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EMMA: ADAPTING THE NOVEL TO THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This essay introduces a comparative analysis between one of Jane Austen's most famous literary works, *Emma*, and the film with the same title, released in 1993 and directed Amy Heckerling. Adaptations tend to be distinguished according to their faithfulness to the original text; however, it does not have to be like that. Films may achieve the novel's objective without containing every detail of the text, taking into account that the adaptation will be directed to a different public than that of the novel. Thereon, the elements compared throughout this paper are the most relevant components that define a story, with the aim of reaching a final conclusion regarding whether the effects provoked by the novel are reflected in those of the film.

1. INTRODUCTION

Without books, films would lose a very important category within them. A great number of novels have been eventually adapted to the screen, and, when successful, allowed the introduction of a piece of work to a public unfamiliar with it. As it happens with adaptations, there are some which remain faithful to the original, not forgetting any details, either by maintaining the actual dialogues, scenes and/or characters. Nonetheless, this faithfulness does not translate into the quality of the adaptation. When dealing with the famous Jane Austen, it is known that a vast amount of work has met a film adaptation. Each one of them has one thing in common: making her novels reachable to the public and, consequently, enabling them to enter the world of Austen. For that reason, the importance does not rely on whether the film is true to the original, but rather whether the adaptation is capable of provoking the same effect upon its audience.

As aforementioned, there have been numerous adaptations to the screen of several of this 18th century author's most famous works: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* or *Emma*, just to mention a few. In spite of that, these novels have not been brought to the big screen since the beginning of cinema, as it happened with other classics. This is pointed out by the author Deborah Cartmell (2010): "While filmmakers in the silent period produced plenty of adaptations of the plays of Shakespeare and the novels of Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Tolstoy, it seems that no cinematic value or potential was detected in Austen's novels" (p. 4). Hence, it can be deduced that there is a lack of film adaptations of the novels of Jane Austen during the 20th century is due to the fact that: "while Shakespeare's narratives normally have a sweeping grand scale [...] nothing much happens in Austen's stories, the pleasure being in the choice of words and in the verbal subtleties" (Cartmell, 2010, p. 4). It is a fact that there used to be a major trend in adapting Shakespeare's plays, also known as an academic discipline named "Shakespeare on Film". However, Austen's works' appearance on TV shows and films has incremented a lot, and that is because of what Shakespeare's film adaptations conquered in the past:

By bravely venturing into what was previously forbidden territory. By the twenty-first century the field begins to expand with an extensive list of work that begins to move beyond the one-way trajectory from literature to film and canonical authors [...], embracing other forms of adaptations, such as popular adaptations, film to novel adaptations (novelizations), television,

video games, the economics of adaptation, interrogations of the role of the author and the author on screen, novel to film to musical adaptations. (Cartmell, 2012, p. 7)

The first adaptation to be found regarding the book chosen to analyse throughout this thesis is that of *Emma*, a produced by BBC TV and broadcasted in 1948. It was a black and white show performed live. This production apparently has no record of a director, although it is known that Michael Barry was the producer (Parril, 2002, p.111). The American counterpart appeared a few years later, in 1954, by NBC'S *Kraft Television Theatre*. This particular show casted several key figures from the Golden Age of Hollywood, such as Grace Kelly, Paul Newman or Charlton Heston. Notwithstanding, as Parril (2002) claims, "this version of *Emma* differs from the earlier BBC version in its limited setting. Most of the scenes take place at Hartfield, with several different interior perspectives, including a fireplace and a staircase." (p. 112).

During the sixties, CBS's *Camera Three* produced another TV show directed by John Desmond. In the UK, the BBC broadcasted another one quite similar to that from 1948, which had Campell Logan as the producer. Additionally, Parril (2002) clarifies that "neither of the early BBC adaptations takes any serious liberties with the storyline or characters of the novel." (p. 116). Therefore, it should be highlighted that all of these adaptations try to be extremely faithful to the novel.

After these black and white productions, BBC-2 TV released a six-part serial during the summer of 1972, directed by John Glenister. In 1996, both American and British Industries presented *Emma*, the former directed by Douglas McGrath, with the famous Gwyneth Paltrow as the protagonist, whereas the latter was directed by Diarmuid Lawrence. The success of the American version goes without saying, as it was nominated to the Oscars, The Writers Guild of America Awards and the Satellite Awards, which Paltrow got for best main actress. A year after, Meridian Broadcasting for ITV presented in both countries the A&E mini-series with the same name and produced by Sue Birtwistle, which was awarded two Emmy Awards.

To conclude with the adaptations true to the novel, there are two more British productions. A BBC four-part serial from 2009, which was directed by Jim O'Hanlon, which:

clearly tries to be different from the two productions of 1996, the elegant and classical Miramax film starring Gwyneth Paltrow (in pretty much every scene) and focusing on the character of Emma, and the ITV telefilm with Kate Beckinsale, which emphasizes community building and social integration. (Troost & Greenfield, 2016)

The second one is the third film recorded since the two 1996 productions, directed by Autumn de Wilde. It also follows the novel, with no major changes and specially focuses on Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley's story.

There are other adaptations where characters from the 21st century are involved in one way or another with Austen's work, for instance, *Clueless* (1995), a very popular release in the 90s. Directed by Amy Heckerling, the setting of the film is transferred from the English countryside to the impressive mansions in Hollywood, California. Cher Horowitz, the protagonist, embodies Emma Woodhouse, who is introduced "as an airhead, but also placed her in a cartoonized version of a Los Angeles high school amid shopping malls and busy highways" (Kenney, 2011). Moreover, there is the Bollywood production called *Aisha* from 2010 directed by Rajsheel Ojha, which has been accused of being a copy of the 1995 film. However, as Kenney points out, it is merely following *Clueless*'s lead in the attention it gives to the heroine's fashion sense. Lastly, in 2014 there was another modern adaptation known as *Emma Approved*. It is seventy-two episodes show, which last from approximately six minutes and are available on Pemberley Digital and YouTube. The series follows a vlog format in which Emma Woodhouse is the owner of a successful company aimed at coaching, matchmaking and event planning.

Having said that, probably one of the best-known film adaptations of the novel, hold responsible for the Austenmania or Austen fandom phenomena, is the 1995 Paramount Picture film directed by Amy Heckerling, starring Alicia Silverstone as Cher Horowitz and Paul Rudd as Josh Lucas. This paper will analyse the main differences in the plot between the original text and this film while considering the major themes, the setting, and finally the characters, in an attempt to assess the value of the adaptation. To that end, the critical reception of these elements and the effect that the filmmaker wished to provoke in the audience will be considered.

The length of this paper only allows for a summary of the plot to point out some of the differences that exist. The narrator then, becomes the second most important aspect to comment on, because, as already mentioned, language is the text's strong point, but also because without a narrator, the portrayal of the protagonist role varies from the novel to the film. Besides that, some of the most relevant themes in the story are marriage, love, class and irony, which, unlike the rest of the topics, allow a clearer comparison to be drawn. The way in which the author and the director develop these ideas is different, considering that the novel intended to produce an effect on the readers from the 19th century, whereas the film adapts them for a contemporary audience. In what seems to be a romantic story, Austen includes a subtext with critiques

concerning her society, especially the role of women. Nevertheless, she does not get rid of those critiques, and adapts them to the 20th century.

Another essential part of the structure of a novel or a film is the setting. This aspect is in this paper supported with the explanation of several selected scenes where comparisons regarding the setting are most noticeable taking into account that what the author conveys with the narration somehow needs to be portrayed on the screen. Moreover, these scenes contain the main adaptation techniques used in the film, i.e., omission, as the limited length of the film cannot include all the details from the novel. Finally, a story would not be complete without the characters. They are created by the author to express certain values and, in the film, there are some who are slightly altered, again due to the contemporary effects the director decides to produce. These effects are achieved by choosing specific actors in order to attract a larger audience; some of them were highly regarded when the film was originally released.

All of these key elements help the viewer, or reader in case of the novel, to better understand the motivations of the main characters and the direction of the plot. They would also evidence the type of adaptation it is: a transposition, whose adaptation to the screen rightly follows the original text, without apparent interference, a commentary, if the adaptation is somehow altered because the filmmaker aimed to convey a contrasting effect, or an analogy, which consists of creating another product departing from the original and heavily relying on it (McFarlane, 1996). As such, this paper will focus on comparing them in order to see the impact each medium has on the spectator. As a whole, the method that is followed here is intended to be in descending order, from an introduction to the line of the story, to the elements that compose it, both in the novel and in the film.

2. PLOT

Throughout this section, since the novel and the film differ in some major aspects, a summary intertwining both will be carried out. The novel takes place during the 19th century in Highbury, a small town around sixteen miles from Brunswick Square, London and seven miles from Box Hill. Nonetheless, the film moves forward to the ending of the 20th century in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, California during the 1990s. Both Emma Woodhouse and Cher Horowitz live with their wealthy fathers, since their mothers passed away when they were young. They seemed to enjoy playing matchmaking, especially after they succeeded with their first couple, Mrs. Weston (formerly Miss Taylor) and Mr. Weston, Emma's former governess, and Cher's teachers, Miss Geist and Mr. Hall, although in the novel we already know it was a match because they are already married, in the film we are shown the process of pairing them together.

Despite their triumph, both protagonists feel the necessity of helping people find their soulmates, and that is when Harriet Smith/Tai Frasier enter the scene. They become their protégées and are taken pity upon by Emma/Cher with the sole objective of setting them up with suitors. To achieve that, some changes in them are carried out to make them more “appealing” to the presumed suitors. However, both characters were already interested in somebody, Robert Martin/Travis Birkenstock, who are considered unsuitable for them by the protagonist for a number of reasons to be discussed further ahead, although mostly related to their social status. It is then when they are introduced to Mr. Elton/Elton, who ended up being a wrong match since he was interested in Emma, precisely for her social status rather than affection.

Emma/Cher decided that after that unpleasant outcome, they would stop interfering by not making any more matches. After that, the focus seemed to be on them when Frank Churchill/Christian appeared on scene and became their love interest, even though they were not looking for a match for themselves. Mr. Knightley/Josh, who in *Emma* is simply a family friend, and one of Emma’s closest friends, becomes Cher’s stepbrother in *Clueless*. They both try to advise and encourage them to reflect upon their decisions and eventual mistakes.

Unfortunately, their search for a proper suitor did not go as planned, since Frank was already engaged and Christian was a homosexual, facts that caught the female leads by surprise. On top of that, their most recent companion, Harriet/Tai realises is in love with Mr. Knightley/Josh and asks Emma/Cher for help. It was then when the protagonists became aware of their love for Mr. Knightley/Josh and admit their feelings to one another. Meanwhile, Harriet/Tai get back together with Robert/Steve. In the novel, these couples get engaged and married soon after, whereas in the film they start dating.

The plot of the novel and the film are almost the same, considering that most of the story is maintained. However, bringing a novel to the screen can be difficult, especially with Austen’s novels, as stated by Kathryn Sutherland (2005):

Austen’s novels are largely plotless (and film relishes action); Austen’s text displays a weak dependence on metaphor and figurative language (and film’s power lies in the manipulation of image and imagery); Austen’s mature art (and, risky word, her “essence”) is a sophisticated aural figuration in which, through free indirect discourse, voice is laid on voice to produce critical (specifically, ironic) connotative effects, and the blurring of character with character and

narrator, which are almost impossible to achieve in film whose aural effects, however sophisticated, are subordinated to an immense visual rhetoric. (p. 341)

Even though what Sutherland highlights may be perceived as something negative, since it explains how the novel may be difficult to capture on screen, it also creates a space for directors, scriptwriters and producers to interpret and adapt the story to whatever they would like to convey to the audience. In the case of *Clueless*, its deceptive resemblance to the film allows the audience to experiment Austen's essence, which Heckerling manages to emulate updating certain elements.

In fact, as Mazmanian (1999) enhances that:

Although there have been numerous adaptations of *Emma* in film, *Clueless* is a striking model of refurbishment because it does not attempt to imitate the period or setting of the original text. It is impossible for us to approach an eighteenth-century text from the cultural environment in which it was written. Therefore, adaptations attempting to be *true* to an original novel end up disguising updated perspectives and agendas behind costumes or accents.

Significant changes, or updates, from the text to the film that should be addressed concern the time boundaries provoked by a change of period from the novel to the film, evidencing signs of contemporaneity, and the complete removal of Jane Fairfax as well as other characters present in the novel. Starting with the first, one of the main changes which challenges identifying the adaptation at first is the time in which the film is set and its consequent modifications. Because of the time, the film conveys racial and sexual diversity: "the orphaned Harriet Smith becomes a Hispanic transfer student, Frank Churchill is revealed to be gay, and Emma's best friend becomes a moneyed African American" (Ferriss, 2000, p. 437). Moreover, during the 1990s, big cities such as Los Angeles were experiencing a great number of technological advancements, a boost in the economy, where anybody could become who they wanted to be, according to the well-known American propaganda: the American dream.

In *Emma*, a more traditional period is expected to be conveyed, with a clear depiction of a structured social class and placing a high value on birth right. Its conservativeness in relation with the film adaptation is also perceived, merely in terms of women having to marry to be prosperous and being given a position in society, whereas in Heckerling's film marriage

would be the ultimate goal, but not the priority. The issue of virginity, however, displays the film social conservatism, especially when Cher clarifies she is saving herself for the right one.

Nonetheless, *Emma*'s England in the 1810s is additionally suffering economic changes thanks to the industrialisation, which would eventually lead to the creation of a new social class: the middle-class. Gentrification was not as possible as in *Clueless*, whose capitalist society would allow anybody to ascend the social class pyramid overnight. Lineage and family history were still important factors, but power and class could easily be bought. Keymer (2020) comments: "centrally important throughout Austen's fiction are the structures, dynamics, and consequences of rank" (p. 143) when dealing with the topic of rank.

Regarding the elimination of Jane Fairfax, it is a major difference to discuss considering the importance that this character conveys in the book. She is Emma's rival: "Jane Fairfax presents a challenge to Emma of which Harriet has never been capable: Jane is a rival in everything except birth and prospects (including wealth)" (Wright, 1964, p. 146). This can be proven in a number of occasions with quotes from the book, such as this one from chapter 10: "One is sick of the very name of Jane Fairfax" (Austen, 2004, p. 250). Nonetheless, she maintained a cordial relationship with her, although Mr. Knightley was very aware of her disliking and: "had once told her it was because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself" (Austen, 2004, p. 355). Furthermore, Jane Fairfax becomes her rival for Frank Churchill and finally marries him, even though Emma was not aware of their relationship, as they decided to keep it secret until they saw fit. Hence, if it had not been for Jane, Emma and Frank could have ended up together instead, or even never been to Highbury, since his main goal was to see Miss Fairfax. The film Frank Churchill's counterpart is Christian, who manages to capture the protagonist's attention but is homosexual:

In the novel, Frank feigns interest in Emma in order to disguise his attachment to Jane. In the movie, Christian's attention is meant to cover a homosexual nature. This shift in character is significant in light of modern cultural attitudes. We no longer equate secret engagements with moral inadequacy, but we do consciously or unconsciously place homosexuals in a morally stigmatized category. This categorization is due to historical prejudice and a perceived association between homosexual men and AIDS. (Mazmanian, 1999)

Therefore, despite the film's alteration of the plot are noticeable, the subtext remains similar. Additionally, it is possible that Heckerling decided not to include such a relevant character as Jane Fairfax due to the complexity it could lead to and time constraints. In spite of that, Cher is offered the character of Amber as a rival, whose importance in the story is almost imperceptible. Nonetheless, she would be Mrs. Elton counterpart, although in the film it is not seen until Cher rejects Elton and he starts a new relationship with Amber.

3. NARRATOR

In the book, as in the film, it can be observed that Emma, as well as her cinematographic counterpart, Cher are the protagonists of the story. In the book, there is a third-person omniscient narrator and thus knows everything the characters think or do, however, the narrator tends to focus on Emma's thoughts and actions since the very beginning, to explicitly state the role she has in the narrative by displaying her point of view. Consequently, there is a misguidance for the readers:

The chief delight of the novel comes through revelation, through the comic recognition of Emma's lack of insight. Swayed by Emma's own confidence in her perceptions of events, the reader is equally startled when her views are found to be wildly in error. (Ferriss, 2000, p. 437)

The cinematic translation of Austen's technique is using Cher's voice-over of to deliver the story using the first-person narrator. This technique Heckerling employs, as Ferriss (2000) stated, it "neatly captures the contradiction between actual events and her perceptions. As a commentary on events, a voice-over is always temporally distinct from the visually realized events, occurring in narrative time necessarily after the events pictured have unfolded." (p. 437) This translates into Cher being in her own bubble, imagining things which are not there and ignoring (maybe on purpose) the reality surrounding her.

It could be assumed that Austen's wittiness throughout the text would not be catered for in an adaptation such as *Clueless*. Aiming to preserve her wit and ironic language, numerous screening adaptations maintain part of the original dialogues. Yet still, the language in *Clueless* contains a style which informal and slangy, conforming with the age and setting, including dialogues which emanate from Heckerling's mind. The voice-over narrator is what brings that Austen's characteristic wit to screen, mainly deriving "from the discrepancy between Cher's verbal representations and the camera's visual representations" (Lynch, 2015, p. 200).

To illustrate how the author and director depict that deceiving feature, the substory in the novel concerning Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax could be disclosed, whose engagement was not acknowledged by the omniscient narrator until some characters found out. However, if the readers reread the novel, there are hints which could lead them to certain hypotheses and conclusions regarding this secret engagement. For instance, he could not manage to visit Highbury due to his aunt's illness until after Jane Fairfax appeared on scene. From that point on, even the dialogues reveal their true feelings, as it can be appreciated in this exchange of words between Frank and Emma "criticising" Jane: "Miss Fairfax has done her hair in so odd a way—so very odd a way—that I cannot keep my eyes from her. I never saw any thing so outrée! Those curls! This must be a fancy of her own. I see nobody else looking like her." (Austen, 2004, pp. 429-430). The two most significant utterances are: "I cannot keep my eyes from her" and "I see nobody like her".

Nonetheless, the film, as aforementioned, depicts what is truly happening, so that the viewer already feels they know more than the narrator, Cher's voice-over, which does not want to realise that Christian is homosexual despite the obvious signs, many of them in the form of stereotypes, such as having a fashion sense, dancing skills or art literacy. For example, when they go to the club party together and he was dancing with Cher and not looking at any other girl, until he saw a boy he liked and left her to talk to him. In both instances, the novel and the film try to mislead the audience with unreliable narrators, which is more implicit in *Emma* and explicit in Heckerling's screen adaptation.

Sarah Morrinson (1992) comments on the fact that "film versions of Austen's novels must somehow compensate for the absence of the witty and intrusive narrator who negotiates the space between the heroine's subjective experience, other characters' perspectives, and something that may be called "objective" reality." As it has been read throughout this point, it appears Heckerling found a clever solution to that problem by aiming to evoke a similar effect on the audience.

4. MAJOR THEMES

4.1 Marriage

As Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's father, states along the first chapter, marriage is an agent of change, or the "origin of change" (Austen, 2004, p. 142) in his own words. Marriage in Austen's novel becomes a matter related to money rather than to love. Austen's intent is to criticise this state of affairs, being aware of the inequality between men and women and the duty of the latter to get married, without taking into account if the bride fancied her suitor or not. In the novel,

she portrays a 'heroine', Emma, who does not accept such a fate and refuses to get married just to avoid the "spinster's" life. However, it does not prevent her from envisaging her ideal suitors and matches. In Emma's case, her father is not pursuing her marriage. Conversely, he would like to keep his daughter to himself, as he feels it "was always disagreeable; and he was by no means yet reconciled to his own daughter's marrying" (Austen, 2004, p. 143). This is also due to the fact that Emma will become the mistress of the house when her dad passes. Her sister is married and the state could be hers, hence, she does not have the need to worry about marriage, and instead, she turns it into a hobby when she becomes Highbury's matchmaker.

Notwithstanding, the novel's conservatism is somehow regulated by a feminist turn included at the end. As a comedy, Austen's Emma was expected to include a marriage (or several in this case), at the very end. However, Mr. Knightley's consent to move to Emma's home, Hartfield, proves to be an "unexpected turn, as the guarantor of order himself cedes a considerable portion of the power which custom has allowed him to expect" (Ferriss, 440, 2000).

Oppositely, *Clueless*, as a *modern* adaptation of the novel, does not regard marriage in the same level as in the 19th century. Getting married is not women's purpose anymore, they are freer and more independent. The end, nonetheless, involves another wedding, her teacher's, Mr. Hall and Miss Geist. The way in which the scene is introduced aims to confuse the audience, as the event occurs right after Cher and Josh declare their feelings to each other. Therefore, it could be expected that the wedding was theirs. During the scene, Cher's voice-over clarifies it is not her, "as if!", her famous catchphrase, and alludes to her being too young to get married. Jocularly, being a romantic comedy, the *Clueless* protagonist ends up catching the bouquet, anticipating her future marriage.

4.2 Love

The theme of marriage leads to the theme of love, considering the connection that exists between both in the novel and in the film. As Sherrod mentions in her article:

Jane Austen infuriates many readers by lapsing into narrative during romantic scenes. She writes love stories that are the antithesis of what we have come to think of as romantic. [...] Most of all, there are no standard love scenes; that is to say, there are no scenes that make it clear that the lovers kiss or embrace. (1989, p. 1)

Austen was not a romanticist, which was the dominant literary trend during her time. Instead, as Robert Barnard (2002) writes, "ella recelaba de los excesos románticos y solía

burlarse de ellos.” (“She distrusted romantic excesses and used to mock them”, p. 167) that is why the dialogues between Emma and Mr. Knightley cannot be expected to contain the romanticism that readers from the 21st century might expect. The aim of her novel was not to create a love story, but a more profound critique of the society she lived in: “love” is a theme of great importance in the novel, although it is not the centre of it.

One of the main critiques in this regard to getting married without the need of being in love. Romance is therefore dependent on marriage, and if it does not culminate in that union before God, it will be a relationship disapproved of by society. In the case of *Emma*, there is a negative portrayal of romance whose aim is not getting married. To illustrate that, the fact that Frank Churchill flirted with Emma simply to mislead everybody about his true intentions towards Jane Fairfax is condemned by Austen. On top of that, playing matchmaker does not work out for Emma, because love is something that cannot be arranged. The only marriage whose arrangement seemed to succeed was that of Mr. Weston and Mrs. Weston, whose wedding ceremony had just ended by the beginning of the novel. Still, there are three more weddings by the end of the book: Harriet and Robert Martin’s, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill and Emma and Mr. Knightley.

Similarly, the adaptation depicts the aforementioned characters’ counterparts’ relationships, with the major difference of displays of affection between them. The manifestations of love are more explicit amongst characters, more physical. It can be seen in the numerous scenes in which Cher is trying to call Christian’s attention, reaching a point at which they are both at her house, alone and she tries to have sex with him without success. Once Cher professes her feelings to Josh, near the end of the film, there is a scene of them kissing on a staircase, almost resembling the shape of a heart. This could have been used to point out the relevance of love instead of just marriage, and its importance in a well-functioning relationship.

Love involving family is perceived in the relationship Emma and Cher have with their dads. Both are caring and protective of their daughters and vice versa. Emma has a sister, Isabelle, who is married to Mr. Knightley’s brother. They have five sons and daughters and Emma’s affection towards them is noticeable in some of the visits to Hartfield, such as in chapter 12 from the first volume: “the youngest, a nice little girl about eight months old, who was now making her first visit to Hartfield, and very happy to be danced about in her aunt’s arms” (Austen, 2005, p. 267).

Emma is also fed with romanticism thanks to the children. Whenever they ask her for a story, she romanticises life and gives free rein to her imagination and her nephews’, Henry and

John, who were always the ones interested in listening to one of her aunt's narratives. Hence, according to McMaster (1992):

It is no wonder that, when Harriet arrives with news of a new love, Emma at once proceeds with her construction of the real-life romance in which the low-born maiden will marry the gracious Prince Frank who rescued her, and live happily ever after. (p. 64)

4.3 Class

These two themes are closely related to class, principally because without a suitor that matches the character's social status, marriage would not be well-seen. Although the love between the protagonist couple is real, it is a union only possible due to them being equally wealthy. As it has already been highlighted, class in Austen's *Emma* is presented as rigid, structured and with defined hierarchies. Mark Parker comments that the novel "can generate two readings of class: a progressive one, which emphasizes the insidious workings of class in Emma's disposal of Harriet¹; and a reactionary one, which sees and accepts this working as part of the price of social stability" (p. 358). With this in mind, Colon (1999) argues that *Emma* "lends itself to contradictory readings that challenge readers with many questions, particularly relating to class structure. We must decide how to position Emma, the narrator, and ultimately Austen within the conflicting ideologies that surround this text." However, when brought to the big screen, filmmakers may decide to incorporate or ignore certain elements inherently present in the text.

It has occurred with other Austen's adaptations that the plot has been simplified, merely drawing attention to the protagonists' courtship and leaving behind certain themes, characters or scenes whose presence offered a more faithful image of the novel. Many times, that reason has been capturing the audience through an oversimplified plot. In the case of the theme of class, British and American productions differ in their approach to it. Austen's work "is a witty satire whose chief target is snobbery [...] Accompanying the novel's attack on snobbery, however, is an underlying attitude that class distinctions are proper and even beneficial" (Dole, 1998, p. 67). For that purpose, Cole (1998) observes that "British film adaptations take the hardest look at class, while the mainstream American films tend on the surface to ridicule class snobbery but on a deeper level to ratify class divisions" (p. 60). Educating a modern audience

¹ This disposal refers to what might happen by the end of the novel, once Emma and Mr. Knightley get engaged, as well as Harriet and Mr. Martin, there would be a gap between, socially speaking. That would prevent them from socializing as they did before.

on the importance of class and social rules from the Regency period in England could be found distasteful by the audience. Thus, adaptations bring it to their fields and, as stated by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (1999), while British adaptations are more critical about class, American productions involving past events are more aware of the social issues involving the country, especially racism. Hence, “the British production of *Emma* pays great attention to the situation of the serving classes in Regency Surrey whereas the American production glosses over their existence.”

The microcosmos embedded in *Highbury* depicts a society without aristocracy. Their absence is substituted by people belonging to a middle class of gentry. In *Emma*’s world, Mr. Knightley constitutes the highest rank character, considering his family has been in possession of their land since Tudor times. The Woodhouses are part of the elite, but their time as tenants is fairly shorter if compared to Mr. Knightley. They are “newcomers to their ‘notch’ in the Donwell estate, and they live primarily from investments” (Keymer, 2020, p. 147). Below them, characters such as Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax or Harriet Smith could be included and, after them, there are those whose role is less relevant but their presence constitutes the backbone of the community, like Mr. Perry, the apothecary.

In the case of *Clueless*, high school hierarchies serve the purpose of this theme. American public schools are often used to portray the variety of groups students can encounter when they get to high school. It is Cher who introduces the different “social classes” to the audience while she is showing the place to Tai. Carol M. Dole (2001) enumerates them:

Alaina’s group, who think only about the TV station; the “Persian Mafia,” who all drive BMWs; the popular boys (the only acceptable high school boys for a friend of Cher’s to date); and the “Loadies,” drug-users and classcutters that “no respectable girl actually dates. (p. 73)

Similarly, there are class boundaries when it comes to crossing them to establish relationships. *Emma* strongly advises Harriet to not accept Robert Martin’s proposal because of his social class. On the other hand, Cher tells Tai the same, although it is not based on class but on behavioural propriety because he does drugs (marijuana). The perception of this theme is then altered with alternative class markers which only have relevancy in the teenage environment.

The presence of servants is barely addressed along the text, at least explicitly. It can be discerned through comments from Mr. Woodhouse or Mr. Elton, whose meaning reveals how each of them regards servants: “it speaks volumes that Mr Woodhouse fusses about their

welfare while Mrs Elton can't remember their name" (Keymer, 2020, p. 144). The 1995 film does include the character of Lucy, the housemaid, whose relationship with Cher seems amiable. She is considerate with her and even donates some of her clothes to Lucy. In spite of that, on one occasion she offends her by referring to her nationality as Mexican, when in fact she is from El Salvador. This could be evidencing the common stereotype of servants who come from South America and are directly assumed to be Mexican, because the film, according to Lisa Hopkins, "shows sensitivity to race":

Cher's name, with its homage to a singer of native American descent, and the blackness of Dionne, a character with no precedent in the original, also point to a sensitivity to race, as is indeed appropriate in an adaptation of the novel that is so openly aware of the slave trade. (1999)

4.4. Irony

The treatment of this theme varies from text to film, mainly because Austen's conception of irony during the 19th century will not be the same as Heckerling's by the end of the 20th century. If Austen's usage of irony is considered, it could be remarked that her goal is to satirize and ridicule the world surrounding her, while she "still believes in the moral, psychological, and interpersonal dream of wholeness" (Azerêdo, 2006, p. 238). Moreover, Austen manages to display this resource on multiple levels, through different situations and characters. Irony is mainly exposed by means of the protagonist, whose mistakes along the text reveal how arrogant she can be. However, it achieves to convey a critique to society and its conventions when women like Jane or Harriet are considered as "less of a "catch"" (Nachumi, 2001, p. 137) when compared to Emma or Mrs. Elton. Therefore, it is thanks to irony that the reader can go back and reflect on these aspects assumed to be true and evolve and improve just like Emma.

Along the novel, Emma firmly believes that what she is doing is correct and has a rightful purpose. She is trying to help poor Harriet to find a suitor, she brings food to the poor and she apparently has a happy disposition towards everybody, when actually was aiming at controlling them. This clash with reality does not occur until she begins to mishandle things and occurrences start happening. To illustrate that, Harriet's mismatch with Mr. Elton seemed to discourage her meddling between people. A better example could be her change of disposition after insulting Miss Bates, as from that moment, Emma really reflects upon herself and dares to make some changes and improvements.

Clueless is more predictable in the sense of the characters' course. Unlike in the novel, readers need to be rather attentive to detect Frank and Jane's affair in between lines, whereas

Christian being homosexual is apparent to viewers by the way it is stereotyped on screen, as well as Cher and Josh ending up together. For a first-time reader of Austen, it is unclear whether Emma will ultimately be with Frank Churchill, Mr. Knightley or another gentleman introduced later on. However, there is a growth in Cher's personality, a development which translates as unusual departing from the stereotype Beverly Hill girl she is, a spoiled teenager.

When adapting a text that is already ironic, the result might be doubly ironic. Richard Rorty 'describes an ironist as a person who "has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses (...)" (73). The ironist thus expresses herself through redescription, through "playing the new off against the old" (73)" (as cited in Azerêdo, 2006, pp. 241-242) This is because the film adapts elements in *Emma* to contemporary times and eventually makes use of irony adding to it certain features which were not present in the original text. Notwithstanding, a mistake that some critics have emphasized is the lack of acknowledgment to Jane Austen's book throughout the film or even the film credits, which:

makes Austen be the unsaid in *Clueless*. In this sense, the relationship between said and unsaid meanings complement each other through this game of reference and allusion the adaptations create with Austen's source text, and also through the cultural gap between the literary and filmic texts. (Azerêdo, 2006, p. 244)

By not addressing the novel, Amy Heckerling is creating irony combining the past and present, inserting elements which clearly allude to *Emma* but also incorporating themes related to her times. Austen's irony tends to concern topics on appearance, manners, social status, which serve as a base for the film's irony, although it extends it by alluding to contemporary themes: fashion, education, consumerism, sexuality, drugs, ecology, to name a few; topics that are present but ironically, never discussed. In doing that, she is capturing the attention of those who are not familiar with the original text, and therefore do not feel the need of having to do any research about it to get a better understanding of it but will perceive its irony as well. Simultaneously, viewers who have read the book and follow Austen's style will be able to attach another level of irony to the cinematographic piece.

The narrator in Austen functions as key when it comes to display irony. More often than not, films seem to be limited by not being capable of portray the narrator's voice completely. However, the film compensates it with Cher's voice-over, giving the audience her opinion while narrating events that are being also portrayed on screen through pictures. Cleverly, the ironic narration in *Emma* is covered through the implementation of that cinematic technique.

4.4 Critical response

The making of films from novels, such as in the case of *Emma*, brings “new readers into a two hundred-year-old authorship” (Sørbø, 2014 p.1). Nevertheless, Sørbø also mentions that “these adaptations may also inevitably become hypertexts (a palimpsest); each functions as the last, current and updated version of Austen’s novel” (p. 9). It has been said that both members in the audience, those unaware of Austen’s influence in the film and those followers of the author will enjoy the adaptation, and are targets the filmmakers attempts to address.

The updated redescription of the Jane Austen’s work criticises, from a modern context, a number of elements in Austen’s story. In spite of that, critics have focused on the lack of fidelity to the original text, which usually translates into them missing historical references to the novel. In other words, criticism has been made towards the film not being a period film and being a pop culture product instead. If, on top of that, *Clueless* does not formally give credit to the book as the backbone of the film, criticism will back their opinions on that too. Nonetheless, the so-called high culture developed in the novel is represented in the film inserted in several dialogues. For instance, when Cher refers to a Monet’s painting when talking to Tai about Amber: “Tai: Do you think she’s pretty? Cher: No, she’s a full-on Monet. Tai: What’s a Monet? Cher: It’s like a painting, see? From far away, it’s OK, but up close, it’s a big old mess.” (Heckerling, 1995, 0:55:18).

As read above, the main themes’ gist is present, although altered in some cases to meet the standards from the late 90s. For that reason and following the most common visualisation of the film, it has been labelled as a superficial comedy of manners, when in fact, Heckerling is taking advantage of that superficiality to explicitly portray the actual problems in the postmodern society, as Austen did during her time, since she tried “to examine how some of Austen’s central concerns play out in the context of a chaotically postmodern social and cultural milieu that is radically different from the much more coherently structured society of early nineteenth-century England” (Monaghan, 2003, p. 215). Moreover, this superficiality translates into the constant misinterpretation of events reflected on both plots, in which Emma/Cher are not able to discern what is really transpiring.

To exemplify the aforementioned, it could be argued that the theme of love is given a similar relevance in the film. It is not overly romanticized and is not looking towards a dramatization of love. There are other adaptations which denude Austen’s subtext regarding love and make it the centre of the final product. With the theme of marriage, there is a noticeable upgrading, considering women by the end of the 20th century are freer. Sexuality becomes a more explicit theme in the film, however, preserving that conservatism which characterizes

patriarchy: the importance of virginity, especially conveyed through the protagonist. Teenagers were also a target for Heckerling, thus, her inclusion of themes like sex, drugs, fashion in a high school context, would definitely help to capture their attention. Social class is discussed, but it is done from the American point of view, since it “caters to the values of the mass Hollywood audience by subscribing to the American myth that it is possible to flourish as an autonomous, morally aware person within a capitalist society” (Monaghan, 2003, p. 218).

5. SETTING

When adapting a novel to film, as in the case of Jane Austen’s work, one may find “some very specific holes” (Sørbø, 2014, p. 12) where there is a lack of descriptions that makes it difficult for readers to imagine the spaces where the characters are or what their costumes are. Nevertheless, considering that Austen told her stories based on the reality of her time, it has been assumed that these aspects, although not described, should be assumed to be those of her surroundings during the years of the publication of the novel. *Emma* was first published in 1815, however, the film is set in 1990s, which implies significant changes to the sceneries and the costumes of the characters from the text to the screen.

Most of the action narrated in the novel takes place in the countryside, portraying a rural environment in a town from Surrey known as Highbury. Austen offers details to the readers and clarifies it is located sixteen miles from London, nine miles from Richmond and seven miles from Box Hill. These coordinates indicate an actual spot in Leatherhead, since some locations described in *Emma* are real places, along with the River Mole, Kingston, Weymouth and Cobham. Among the fictitious places, the heart of the story setting, Highbury and Hartfield, the Woodhouse home, Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley’s residence, Randalls, the Weston’s residence, Enscombe, the Churchill family Scottish home, in Yorkshire, Maple Grove, home of the Sucklings, Mr. Elton’s sister and brother-in-law or the Crown Inn, place chosen for the ball organised by Frank Churchill, to mention a few. The proximity of these residences is made clear to the readers and offer the sense of a real community between the people in Highbury.

As it occurs with the majority of her novels, the vital setting are drawing-rooms, where interactions take place, in addition to dining rooms, ball rooms and even carriages. Descriptions of these locations are barely made since the focus is placed on human relations, however, there are constant mentions to these places throughout the novel, even though the protagonist hardly ever leaves her home. Susan Morgan (2000) states that:

She does stroll the village and have dinner at the Westons. She attends a party at the Coles and a dance at the Crown, visits the estate adjoining Hartfield for the first time in many years, and even goes as far as Box Hill, for the first time in her life.

Then, knowing that Emma is the narrator's main focus, readers can only perceive movement in the novel through other characters' reports. Susan Morgan highlights the fact that the text "is full of movement" and residents in Highbury are moving and travelling around continually. For that reason, it can be ascertained that much of her "early narrowness and foolishness, of course, can be attributed to her seclusion at Hartfield" (Brammer, 1960, p. 155).

Clueless moves away from the Regency period and conversely depicts real locations around Beverly Hills. Bronson Alcott High School is where the protagonists' lives collide and coexist, however, other places are displayed along the film, from Cher's or Dionne's houses to iconic and touristic places such as Rodeo Drive, where Cher goes shopping, or landmarks she passes by, like the Spadena House, also known as the Witch's House. The parties equivalent to the balls in Jane Austen's times are reduced to two in the film, one being set in a house in The Valley and the other in a club.

Another element filmmakers can use to "reconstruct specific social environments and address an audience of that similar environment" (Mazmanian, 1999) is fashion. The time period again requires Heckerling to use fashion as a weapon to reflect, amongst other things, the superficiality rooted to stereotyped teens in America. According to Genilda Azêredo (2006):

Fashion and consumerism in *Clueless* walk hand in hand [...] The attention given to fashion and consumerism is such that the school where part of the action of *Clueless* takes place reminds the viewer, many times, of a fashion show walkway or parade. People are distinguished and identified also in terms of their dressing. (pp. 247-248)

Social class, or in the case of the film, student's status, is determined by how they look rather than how they behave. For this reason, Cher and Dionne decide to give two makeovers to two women, Miss Geist, so that she can make Mr. Hall totally fall in love with her, and Tai to make her look more like she belongs to the popular teens. Famous designers' brands are alluded to, such as Calvin Klein or Fred Segal, for instance, when Mel Horowitz questions his daughter about the white dress she chose for the frat party. If, on top of that, Cher is an undiagnosed shopaholic who thinks going shopping can fix anything, the theme of consumerism should consider itself covered.

The fashion in this coming-of-age film has impacted a whole generation, and still is. The costume designer, Mona May, “worked together with director Amy Heckerling to achieve timeless looks in *Clueless*, blending high fashion with the girls of Beverly Hills.” (Abbas, 2022). There are some iconic looks which are referred to nowadays as the “Cher’s outfit”, especially that yellow plaid uniform Cher wears at the beginning, stating how the character outstands and differs from the rest. However, Sarah Abbas (2022) mentions that:

Mona May did not shy away from referencing previous decades. She crafted some subtle nods to the original source material of *Emma* through her costume design [...] [and] kept some of the appropriate silhouettes, and Cher is spotted in a gorgeous sage cap sleeve empire waist dress.

Costume design for the film was based on the mod fashion from the 60s, 70s and early 80s. “Heckerling and May visited Los Angeles schools in the mid-1990s to get a sense of what high-school students were actually wearing—flannel and loose-fitting jeans, none of which fit Heckerling’s ideal aesthetic” (Miller, 2016). They sought to be colourful, patterned and playful and to be a remainder of the 90s fashion. Plaid suits were highly worn throughout the screening picture, not only by Cher, but by other characters like Dionne or Tai. Squared patterned clothes, either be upper or lower body, can be seen in numerous occasions too. Argyle knitwear shirts and sheer button-down shirts have become timeless pieces thanks to the film, alongside sweater vests layered over shirts. Moreover, there were seasonal colour pallets and as May clarifies in her interview for *Vanity Fair*, in autumn some characters would wear yellow, orange or red, while in Christmas red and green became the main ones and pastels for spring.

Each character has a very specific look that helps identifying them. In the case of Amber, May addresses in Miller’s article (2016) “her crazy stripe outfit” and “the sailor look or the Pippi Longstocking look”. Whereas for Tai, May “was careful [...] to make a class and style distinction. [...]”. “Even after [Cher] did her makeover, we were careful not to make her as sophisticated as Cher would be.”

As mentioned above, Austen does not have much space allotted to describe the environment or the characters present on it. However, it is assumed that her characters would wear the clothes in style during the Regency period, when “many styles and trends converged and flourished” (Cole, 2012). Fashion during this period suffered many changes, influenced by tumultuous events of the time, both social and politically, as a result of the French Revolution, and the influence that France had on European fashion. These changes were more obvious in women’s clothing, whereas in men, the changes were less perceptible. There was a:

transition period between the old rococo style and the incoming neo-classical style; the young women's dresses are slimmer and simpler than those of their elders. The neo-classical style, on the other hand, with its typically very high waists, light fabrics, pastel colours, and the white of Greek marble statues the most popular colour of all, came into fashion in the very last years of the century, after 1795, and lasted until around 1820, when the lower waistline and fuller skirt returned. This was thus the dominant style of Jane Austen's adult years. (Sørbø, pp. 165-166)

Apart from the differences regarding the setting, one of the most important aspects to take into account when adapting a text to film is choosing the scenes and the characters, which ones should be in the film and which ones should be left out (technically known as omission) because a film cannot cover the entirety of a novel in barely 1 hour and 37 minutes, which is the length of the 1995 film. Nevertheless, the use of this technique is not always necessary for longer productions, such as the 1972 BBC mini-series, where mostly every scene or character is included, considering that it lasts around five hours. Moreover, the rearrangement of the novel's events and characters, resulting in the alteration of its chronology, is inherent in Heckerling film. In this section, three selected scenes between the novel and the film shall be compared to see how the filmmaker has adapted the setting, as well as several techniques they used.

5.1 Capturing Harriet/Tai's portrait and Elton's declaration

Above, several techniques used to adapt novels to the screen were mentioned and exemplified, for example, the omission of characters and scenes containing Jane Fairfax and the Bateses. For this part, the goal is to compare how two key scenes in the original text have been translated into the 1995 film by merely updating and altering a few aspects about them, yet it could be said it is essentially duplicated.

In the first scene, Emma is still orchestrating Harriet and Mr. Elton's match. To achieve that, she decides to paint a portrait of her friend during a visit of the gentleman, with the only intention of drawing his attention to her beauty. Once the drawing is completed, she asks him about his opinion regarding the portrait, to which his answer is full of praise. That added to the fact that he agreed to take it with him to London to get it framed, led Emma into thinking he was considerably interested in Harriet.

Clueless transforms the portrait into a photograph. In the film, Cher decides to do a photoshoot of her friends in a patio. She encourages Tai to move closer to Elton when taking group pictures and even asks him to put her arm around her shoulders, to which he complies.

After that, Cher takes some pictures of Tai and Elton approaches them, so Cher takes advantage of that and starts complimenting her friend, method which seemed to work given the fact that Elton asked the photographer to make a copy of those pictures.

The unfortunate outcome of this matchmaking in the novel caught Emma by surprise after a dinner gathering at Randalls. The guests were already outside waiting for the carriages, and Emma got stuck in the second available one with Mr. Elton. She thought of it as an opportunity to speak highly of her protégée, but Mr. Elton declared his feelings for Emma instead, something she would have never expected. Emma rejected him, although not without questioning him about the apparent attachment he had towards Harriet. His answers centred around wanting to get along with Harriet to please her, which was the reason why he complimented the portrait, because Emma was the author. After that, Mr. Elton is angry and embarrassed, so that he decides to remain silent until the carriage stopped at his home.

This scene's counterpart is located after The Valley's party, with Tai, Elton and Cher leaving the place and looking for a ride home. Cher comes across a friend for school who offers to take her home and she accepts, so that Tai has to leave in Elton's car. However, her friends' route turns out to be suitable for Tai, who appears to be unaware of Cher's intentions. The scene results then in a hilarious swap of characters from one car to the other at the hands of Cher, as she would not give up on her plan to have Tai go home with Elton. Exhausted, she finally goes with Elton, and exactly like the novel, decides to put in a good word for Tai. Elton's response is to stop the car and attempt to kiss her, which shocks Cher and pushes him away, even though he is persistent and refuses to believe his feelings are not reciprocated. She also decides to find out why he asked for a copy of Tai's picture to put it in his locker, and just as in the text, he states it was because she took the picture. The aftermath of Cher's reject unfolded differently since she got out of the car and Elton drove away and left her alone on the road.

In both cases, Mr. Elton/Elton get angry and despise ever having a relationship with Harriet/Tai due to her social class: Mr. Elton exclaims, "I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!" (Austen, p. 312) whereas his cinematic counterpart rhetorically asks, "Don't you even know who my father is?" (Heckerling, 1995, 41:17). In spite of that, it is in the film where Elton sexually harasses Cher when attempting to kiss her before stranding her. This type of behaviour was usually backed up in films or TV shows by the misreading of intentions and women's misconception of playing hard to get. Still, Cher refuses and pulls back every time, but he did not stop until she actually uttered "stop it!" (Heckerling, 1995, 0:41:43).

5.2 Frank/Elton's secret

Similarly, some scenes are “divided up and rearranged in a kind of image anagram for the *Emma*-familiar viewer to solve” (Philips & Heal, 1999), which is the case of the scene analysed in this section. According to these authors, “Heckerling has created what we would like to term an “alphabet puzzle approach” to her treatment of plot in adapting *Emma*. [...] To locate themes parallel to those in *Emma*, viewers must rearrange some events to master the puzzle.”

The revealing of Frank and Jane’s secret marriage occurs during chapter 10, Volume 3, by hands of Mrs. Weston, who specifically asked her husband to go fetch Emma and bring her to Randalls to deliver the news. A turn of events which completely shocks Emma and alters all of her future plans. Oppositely, the film conveys a new and rather interesting setting for the revealing: a car conversation. In the scene, Dionne and her boyfriend Murray pick Cher up for a ride in which Murray is giving Dionne some driving lessons. While Cher is discussing what happened the previous day in her date with Christian, Murray cannot help but to give her some insight about Christian’s sexual inclinations, listing all the aspects depicting his homosexuality, arguments supported by Dionne in the end.

Hence, in a way, Murray’s character assumes the role of Mr. Weston and Dionne, by implication, Mrs. Weston’s, assuming she is Cher’s best friend and Miss Taylor is also one of the closest friendships Emma has. Generally, the Weston’s paralleled characters are Mr. Hall and Miss Geist. Although, occasionally, certain characters are represented by different ones in the film or, at least, regarding specific traits. In the case of Amber, she is assumed to be Mrs. Elton, although she shares some similarities with Jane Fairfax, being both the women Emma does not find appealing.

5.3 Critical response

The lack of the characters’ and sceneries’ descriptions that the novel has, lends film adaptations a sort of freedom in certain aspects, as neither the landscapes nor the clothes need to be described in detail. Nevertheless, the differences found in the 1995 film to the setting are mainly due to not create another period film stuck or representing the past. Instead, she could use her present to demonstrate Austen themes, values and critiques rooted in her society are somehow present in modern times. Then, a literature classic appears to be hidden behind a teenagers movie, in which the story of Emma is treated in a way which:

shows that Heckerling has a great affinity for Jane Austen. The rearranging of events and characters in the form of mysteries parallel to those of Austen in *Emma* is evidence of this claim. The film can encourage the *Emma*-familiar viewer to explore dimensions of character such as

the similarity between Emma and Mrs. Elton, which the viewer might have overlooked before. Almost every viewing of the film generates further questions of interest about the novel, which is perhaps the greatest compliment to an early nineteenth-century writer from the film-viewing public at the turn of the twenty-first. (Philips & Heal, 1999)

Consequently, the critics have remained positive and tend to agree on the level of fidelity it keeps towards the novel and its essence. There have been negative reviews as well, precisely denying the film of that truthfulness formerly addressed. For them, not being a period film, especially during a time when period films were at their peak, translated into an unfaithful adaptation. But, needless to say, it was a success: “*Clueless* was a sleeper hit, grossing more than \$55 million domestically,” according to Kim Masters (Washington Post, 1995, G1).

6. CHARACTERS

Regarding the characters, as abovementioned, not all of them are included in the film version or have the same relevance as they do in the novel. By means of the characters that Austen describes through the story, she may be conveying certain critiques that the film does not. In other cases, characters are maintained but portrayed in a different way so that they lose the value Austen had originally conferred to them. The result, according to Judith Hawley, “[may] upset the delicate moral and emotional balance she achieves in her prose”. For instance, recalling some of the changes in the plot, the removal of pivotal characters such as Jane Fairfax and Mrs. and Miss Bates.

The centre of both novel and film are Emma and Cher. Emma is twenty-years old and is already the head of Hartfield, the family household. She is an exception amongst Austen’s heroines, since barely no-one but herself would like. Her character is difficult to empathise with in many senses. First of all, she possesses one of the highest financial status and, reasonably, does not worry as much when it comes to searching for a suitor, considering she will not accept anybody below her status. Other elements evidencing differences between her and other female protagonists in Austen are, as Lisa Hopkins remarks, are that:

She is the only one whose beauty is consistently remarked on, and she is the only one who never travels: Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot go to Bath, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood to London, Elizabeth Bennet to Kent and Derbyshire, and Fanny Price to Portsmouth, but Emma never even goes to London, although it is only sixteen miles distant and she has a sister living there. (1999)

The fact that Emma does not travel is key to understanding her. When looking at other characters, glimpses of changes are perceived after they travel. For example, after Harriet comes from London, she accepts Robert Martin's hand. But due to her not going anywhere, she does not receive the education or the insight other of her heroines do. Morgan (2000) points out that "one sign of the ways Emma has moved out from the self-centered vision which distorted her better understanding for so much of the novel is that her plan at the end is precisely to travel a little, for she and Mr. Knightley to take as their honeymoon".

She also reaffirms herself on several occasions along the text that she does not want to marry, when ironically, she is one the most eligible woman in town. "She may act like a product of "progressive ideology," but her social position embeds her in a "traditional ideology" that assumes marriage for social benefit" (Mazmanian, 1999). The irony is then reflected when she decides to marry Mr. Knightley because she discovered her feelings for him, when, coincidentally, he belongs to her same status, which would qualify him as a rightful match.

Cher is an almost sixteen-year-old student whose personality can be summarised in three words: manipulative, cocky and sensitive. Melissa Mazmanian (1999) describes her physical appearance as follows: "a blond teenager dressed consistently in short skirts, tight tops, and thigh-high stockings appears promiscuous, yet Cher forsakes expectations and remains a virgin until she finds an ideal match." She represents a recognizable stereotype, who appears to behave as such. However, underneath all those layers of superficiality, Cher, as well as Emma, manages to evolve and grow throughout the story.

Mr. George Knightley, Emma's brother-in-law and soon-husband-to be, is a good friend and advisor of the Woodhouses. He is older than Emma, in his late thirties, and his age difference and consequent experience, along with the close relationship he has with her, entitle him to openly be critic to her and advise her. "Their mutual respect and compatibility are also revealed by the frankness of expression in their conversation. They quarrel and spar in private, showing they are intellectual equals. Emma refuses to be intimidated by Knightley's brusqueness" (Byrne, 2009, p. 200). This relationship is preserved in *Clueless*, in which Josh and Cher have a sort of antagonistic relationship "very much part of conventional Hollywood romantic comedy, in which the male and female leads customarily start out disliking each other" (Parril, 2002, p. 116). Josh Lucas is Cher's stepbrother, a college boy who is the son of one of Cher's father's previous wives. His presence in Cher's house is due to his interest in becoming an environmental lawyer. Her father is a litigator, as it will be commented below, so he spends some of his time helping him and learning more about his future career.

A remarkable distinction exists in how their love is professed to each other. In the novel, Mr. Knightley and Emma have a conversation about Jane and Frank's secret marriage, and Emma having no feelings for him at all. Emma apologizes for her behaviour regarding the recent events with the Miss Bates in Box Hill and Mr. Knightley also takes the opportunity to also apologise for underrating Frank. While Emma expects him to tell her about his interest in Harriet, he declares his feelings to her.

In the film, after Cher discovers she loves Josh, she gives herself a soul makeover and leaves aside her obsession about her appearance, as she: "forsakes her designer outfits and mini skirts to wear blue jeans and simple tops. She even wears her hair uncured and pulled back from her face" (Parril, 2002, p. 120). Additionally, to appeal to Josh's interests, she gets involved in charitable activities and swaps watching cartoons by the news. She also helps her father with his case, and it is after an argument with one of her father's associates, that Josh defends her and they end up having a more intimate conversation in which both of them reveal their feelings (feelings to which Cher was "clueless" about) and kiss at the top of the stairs, immortalizing an iconic scene. Cher's development is again portrayed through these actions, proving to be a deceitful stereotype from that blonde superficial girl introduced at the beginning.

Mr. Woodhouse constitutes an arguable patriarchal figure. He is a frail and hypochondriac old man who enjoys being at home and despises social gatherings if they require leaving Hartfield. "Mr. Woodhouse, with his frail health and constant fussing over drafts and diet, appears more like the stereotypical "old woman" than the patriarch of the family" (Ferris, 2000, p. 439). He is scared of being lonely, so that he encourages Emma to remain at home with him, petition to which she usually accepts. Susan Morgan (2000) describes him as a:

gentle tyrant, [who] has taught Emma well, has assured her of her superiority in the little world they dominate and has, through his very inaction, encouraged her in the belief that the only way always to be first is never to leave home.

His fear goes to such a degree that he would rather have his daughter unmarried, as expressed in the quote included in section 4.1 discussing the theme of marriage. Thereupon, it could be stated that it is Emma who rules the household, rather than his father. Controversially, Suzane Ferris (2000) stresses that Mr. Knightley acts more like a father, "often scolding her as

though she were a child. In fact, he assumes the paternal role in several instances in the novel, most notably after she has heartlessly mocked Miss Bates” (p. 440).

Oppositely, the character of Mel Horowitz, Cher’s father, comes across as an authoritative figure and more of a patriarch than his counterpart. He is a successful litigator, addicted to work, who appears to be working along the whole film on an important case. Even though he masks himself with a tough appearance, as “he barks orders and controls her behavior, grounding her for unpaid speeding tickets” (Ferriss, 2000, p. 440), he also requires her daughter attendance, who looks after him bringing him food and reminding him of his low-cholesterol diet. Likewise, Emma’s father worries about his digestion. In spite of everything, the reader/audience perceives that they have a good relationship with their daughters and truly care about their well-being.

Harriet is Emma’s seventeen-years old protégée. She resides at Highbury’s boarding school because she is an orphan:

Emma takes Harriet under her wing as a prodigy and Harriet is properly obliging. Emma assumes that Harriet’s company (herself) will overshadow Harriet’s questionable origins. Unfortunately, Harriet cannot escape her uncertain birth. Her paternity is unknown and therefore no amount of Emma’s patronage will make her desirable. (Mazmanian, 2000)

She is a simple and pretty girl who lets Emma manipulate her all over the story, managing to convince her to decline the only proposition coming from a man who seems to love her, Robert Martin. Instead, Harriet follows Emma blindly and accepts receiving a makeover and being part of her matchmaking schemes.

In the film, she is a Hispanic transfer student who was not looking for a dramatical change in her live. However, Cher’s radical makeover and incessant manipulation, lead her to also change personally, becoming more confident and enjoying her popularity. Her status rapidly elevates after a near-death experience in the mall, from which Christian saved. Emma has a parallel scene with Harriet and Frank. Nevertheless, it is in the film where Cher’s high level of popularity seems at risk, which eventually affects her relationship between her and Harriet.

Even though both characters undergo a transformation, they could never be what they are not, since “neither is marketable. Harriet’s lack of kinship alliances is replaced by Tai’s

mistake of multiple sexual alliances. Both examples of Hecklering's character evolution reveal that the eighteenth-century debate concerning kinship and birthright evolved into one concerning sexuality and promiscuity" (Mazmanian, 1999). Again, it is observed that the film updates elements and adapts them to the 1990s context.

Frank Churchill is Mr. Weston's son and Mrs. Weston's stepson. He lived at Enscombe with his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Churchill but decided to move closer to Highbury due to his aunt's delicate health condition. He seems to be an accomplished man, handsome and a gentleman, who is also irresponsible, manipulative and mischievous. In some ways, he is Emma's male counterpart in the sense that he is likable despite of his flaws. Mr. Knightley sums up his journey across the text:

He is a most fortunate man [...]. Everything turns out for his good. He meets with a young woman at a watering-place, gains her affection, cannot even weary her by negligent treatment. [...] His aunt is in the way. His aunt dies. [...]. He has used everybody ill-and they are delighted to forgive him. (Austen, 2004, pp. 706-707)

Even though Frank is mentioned since the beginning of the novel, he does not physically enter the scene until chapter 5 from Volume 2. Correspondingly, Christian arrives to Bronson Alcott High School at midterm. He is handsome, has a taste for fashion, and perfectly fits into the stereotype of a homosexual man, because [h]is actions are effeminate; his clothes, car, and hair style project an obsession with appearances [...] [therefore] his rejection of Cher, the image of sexuality, would appear shocking if not for his sexual orientation. Notwithstanding, it is not a topic addressed in the film, it is mainly assumed by his manners, behaviour and, ultimately, by Murray's assumption: "as far as the audience knows he is gay only to explain why he does not respond to Cher's advances and to showcase her naiveté. This distance from Christian as a person enhances his role as a symbol". (Mazmanian, 2000)

6.1 Critical response

The remarkable choice of the cast for this film adaptation is based, apart from their performing qualities, on their popularity, as casting familiar faces will undoubtedly increase the size of the audience. Alicia Silverstone was already a star by the time she was casted in the film. During that time, she had just turned 18 and had debuted in the film *The Crush* just two years earlier. However, her first role was on *The Wonder Years*, a TV series from 1992. She

became even more famous after obtaining the MTV Movie Award for Best Breakthrough Performance in 1994 for *The Crush* and for appearing in an Aerosmith music video. In an interview for the online magazine *Little White Lies*, director Amy Heckerling reveals she saw her in the aforementioned music video and knew she wanted to cast her right then as Cher: “you see Alicia and just care about her. There’s something so childlike and vulnerable and her sweetness comes through. You immediately smile.” (Simon Bland, 2020)

In the case of Paul Rudd, despite the fame he possesses nowadays, being an actual Marvel superhero, *Ant-Man*, during the 90s he was not as famous as Silverstone. His first acting debut was in 1991 in a commercial. The year after he starred in a TV show called *Sisters* and appeared on six episodes in another show named *Wild Oats*. Although he was not the director’s first choice, she recalls Rudd as a funny and perfect for the role because of the way they would connect. Her first choice and the person she had in mind when developing the character was Adam Horovitz, whose schedule did not allow him to participate in the casting.

Tai’s incarnation by the remembered actress Brittany Murphy is praised by the director in Sophia June’s article (2021): “we saw a lot of people for the part of Tai, and I felt like everybody was kind of acting it as opposed to just feeling it. And when Brittany came in, she was just genuine,” Heckerling recalled. “She just felt like a sweet girl who kind of didn’t fit in with the others and was just trying and being nice but, like, was lost in this world and that was exactly what I was looking for.” The film was a pivotal moment in her career, as it led her to roles in well-known productions such as *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, *Just Married* or *Girl Interrupted*.

7. CONCLUSION

The fact that *Emma* is one of the most famous literary works known, especially during the 21st century, is greatly due to the film adaptations, which have turned Jane Austen into an even better-known author than she already was. However, not all adaptations include every aspect contained in the novel, such as the themes, scenes or the characters, as has been shown here in this essay focusing on the film version from 1995.

To answer the question formulated at the beginning of this essay, it could be said that the effect that the film version provokes is not the same as the one of the text, because, the audience Heckerling is aiming for is not necessarily fond of heritage or period time films. The production was conceived for the average public, to be screened without having to bash one’s head up, as it usually happens with most romantic comedies. As a result, many people are still unaware of Austen’s *Emma* being the backbone for the plot and themes presented on the film.

Austen's addressed wittiness is undeniably present in the manner the filmmaker updates the plot, the themes and creates new characters for a contemporary setting. All the critiques Jane Austen attempts to make against the society of her time, embedded in the subtext of the novel are, thereupon, adapted to the present. It was also a way to portrait that the essence of those issues lives on nowadays. In that sense, hiding Austen's literary classic behind a teenage film would definitely attract a wider audience, many of them young, who might become familiar with Austen after watching the film, as it has become a pop culture classic.

Questioning the faithfulness of adaptations not depicting people in costumes or English rural settings has been quintessential when reviewing the film. A further analysis into the layers the film so meticulously incorporates in a gradual manner, scene by scene, dialogue by dialogue, will ultimately reveal how powerful adaptations can be and how appearances can be deceiving and require the public to look beyond them.

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