

## DIARMUID LAWRENCE'S ADAPTATION (1996) OF JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA* (1816): EXPRESSIVE MONTAGE, CLASS DISTINCTIONS AND IRONY

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to discuss Diarmuid Lawrence's 1996-ITV/A&E adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* focusing on the creation of irony and the relations established between irony and social class distinctions. The analysis is enlarged through a comparison with Douglas McGrath's adaptation (also 1996) of the novel, one which illustrates a romantic and superficial portrayal of Austen's universe. Lawrence's version, conversely, is aware of the tensions characteristic of Austen's world, thus being more successful in the reconstruction of Austen's ironies, even when creating and adding scenes different from those in the novel *Emma*.

Keywords: filmic adaptation; irony; montage; social class distinctions

### RESUMO

O objetivo deste ensaio é discutir a adaptação que Diarmuid Lawrence realizou, em 1996, do romance *Emma*, de Jane Austen, tendo como foco a criação da ironia e as relações estabelecidas entre ironia e distinções de classe social. A análise é acrescida por uma comparação com a adaptação que Douglas McGrath fez do mesmo romance, também em 1996. A discussão mostra que a adaptação de McGrath constitui um retrato romântico e superficial do universo de Austen, enquanto a adaptação de Lawrence ilustra uma consciência das tensões características do mundo pré-vitoriano, sobretudo quanto à reconstrução das ironias de Austen, mesmo quando criando e adicionando cenas diferentes daquelas do romance *Emma*.

Palavras-chave: adaptação fílmica; ironia; montagem; distinções de classe social

Several aspects in Diarmuid Lawrence's 1996-ITV/A&E version of Jane Austen's *Emma* call one's attention to irony in a first viewing. The way the film starts – with a moon-night image in which thieves are dimly shown stealing hens from Hartfield (we can perfectly hear the noises made by the hens and by a gun-shot) – already makes the viewer question, for some seconds, whether that is really an Austen film. In her reading of “Class” in Austen, Juliet McMaster says that “Dickens might give us scenes of the unleashed fury of the mob in the Gordon riots or the French Revolution; but in Austen's novels, by and large, law and order prevail” (1997, p.128). I have an argument that already in Austen's world this ‘law’ and ‘order’ might prevail only in appearance; Austen's irony and implicit tensions undermine such an order, contradict its neatness, thus inviting a careful look into the *double-dealings* of narration at large. In the novel *Emma*, for instance, the reference to ‘pilfering’ comes in the very last page, as follows: “Mrs. Weston's poultry-house was robbed one night of all the turkies – evidently by the ingenuity of man. Other poultry-yards in the neighbourhood also suffered. – Pilfering was *housebreaking* to Mr. Woodhouse's fears” (AUSTEN, p. 313). The use of the passive voice and also of the vague, indeterminate expression “ingenuity of man” (used ironically) endows the act with an indirectness and a certain distance or abstraction that contrasts with the more tangible and frightening (because enacted and shown) corresponding visual scene.

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Significantly, the novel shows other poverty-scenes and several gradations of poverty as well: when Emma and Harriet visit the poor and the sick (this scene is absent from Lawrence's version); and when Harriet is attacked by a group of gypsies (a scene that is maintained in both versions, Lawrence's and McGrath's (also 1996) adaptations of *Emma*). Besides, as Mary-Elizabeth Tobin shows in her reading of impoverished gentlewomen in *Emma*, this is a novel in which Austen "explores (...) [women's] depression over their loss of social status and the shame they experience at all the small indignities accompanying their social exclusion" (1998, p. 415). Miss Taylor (once Emma's governess), Mrs. Goddard (mistress of Highbury Boarding-school), Miss Nash (a teacher at Mrs. Goddard's school), Mrs. and Miss Bates (widow and spinster daughter of a vicar) and Jane Fairfax (the Bateses' niece, a would-be governess) are examples of such impoverished gentlewomen. What Lawrence's film does, actually, is to bring the scenes of poverty and those showing the working class to the foreground, or even when they appear in the background (throughout the film servants are shown as if they were merely part of the decor), the film often gives them more visibility, perhaps more emphatically or explicitly, than Austen does. The 'hen-stealing' scene, for instance, is chosen to provide the framework for the film's construction: the film ends the way it starts, with an exterior night shot in which hens are also stolen. In her reading of "Austen, Class, and the American Market," Carol M. Dole comments on the sequence by saying that

The chicken-theft scenes, with their strutting cocks and stolen hens, invite an alternative comic reading through their positioning near marriage/engagement sequences, especially in light of Mr. Woodhouse's lament that he has lost "six good hens and now Miss Taylor." (1998, p. 71)

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

In the film's opening, irony is created mainly through editing procedures: there is a clear opposition between the peace that the night promises, and the fear that hunger and social injustice might bring. Andrew Davies' screenplay already juxtaposes information that it is "a clear night in the country (...). There is some moonlight" with "shadowy figures, three or four of them, running across the grass." He adds, "(...) We can see the silhouette of the house in the background, but the thieves are making for the chicken coops" (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma*, 78)<sup>2</sup>. The juxtaposition of these two scenes – thieves stealing hens from Hartfield, and that of Emma sleeping, and later waking up with the noise the thieves and the chickens make – clearly illustrates an instance of expressive montage<sup>3</sup>: here, no words are used (except for, "Ho! Ho there! Stop thief!", by the gardener), the effect resulting mainly from the combination of incongruent elements (an apparently peaceful and moonlit night and thieves stealing hens), that in their turn give rise to disjunction and irony. Of course the attribution of irony at the film's opening also depends on some presuppositions concerning Austen's (textual and contextual) world; as Fay

<sup>2</sup> The quotations of Lawrence's version of *Emma* are taken from the script provided in Birtwistle and Conklin's *The Making of Jane Austen's Emma* (see reference section at the end).

<sup>3</sup> This notion of expressive montage is related to the conception of montage as collision, as conflict, and owes to Sergei Eisenstein's theoretical discussions, presented both in "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form" and in "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram".

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

Ladies and gentlemen – friends. We have been blessed this year again with a good harvest. I have been blessed in another way too.

*He looks down fondly at Emma and she smiles up at him.*

By next harvest, I shall be living at Hartfield, but I assure you all I shall be farming my estate, and looking after you all. There will be stability. There will be continuation – though my life is to change (...). (p. 151)

Actually, scenes of social disruption, showing a frame beyond that of Austen’s, constitute a remarkable feature of this film version. Immediately after the opening scene, there is a sequence of the Westons’ wedding; on the carriage-ride to church, the camera takes advantage not only to register the dialogue between Miss Taylor, Emma and her father inside the carriage, but also to open the field of vision so as to show workers, common, poor people in the village. As the carriage moves, we listen to Mr. Woodhouse complaining, “Six good hens and now Miss Taylor,” a juxtaposition that sets the ironic tone as well, by equating Miss Taylor to a commodity. Davies’ notes in the screenplay inform that the Woodhouses’ carriage goes “past a couple of ramshackle cottages of extraordinary squalor. A couple of ragged barefoot children have come out to gawp at them” (p. 79). There is a marked contrast between the Woodhouses’ social-class superiority, their gentle manners, their nobleness, and the poor villagers’ inferior social position, mainly expressed by their ragged clothes and general appearance. As the carriage passes, they raise their hats in a sign of deference and respect for the Woodhouses, thus attesting to their importance in the village. The visual rendition of a (perhaps) larger Highbury than that of Austen informs, in a wider spectrum, both on the quantity of servants upon whom the landed gentry depended, and on the inequalities and injustices of that kind of society, in which issues of class, money and manners – as Austen’s novels, certainly with more subtlety, already reveal – play a crucial role. For instance, Lawrence’s film also shows common workers in the village when Mr. Elton leaves for Bath in search of a wife, and servants and their work are shown during the picking of strawberries, during the Box-Hill picnic, and during the preparation of food for the harvest-dinner at the end of the film.

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

the apothecary Mr. Perry, and the tenant-farmer Robert Martin; those that have risen from trade to gentility, like the Westons and the Coles; the land workers, the servants, the gypsies, and the poor family, the Clarks, that Emma visits for charity at the beginning of the novel. And because its heroine, Emma, is, in Juliet McMaster's words, "one who specializes in social discrimination and makes prompt though often inaccurate judgments about the social station of the people around her" (1997, p. 118), the novel provides many examples that contribute to the complexity of class distinctions. These examples (for instance, Emma's rejection of Robert Martin as Harriet's partner, and Mr. Elton's despising Harriet) sometimes seem to reinforce, and at other times, deny, the strict boundaries of class distinctions. Or better, if they do not deny, they at least show the inevitable crossing of boundaries, so as to promote the assimilation of, for instance, those coming from trade into the so-called upper-gentry. I would argue that in Austen such distinctions are more subtly depicted, mainly with regard to the classes below the landed gentry; as it is known, it is the gentry who constitute her most privileged focus. In Lawrence's *Emma*, however, the dramatization of class distinctions – mainly because of the time-gap between Austen's time and ours – is more openly expressed. Whereas in Austen's novel(s) the reference to the less privileged classes almost always appears in the background, or through details, the film visually shows many scenes in which the presence of servants and other workers compete with those of the upper-gentry on the screen, a fact that illustrates their visibility in more evident ways.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In terms of larger social issues, Andrew Davies, commenting on the social context of the period, says: “(...) I think it’s an interesting aspect of this book [*Emma*], the fears and evasions of the aristocracy and gentry, living in such close proximity to the great unwashed” (*The Making of Jane Austen’s Emma*, p. 13). The visual rendering of these contrasts favours the creation of irony as well. Such is the case of the strawberry-picking scene, organized and hosted by Mr. Knightley in his Donwell Abbey. The first contrast the viewer notices is between the natural surroundings – specifically the strawberry beds – and what would be a rather natural undertaking (the picking of strawberries), and the way the ladies and gentlemen over-dress and behave (principally Mrs. Elton) – in a very ritualised way, as if in a form of parade. The clash between nature and culture, and between the gentry and the servants is made more evident in the detail of the servant providing a knee cushion for the guests’ comfort while they stoop to pick up the fruit. The irony is enhanced by Mrs. Elton’s saying, “How delightful to gather for oneself – the only way to really enjoy them – don’t you think, with one’s basket over one’s arm... so simple and natural, I fancy myself as a sort of shepherdess you know...” (p. 131). The simplicity and naturalness of the task, referred to in Mrs. Elton’s words, is every time denied, or undermined, by its ritualising and formal procedures. Again, irony is achieved first in visual terms, and elaborated further by verbal material.

The Box-Hill picnic – famous for Emma’s crude and ironic remark addressed at Miss Bates – is another sequence of Lawrence’s film that dramatizes the contrast between social classes, by emphasizing the role played by workers and servants in the provision of

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

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

Andrew Davies' screenplay joins to the Box-Hill picnic an incident that takes place two chapters earlier in the novel, when Frank commits a blunder for commenting about Mr. Perry's plan of setting up his carriage (a piece of information he had known through one of his secret letters from Jane). In the novel, this incident leads to a "letter-game," in which Frank uses the words *blunder* and *Dixon*. This is a game (aligning with other games in the novel) that hides – but only to reveal retrospectively – relevant information about the characters: through the word *blunder*, for instance, Frank indirectly tells Jane of his silly mistake. The meaning of the word *Dixon* is shared by Frank and Emma on one level (Frank induces Emma to think there is a secret attachment between Jane and Mr. Dixon), and by Frank and Jane, on another (in fact, it is Frank and Jane who are already secretly engaged). The overlapping of these two level-meanings generates an ironic meaning, shared by narrator and reader/viewer (besides Frank and Jane) mainly at Emma's expense. In the film (as in the novel) the viewer is also guided by Knightley's detective and suspicious look, which reveals his intent to interpret what is going on. Interestingly, because these games are essentially linguistic, and have a considerable degree of indirectness, they would normally pose problems for the process of adaptation. A way of overcoming that, at least in Lawrence's version, is through the insertion of this letter-game in the Box-Hill picnic, an event that, in the novel, is already essentially tense (and dense) because of Emma's rude remark towards Miss Bates. By accommodating the letter-game to the Box-Hill picnic, Davies' screenplay adds to the tensions of this social gathering and dramatizes, by deepening, the relationship between Frank and Jane. Jane, after seeing the letters corresponding to the name *Dixon*, leaves the group, looking clearly anguished and deeply affected by the "silly private joke," as Emma describes the game to Knightley afterwards. Thus, the letter-game not only introduces and prepares the way for Emma's climactic irony to Miss Bates, some time later, but in-between develops further (though still indirectly) the Frank-Jane relationship.

The sub-plot concerning Frank-Jane's mysterious link is highly relevant for the creation of irony in *Emma*. In McGrath's version this sub-plot is superficially treated, being almost totally ignored; it is difficult for the viewer to make any sense of the Frank-Jane relationship judging only from the film's resources. Lawrence's version, conversely, is careful to scatter details throughout the film that dramatize their connection; in a

retrospective viewing, one can perceive the subtlety of these details and their function to convey a type of *superior* meaning to the viewer, an aspect responsible for the creation of irony. Some of these “clues” are only visual, whereas others also rely on verbal material. Three of these *visual details* are the following: during a dinner at the Westons, when Jane is singing and playing the piano, Frank, though sitting beside Emma, looks completely lost in his thoughts, “staring abstractly in Jane Fairfax’s direction” (p. 114) thus denouncing that his mind is somewhere else. The superior knowledge expressed in this visual detail is developed further by a conflation of discourses – visual and aural. Some time later, while Frank joins in Jane’s singing – we listen to their voices in the background saying, “And I will love you all the day” – Mrs. Weston comes to sit by Emma and tell her of her “discoveries” in relation to Knightley and Jane. The two discourses compete on the screen: at the same time that we see Mrs. Weston talking to Emma about her conjectures, we also listen (in the background) to Jane’s and Frank’s moving voices as they sing.

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

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

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

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

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

knowledge than that of the characters. The discrepancy between these two levels of knowledge generates irony for the viewer.

The Box-Hill picnic, in Lawrence's version, still provides another shot that adds to the dramatization of the Jane-Frank secret attachment. After Emma's ironic remark towards Miss Bates ("Yes, but there may be a difficulty for you Miss Bates. You will be limited as to number – only three at once!"), Mr. Elton and Augusta give an awful look at Emma, to show their criticism of her attitude, and decide to go away for a walk. Looking at them from a certain distance, Frank says,

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

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

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

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

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

(...) I wondered if it wouldn't be possible to think of some kind of event, other than a wedding, which would bring all the characters together and tie up all the loose ends. I then imagined a kind of harvest supper, like in Hardy's or Tolstoy's novels – all that lovely stuff of bringing the harvest home and the haymakers and the good gentleman farmer; a time when you need every man, woman and child in the community to work together. So I wrote in a scene where we see the harvesting in the fields and then a sequence of the harvest supper itself, where we show Knightley as an ideal old-fashioned landowner who

wanted to share and celebrate with his tenants. I hoped this would form a nice contrast with the Eltons, who think it very eccentric of him to invite his tenants. (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma*, pp. 57-8).

Davies' words are important to illustrate the issue of traversing discourses in adaptations: the 'inspiration' for the scene was not found in Austen, but in Hardy or Tolstoy. The filmic scene is revealing not only of the presence of many servants who prepare the food, but it also suggests the *appearance* of a community bonding. Yet, actually, there are two different rooms to house the guests – one for the gentry, and another for the tenants; we also have glimpses of the kitchen, showing the servants cooking. The film emphasizes this separation, at the same time that it attempts to bridge the gap between both groups; this aspect is clear first in the scene when Emma has to cross a whole room in order to talk to Harriet and Robert Martin. The camera accompanies Emma's natural walking movement, as if in an attempt to highlight her crossing of a boundary, both spatially and socially speaking. In this version (differently from McGrath's), Emma only speaks to Robert Martin and even shakes hand with him *at this time*. (In the previous situations they met, Emma never talked to him). Their meeting is now (ironically) even mediated by Harriet's formal introduction – as if they have never seen each other.

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

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

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