

EMMA A.D. 1996

The Two Recent “Period Piece” Adaptations

In 1960, two different television adaptations of *Emma*, one British and one American, were produced and broadcast roughly four months apart. The phenomenon of virtually simultaneous adaptations in both nations recurred in 1996, only this time the American version was released theatrically by Miramax pictures and achieved a somewhat higher profile than its more modestly marketed British competitor overseas. Since the release of the two 1996 adaptations, literary critics and adaptation theorists have often examined the two versions together, as if they were a unit, or cinematic cousins of one another. Such comparisons have yielded intriguing results, primarily because the two films contrast nicely with one another by offering starkly different interpretations of Austen’s novel. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield suggest one way of understanding the differences between the two 1996 *Emma* films in “Filming Highbury: Reducing the Community in *Emma* to the Screen”:

One could argue that *Emma* is simultaneously the most individual and most social of Austen’s six major novels. It is the only one named after its heroine and the only one that sticks entirely to one community—Highbury.... Between the mental distance Emma travels [to achieve self-knowledge] and the physical immobility she accepts, we can see how carefully this novel balances between being one about a society and being one about an individual.

The two recent films unbalance the novel into two different directions, which is all right since a two-hour adaptation cannot and should not try to do everything.... One may suspect the different emphases derive from the greater American influence on the Miramax film as opposed to the Meridian/Arts and Entertainment production. The feature film promotes a

rising star, Gwyneth Paltrow, whereas the telefilm sits more comfortably within the British tradition of ensemble work. Beyond this, however, the two versions of *Emma* represent two different and legitimate versions of the novel: one more concerned with what happens in the society, the other more in tune with what happens to the individual. Austen's novel has the luxury of presenting both visions simultaneously; a film, however, must limit its scope.

In making this observation, Troost and Greenfield have essentially identified the American film starring Paltrow as a domestic Bildungsroman adaptation and the Meridian/A&E "telefilm" as a retelling of the story as a social critique. The distinction is a useful one. It is certainly true that the American film is interested primarily in Emma herself, especially in dramatizing her rich inner life and her romance with Knightley, while the British film focuses more on broader social issues of class and gender. However, there is a danger in pushing this distinction too far. Although the American film does make Emma herself its prime focus, it grants more importance to class and social issues than has often been suggested. In a similar fashion, while the British television film seems most interested in representing the perspective of Highbury's more economically vulnerable community members, especially the servant class, it presents an intriguing vision of Emma as an "imaginist" that is usually found in more purely Emma-centric interpretations of the story.

Another key difference between the two films is that they are different enough from one another to occupy two distinct categories of adaptation delineated by Geoffrey Wagner. The American cinematic release is a transposition adaptation, which means that it brings to the screen a traditional, conservative reading of the novel that does little to clash with the lay public's vision of the work, and avoids including any elements that might be inspired by more liberal scholarly interpretations that are popular in university classrooms. On the other hand, the British telefilm is a *commentary* adaptation in which the creative team is clearly looking back upon the original text with a modern eye that condemns the class structure of the period. Furthermore, as a commentary adaptation, the telefilm draws upon radical or progressive critical literary readings of the text that are often ignored by more politically conservative transposition adaptations. It is also important to point out that each of the 1996 *Emma* films is unique in the canon of Austen adaptations: the American film is the only *trans-*

position adaptation that presents a domestic Bildungsroman reading of the story, while the British telefilm is the only *commentary* adaptation inspired by this particular text.

Since the two 1996 films have been examined so frequently alongside one another, often with the American production suffering in light of the comparison, I would like to spend the next two sections of this chapter examining each one in its own right. In doing so, and in keeping comparisons between the two at a minimum, I hope to finally afford the two films the opportunity to stand alone.

Douglas McGrath's *Emma*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow

***Emma*. Released August 2 (US), September 13, 1996 (UK). (Columbia/Miramax motion picture, Color, 120 minutes)**

In *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1973), feminist film critic Molly Haskell writes that the ideal heterosexual romantic union is one based on equality and mutual respect. However, she observes that:

[t]he love of equals is no more frequently to be found in films than in life. In both, one point of view—generally the man's—usually predominates, seeing the “other” as a creature of his own fantasies, as someone deprived, precisely, of otherness, who then comes to inherit the burden of his neuroses as well... The best of the classical couples—Bacall-Bogey in *To Have and Have Not*, Hepburn-Tracy in *Adam's Rib*—bring to the screen the kind of morally and socially beneficial “pedagogic” relationship that Lionell Trilling finds in Jane Austen's characters, the “intelligent love” in which the two partners instruct, inform, educate, and influence each other in a continuous college of love. In the confidence of mutuality, individuals grow, expand, exchange sexual characteristics. Bacall initiates the affair, Bogey is passive. Hepburn defeats Tracy, Tracy only half-playfully cries. The beauty of the marriage of true minds is that it allows the man to expose the feminine side of his nature and the woman to act on the masculine side of hers (25–26).

Although Haskell is discussing classic screen couples here, her thoughts on marriage, and on Jane Austen, have intriguing bearing on a discussion of the novel *Emma* and the Douglas McGrath film adaptation it inspired in 1996. In “Emma: A Woman for All Seasons,” Haskell suggests that an ideal representation of the healthy, balanced

romantic relationship that she often fails to see rendered in film can be found successfully depicted in classic literature by Jane Austen in *Emma*. Acknowledging that many critics read the relationship between Emma and Mr. George Knightley as being balanced in his favor, Haskell nevertheless argues that the union is far more equitable than some claim. She begins her discussion of the romance as it is depicted in the novel by considering Emma's privileged birth and initial opposition to marrying:

The irony of Emma's advantaged position is that while it frees her from the oppressive alternatives of either marrying ("it is not my way or my nature") or becoming a "poor old maid" ("it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public"), it also removes the pressure, born of financial necessity, to develop her talents—to practice her playing, to read books from that impressive list she has drawn up for Mr. Knightley—so that she might be truly independent, i.e., intellectually self-sustaining. By fortune and habit of mind, Emma is freed from the necessity of marrying and from the romantically indentured mentality of most of her sex (174).

Although the novel ends as Emma's marriage begins, and readers are left to imagine what married life will be like for her and Knightley, Haskell believes that the closing description of "the perfect happiness of the union" is meant to be taken seriously, and not interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek rendering of the requisite happy ending dictated by novelistic form:

Unlike her continental namesake, the romantically deluded Emma Bovary, Emma Woodhouse expects nothing from marriage—does not look to it for her fulfillment—and therefore stands to gain everything from it....She is very much the type of independent woman who goes for the slightly older man, the Katherine Hepburn (or Audrey Hepburn) of literary heroines....

But perhaps Emma's is the most romantic solution of all, the smart woman's ultimate fantasy: a man who sees her beauty but responds to her intellect. Feminists have taken to complaining that their relationship is not the perfect match that Austen seems to think it, that their marriage, far from being a delicious duet of mutual edification, is likely to be a grim series of home lessons, with the stuffy Knightley (he doesn't dance) scolding and molding a passive and pliant Emma. I don't think so. Knightley can dance (he has already taken his first step in that direction), he will unbend; while Emma will bend with more application to books and studies and discover in her mate a worthy adversary and conversationalist. They will draw each other out emotionally, expressing the warmth each had previously held in check. And perhaps what Emma found in Knightley is not too different from the

emotional sustenance the celibate Austen found in her family, particularly in her sister Cassandra. To my way of thinking, these are no mere accommodations. They are as close to the sublime as two human beings get (176–177).

Molly Haskell's praise of the quality of the romantic union between Emma and Knightley is for their relationship as it is depicted in Jane Austen's novel.¹ Although the early television adaptations do not interpret the relationship in the same way that Haskell does, instead granting Knightley authority over Emma, the 1996 Douglas McGrath adaptation differs from those that came before by portraying the romance as an ideal marriage of equals. Writing about the 120-minute film, which stars Gwyneth Paltrow as Emma and Jeremy Northam as Knightley, Linda Troost observes, "The McGrath film is ...a romance, in the modern sense: Paltrow gets the dishier-looking Mr. Knightley (played by Jeremy Northam). But let us not underrate romance. Austen's novel is both a comedy and a romance, *Emma* must reward its heroine, and it happens to do so by granting her increased understanding as well as the hero" ("Filming Highbury" 6).

As a transposition adaptation, as well as a reading of the novel as a domestic Bildungsroman, the McGrath film has the option of depicting Emma's coming of age story sympathetically, or as a form of moral parable. Although the film chastises Emma strongly for insulting Miss Bates at Box Hill, and celebrates her eventual shedding of her snobbish attitudes, it evokes enough sympathy for the character, and spends enough time making her rich inner life known to the audience through voiceover and telling close-up, that Emma emerges as more sympathetic in this film than she does in any of the early television adaptations.

In addition to granting Emma more subjectivity than the preceding television versions did, the McGrath film is possibly unique in its portrayal of Emma as a physical figure who counts archery as one of her hobbies and who drives herself from place to place in a carriage without James to accompany her. While these are certainly liberties taken with the text, Suzanne Ferriss writes that Emma's physicality in the McGrath film does:

...however, capture Emma's daring and reflect the emerging feminism of the era. McGrath has done his homework. Archery, for instance, was a newly popular sport among the upper classes, with women competing

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

Admittedly, McGrath's script sometimes pokes fun at Emma and privileges male characters such as Mr. Knightley. As Sue Parrill indicates in "Metaphors of Control: Physicality in *Emma* and *Clueless*," Emma's moral inferiority to Knightley is reflected by her inferior skill as an archer.² Emma also proves too headstrong when she drives her carriage into a large pool of water and gets stuck. When she is rescued from the middle of the small pond by the horseback-riding Frank Churchill, one might feel that the implication is that Emma needs to stop being so independent and let the men take over or, conversely, that Emma is striving for a self-sufficiency and self-awareness that she has not yet attained. The imagery of these moments in the film is so striking that it is no surprise that the symbolic meaning attributed to them is under strong debate. In general, Hilary Schor may have said it best when she observed that, "The combination of Gwyneth Paltow's luminosity and her fragility strikes us as similarly vexed, offering at once certainty and vulnerability. Like the distinction between the certainty of the narrator's confident assertion [that Emma, above all, knows how the world *should* be run] and the dizziness of the spinning world [imagery that accompanies the title credits], the opening of the film seems to warn us that some gap will appear between word and image, between voice and action" (148).

Just as its portrayal of Emma herself is somewhat unusual for a period piece adaptation, the McGrath film emphasizes Mr. Knightley's good humor and sensitivity far more than previous adaptations.

Although Jeremy Northam..., Mr. Knightley in the Miramax film, is a smaller man than [John Carson and Mark Strong, who play the part in other versions] and does not exude the authority of the others, he seems more sensitive and vulnerable....His acting style is understated, and he is good at sly irony. There are more witty lines for Mr. Knightley in the Miramax film than in the other versions. For instance, in the scene in which he and Emma compete at shooting arrows at a target, when Emma's aim deteriorates so

that she misses the target entirely, he quips, "Please don't kill my dogs." In another scene, in which he is standing with the massive Donwell Abbey behind him, he tells Emma he would rather not go to the ball but would prefer to stay at home, "Where it's cozy." Of the three actors, he comes across as the most tender in the proposal scene (Parrill 125).

McGrath's script allows Mr. Knightley to make jokes at Emma's expense, but it also pokes fun at Knightley himself for his stodginess, and Emma's teasing has a welcome deflating effect on the sometimes overbearing character. In an amusing rewriting of the scene in which Mrs. Weston and Emma interrogate Mr. Knightley as to the nature of his true feelings for Jane Fairfax, [quoted in Endnote 25 on page 160,] this Mr. Knightley practically flees the scene rather than continue the conversation past a certain point. So, while Emma is ridiculous in her inability to drive a carriage and in her poor marksmanship, Knightley is absurd in his stodginess and in his fear of romantic-themed conversation. Although he arguably demonstrates even more "sweetness" than the original Knightley, Northam's interpretation of the character is neither as comic as Peter Cookson's in the Kraft adaptation nor as pseudo-Victorian in his manner as Carson's in the Glenister-Constanduros version, but it strikes a balance between the two. Like the Knightley in the novel, Northam's Knightley is complex and difficult to describe in broad terms.³ As two flawed-but-sympathetic characters, Northam's Knightley and Paltrow's Emma grow during the course of the film and prove themselves worthy of one another's love by acknowledging their shortcomings and by working to amend their flaws. When, during his proposal, Mr. Knightley says, "Perhaps it is our imperfections that make us so perfect for one another," McGrath has given him a line of dialogue not found in the book that makes the lesson to be drawn from the romance clear.

By exploring Emma's psyche more thoroughly and more sympathetically than any of the other period piece adaptations, and by dramatizing one of the most idealized interpretations of Emma's romance with Mr. Knightley, the McGrath film stands out as a unique and dramatically satisfying reading of the novel. However, its very strengths, its sympathy for Emma and its romantic leanings, have left it vulnerable to certain criticisms which undermine its claim to greatness, both as a film and as a literary adaptation.

Possibly the best remembered of the adaptations set in Regency England, McGrath's film won some popular acclaim as *The New York*

Post's pick for the best film of 1996, and garnered an Oscar for Rachel Portman's music score. However, despite strong performances by an ensemble cast of British character actors, the film has been largely criticized by literary critics as deviating too strongly from the original text to be considered a serious adaptation. This is primarily because, as much as the film is faithful to the novel, its reading is also shaped by the dictates of film convention and of contemporary consumer culture. Although a literary adaptation, the Miramax film is clearly a product of the 1990s, a time in which Hollywood strove to fashion romance films that could please both modern-day feminists and alpha males by presenting the perspectives of both partners with equal respect and attention. The years preceding the McGrath *Emma* saw the release of *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Before Sunrise* (1995), and several other films that attempted to recreate the magic of the Bogey-Bacall and Tracy-Hepburn romances, with varying degrees of success. Certain critics have argued that the McGrath *Emma* is a part of the same project, and have objected to its similarities to other romance films of the 1990s.

Thanks to its perceived commercialism and "Americanness," the McGrath *Emma* is widely seen as a romanticized version of the novel with a tone sweetened to make it more palatable for a mass audience. Signs of the novels "Disney" treatment include the primacy of the Emma-Knightley romance, the virtual disappearance of Jane Fairfax from the story, the sweeping music score, and the idealized portrait of Highbury—with its verdant green outdoors and opulent houses that are too exquisite for the Westons and the Coles, despite their comfortable fortune and rising status in the community. Its "American" qualities could be said to include an American movie-star lead in Gwyneth Paltrow (whose lack of British birth has irked some native English critics), a smattering of Americanisms in the script written by McGrath, and a lack of attention paid to spelling out the class-standings of supporting characters such as Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton.⁴

Perhaps the greatest point of contention is the presence of a glamorous American movie star as Emma, which many critics view as a distracting miscasting. On the issue of Gwyneth Paltrow's American background, Lisa Hopkins observes that the loss of a clearly defined

accent, based in a specific British region and class, has a detrimental effect on theme and characterization in the McGrath film:

...it is difficult for any film that is aimed at audiences on both sides of the Atlantic to convey class by means of that favourite British indicator, accent. In Ang Lee's film of *Sense and Sensibility*, there are, unusually for a major movie, no American actors at all...[therefore] both class positions and indeed character can be indicated by intonation....Similarly, in the ITV [Lawrence-Davies] version of *Emma*, Mrs. Elton has a giveaway West Country accent which significantly undermines her pretensions to gentility, while Miss Bates' extremely upper-class pronunciation, coupled with the preservation of Mr. Knightley's comment that her notice was once an honor, reminds us of the perilously fragile and contingent nature of class position....

The Douglas McGrath film, however, which stars Gwyneth Paltrow, is a very different proposition. That accents were felt to be a sensitive issue is clearly evidenced by the immaculate English tones carefully studied and adopted by Paltrow; but these function primarily to indicate Englishness *per se*, rather than any particular inflection of it. Though, as with Meryl Streep, one cannot but marvel at Paltrow's ability so to disguise her natural pronunciation...it is, nevertheless, a thinner one than that provided by the rich texture of subtly different Englishes being played against each other that we hear in *Sense and Sensibility*" (Hopkins 2).

From the perspective of a contemporary British audience, the substitution of an "American" Emma for a *bona fide* "British" Emma robbed native Englanders of an opportunity to reexamine one of their classic texts in a modern light. This lost opportunity was keenly felt in the 1990s, a time that was filled with uncertainty as to what constituted essential "Britishness" since the very notion of "Britishness" seemed to be challenged by the breakup of the United Kingdom and the creation of the European Union.⁵

Paltrow's status as a movie star has also evoked criticism from American Austen scholars, who argue that her fame is a distraction, and that a less widely known actress would be easier to accept as Emma. Also, Paltrow's association with a specific style of American glamour and "classy" good looks has polarized her audience, making some adore her for her "old world" charms, and others resent her for representing an idealized standard of female beauty that some men love but that few women could live up to even if they wanted to.⁶

Douglas McGrath, who wrote and directed the 1996 *Emma* for Columbia/Miramax, is obviously a male, and one might argue that his photographing of Gwyneth Paltrow got a little too romantic at times

during the course of the film, particularly in one obviously posed shot in which he frames her on a Grecian couch between two plants reading the invitation to the Coles' dinner party. Sue Parrill, on the other hand, defends the casting of Paltrow and, to an extent, her romanticized presentation:

Since Emma is a character who is easy to dislike, having an appealing actress like Paltrow play the role is an advantage. She makes Emma a sympathetic figure, even when she is at her most wrong-headed, and she is easy to forgive when she admits being wrong....[Kate] Beckinsale, on the other hand, seems querulous and cold; [Doran] Godwin stiff and superior....The big difference is a matter of charisma, and Paltrow has it. (*Jane Austen on Film and Television* 123–124)

A similar argument can also be made that Paltrow's performance is superb—as engaging as it is nuanced—and that speaks well of her ability to bring a complex character to life. Writing a review at the time, film critic Jamie Peck said that Paltrow “deserves Oscar consideration.” “One of the few Americans in the film, it is to her credit she blends right into the smooth talents of the mostly English cast. This is a magical, star-making performance that's perfect every way you look at it.”⁷

Whether or not one agrees that Paltrow's performance is “magical,” her presence in the film is far from the only point of contention. McGrath's depiction of Highbury as a lush, almost fairy-tale setting in which most everyone is young and beautiful and the weather is always perfect has evoked concerns from certain quarters that the film is relentlessly “white” and takes nostalgia and upper-class worship to a dangerously racist point. The general argument places *Emma* within the context of the whole 1990s popular revival of interest in Austen, and suggests that the interest was generated by a backlash against cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, and part of a nostalgic effort to reclaim whiteness. That line of argument was probably most reasonably presented by James Thompson:

In his review of *Emma*, Roger Ebert (*Chicago Sun-Times*) writes, “In an impolite age, we escape to the movies to see good manners”....That may be so, but manners have been bad since anyone can remember, and there have always been costume dramas....In these oppositions, Austen is often set against Quentin Tarantino, or she is set up as “an antidote to the fungus infection of Joe Eszterhas” (Jack Kroll, *Newsweek* [December 18, 1995]) Such

comparisons always seem to produce a derogation of the present because we need Austen more than ever in these degenerate times (22).

Some of the nostalgia may come from an older audience, long out of college, living in an age of canon reform, when “their” classics come under attack. Here, the Austen dramas can be said to represent a purely white Englishness, before the fall into Empire and the politics of race. Austen is the very embodiment of white Englishness, especially for an Anglophile American audience (23).

While this may be the reason why some readers and moviegoers gravitated towards Jane Austen in the last decade—Roger Rosenblatt, for one, was inspired by a viewing of the *Sense and Sensibility* film to write an essay in *Modern Maturity* magazine in favor of the classic canon of literature—it would be unfair to suggest that all of the appeal of Austen is nostalgic in nature. Indeed, the very lushness and glamour of the McGrath film might not have the same moralistic and political connotations for everyone who experiences it. In “Clueless: About History,” Deidre Lynch defended the candy-colored Austen films, which she felt were being too easily dismissed as serious adaptations because they were pretty to look at:

It is not evident to me, in fact, that Austen would dislike even the glitz (even the flounces and furbelows) that inevitably distinguish the period adaptations of her novels: notwithstanding the frequently heard assertion that as a novelist she is ‘cerebral’ and really very ‘niggardly’ in her ‘descriptive dealings with food, clothes,...weather, and landscape.’ The materialization that novels undergo in adaptation often does entail their conversion into vehicles for asserting Britain’s film and TV production team’s monopoly on ‘quality’—the term that has come to denote the filmmaker’s scrupulous attention to period detail and finish. Custodians of quality have a commitment to accuracy that moves them to research even the bywaters of history of material culture (that is, they get the details right even for the period corset that no one will see); they tend to conduct themselves in bygone worlds as if they could afford to be genteelly unassuming (that is, they eschew all bright colors in their cinematography)—as if they really were, in short, to the manor born. Why are the results of their efforts so often depressing? Certainly the thickness of texture that results when quality is a byword has on occasion made these films seem claustrophobic—lush but leaden. It is as if a movie can be weighed down by too much re-creation. (85)

Additionally, it might be argued that McGrath’s portrayal of Highbury as a beautiful and safe haven for Emma is in keeping with Denise Kohn’s image of Emma’s home in her interpretation of the

novel as a domestic Bildungsroman. Kohn observes that Austen's depiction of nature which, though sometimes surprising, "is always the safe, domesticated nature of the English village, never the violent, raging nature of the Gothic English moors" (51). The environment of Highbury is presented as safe to assure the reader that Emma will indeed be happy there at the end of the novel, Kohn explains. In this view of the novel, Highbury is not a prison for Emma, nor is Hartfield. "And as nature is domesticated in *Emma*, so is the archetypal role of the greenworld lover, who often plays a prominent role in the novel of female development....Knightley, who is associated with farming and orchards, plays the role of Emma's greenworld lover, yet he is a domesticated version of the mythological Pan or Eros who usually endangers the female heroine....Knightley's domesticated ties to nature make Emma's sexual growth safe within the novel" (52).

Ironically, even though the film has been criticized for idealizing a white, imperialist culture of the past, it has also been cited for misrepresenting that culture as egalitarian by blurring the class and status divisions in Highbury. While I would suggest that the egalitarian subtext of the movie, if there, is an outgrowth of the portrayal of Emma and Knightley's match as a union of equals, Carol M. Dole argues that Hollywood wants to encourage the "American myth of classlessness" by making everyone in the story as well-dressed, pretty, and landed as everyone else. She writes:

The film's mis-en-scene also undercuts hierarchies. Pairs of characters, regardless of their rank or relationships, are routinely positioned within the frame in a lateral configuration so that neither figure is dominant. Harriet and Emma are repeatedly shown seated on opposite sides of a fireplace, or walking side-by-side toward the camera; Knightley and Emma, or Elton and Emma, are often captured in two-shots. Since Harriet bows her head into Emma's lap in one scene, Emma must make a similar gesture in another. Doorways, window seats, and other symmetrical backdrops further emphasize the symmetry of the characters' positioning. This relentlessly symmetrical composition visually reinforces the film's egalitarian views. (69)

In "The Social Constructions of Douglas McGrath's *Emma*: Earning a Place on Miss Woodhouse's Globe" Christine Colon proposes an alternative way of understanding the film, suggesting that it does, indeed, preserve class differences from the novel and confront class issues, but in a more filmic manner than the novel. For Colon, the most

telling and striking treatment of class issues in the film comes from the narrative framing device of Emma's artistic renderings of the globe, and of the narrative voiceover that accompanies its display during the opening and closing credits. In the first case, Emma presented a painted, papier-mâché globe with images of the citizens of Highbury painted all around its equator as a wedding present to the new Mrs. Weston. In the second instance, the closing credits, it is implied that Emma has made a second globe for herself on the occasion of her own wedding to Mr. Knightley, again with portraits of Highbury residents painted prominently over the vast seas and landmasses. Colon has suggested that the globes are loaded symbols, partly because they conflate the images of Highbury and the entire planet, and partly because of which portraits are included, and in which arrangement.

Speaking over the opening credits image of Emma's spinning, papier-mâché globe, the narrator of the McGrath *Emma* seems to come more from our present than from the "present" of the story because the words she uses to introduce the film suggest the opening of a fairy tale set in the distant past. These opening words, which do not appear in the novel, are: "In a time when one's town was one's world and the actions at a dance excited greater interest than the movement of armies, there lived a young woman who knew how this world should be run." The voice sounds like Greta Scacchi, who plays Mrs. Weston in the film, but she is not credited as being the narrator, so the identity of the voice actor cannot be confirmed.⁸ However, according to Colon, this narrator, like Mrs. Weston, seems "more calmly approving" of Emma than the novel's narrator.

Colon notes that the opening and closing voice-over narration is juxtaposed with images of two of Emma's artistic projects. For Colon, the images of the globes complicate the view of the story presented by the approving narrator because they draw ironic attention to Emma's restricted worldview. For Emma, Highbury *is* the world. Both globes hold portraits of people close to Emma. The first globe, which includes only the Bateses, Mr. Elton, the Westons, Mr. Knightley, Mr. Woodhouse, and Emma herself, "reveals that the beautiful world we are about to enter may actually be only a projection of Emma's own perceptions. We are not going to receive an objective view of Highbury but rather Emma's construction of her own world. Indeed,

the globe subtly draws our attention to what might be missing from Emma's perspective. The juxtaposition of the narrator and the globe in the opening sequence, then, has introduced us to the doubleness of the text of *Emma* as we shuttle back and forth between recognizing Emma's worth and recognizing her blindness. The rest of the film continues to emphasize the differences between Emma's perceptions and the realities of the world around her" (Colon 3).

The globe that accompanies the closing credits of the film adds Frank and Jane, Robert Martin and Harriet Smith, and Mrs. Elton to the world of Highbury, suggesting that "Emma's circle has widened, and she grants worth to some regardless of class" (Colon 5). Still, for Colon,

The final image of the globe...allows this film to reaffirm the doubleness of the novel even without the decisive rejection of Harriet. By comparing the two globes, we can see that while Emma has learned several important lessons about snobbery and class, she is still fixed within a world where class distinctions remain important. While friendship may obscure the fact that Mrs. Weston was a governess, Mr. Weston made his fortune in trade, Mr. Martin is a farmer, and Harriet is illegitimate, it cannot completely overcome these distinctions; for ultimately, Miss Woodhouse still remains the center of this tiny world and she decides who may inhabit it (Colon 6).

But what of the other residents of Highbury? How are they portrayed in this film and what level of subjectivity are they afforded? According to Schor:

McGrath's film attends most prominently to Emma's narratorial desire, taking it seriously, playing with her dramatic asides and ironic commentary, offering her remarkable space to comment on the action we are seeing. However, he pays careful attention as well to the games other people play with knowledge—games Austen draws out humorously, tracing from the earliest chapters the marriage plots imagined by the Westons, by both George Knightley and his brother John, and Harriet and Jane's more blighted attempts to write marriage plots for themselves. In a series of scenes, McGrath draws our attention to the ways the same events or documents are interpreted by different characters: in an early episode, we see person after person study a letter from Frank Churchill and pronounce upon it, these shifts of perspective conditioning us to believe that people see in their social interactions only what they are looking for—a version of themselves. (149)

The character who emerges as the least sympathetic in the film, and as the most broadly comic, is most likely Mrs. Elton (played with

great flair by Juliet Stevenson). In constantly praising herself, and attributing the praise to her unnamed "friends," she is amusingly vain, and in boasting of her possessions, she appears greedy and materialistic. In most adaptations, as in the novel, Mr. Elton's presence in the story shrinks to virtual nothingness once Mrs. Elton appears on the scene, but the McGrath film suggests that Mrs. Elton has a habit of cutting off her husband and overshadowing him, suggesting even more forcefully than the Box Hill picnic scene in the novel that the marriage is not all that Mr. Elton had hoped for.⁹

Aside from Mrs. Elton, and a perpetually cheerful Mr. Weston, all the other characters in the film are more complex than they at first appear. Frank Churchill, for example, seems more mischievous from the outset than he does in the novel because it is he and not Emma who invents the slander about Jane loving Mr. Dixon, so the blame for the gossip is shifted more strongly to him. However, it is even more obvious in the film than in the novel that Frank (here played by Ewan McGregor) eagerly awaits Jane's arrival at social gatherings and he spends more time with her in public. Additionally, Frank is allowed to redeem himself for his early ill treatment of his fiancé by not flirting with Emma at Box Hill in this version of the story. In fact, it is he who subtly comes to Jane's rescue by continually interrupting Mrs. Elton's intrusive and persistent prodding to procure employment, and by turning people's attention away from Mrs. Elton and towards Emma. So, a character who begins seeming even more immature and mean-spirited in this film than he does in the novel finishes by proving himself more worthy of Jane than he does in the pages of Austen's text. The effect is to reassure the audience that the couple will be happy and loyal to one another, and that they are marrying for love. The romantic interpretation of the relationship can be justified within the text itself, dovetailing with William Galperin's view that Frank and Jane are revolutionary lover figures in the novel.¹⁰

This romantic view of the characters also fits well within the confines of a film adaptation that emphasizes the romance plots from the novel over the social commentary elements of the novel. However, anyone who views the Frank and Jane romance from the novel in the same manner that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar do is bound to be disappointed by the film's depiction of their relationship. Gilbert and Gubar interpret Frank as a figure who imposes upon both Emma and

Jane, making apparent their vulnerability as women. In making Frank nice, and in de-emphasizing Jane's poverty and poor health, the McGrath film does not grant any significant attention to Jane's vulnerability as a woman. Therefore, an important theme from the novel is glossed over, and any reader who sees the themes of female friendship and poverty as the primary themes of the novel is bound to see the film as skewed at best, and is still more likely to regard it as a hollow and fluffy romanticizing of the source text. Still, such a view does not invalidate the film's portrayal of Frank and Jane as a romantic couple, because such a portrayal is justifiable if compared to Galperin's view of the characters.

It is also important to observe that, as a domestic Bildungsroman adaptation, McGrath's *Emma* is more interested in Jane Fairfax's effect on Emma's emotional and intellectual state than on the problems of Jane Fairfax *per se*, which would receive greater attention in a social critique adaptation. Hence the reason that Jane is presented more as a competitor of Emma's than as a suffering figure. It is often observed that Jane Fairfax (Polly Walker) has little to do in this film, and that is quite true. She is allowed a scene when she refuses to gossip with Emma at Miss Bates' home, and she is shown several times suffering from the loud-volumed attentions of Mrs. Elton, but that is about the extent of her role in the film. Her most significant screen time comes during the Coles' party, when she is presented essentially as Emma's most formidable romantic and social competitor. It is suggested, but not said directly, that Jane is the superior piano player, although Mr. Knightley reassures a slightly humbled Emma that her "playing was lovely." When Mr. Knightley shows some attention to Jane, Emma glares jealously at her from the shadows. In turn, when Frank shows attention to Emma by joining her in song at the piano, the camera cuts to Jane's perspective, and she is seen glowering at Emma. Given the role that Jane is supposed to play in the film—chiefly as a prod for Emma to improve herself and to cling to Knightley before he is taken from her—Jane should probably have at least one more scene to give her more presence and make her a more formidable adversary.

Although the McGrath *Emma* minimizes Jane Fairfax's role in the story, it does not eliminate her from the story altogether, as the Kraft *Emma* and *Clueless* essentially do. Like the two adaptations that strike Jane from the text, the McGrath film uses other characters, specifically

Robert Martin, Miss Bates, and Harriet to illustrate Emma's ill-treatment and manipulation of the less politically and economically powerful Highbury denizens. As with the character of Frank, the McGrath film presents all of the above characters as initially trivial, but with deeper wells of feelings and thoughts than Emma (and viewers) might at first perceive.

The Robert Martin of the McGrath film, Edward Woodall, has a sweet round face, and a loveable child-man quality about him. His first on-screen footage depicts him walking uncertainly past a flock of waddling ducks, the accompanying cute clarinet music earmarking him as a "clownish" figure. And yet, as the film unfolds, Robert demonstrates gentlemanly qualities and a consideration for Harriet that marks him as a good man and a worthy suitor for her. In a similar fashion, Harriet (in the person of Toni Collette) spends the early parts of the movie looking particularly foolish and easily influenced. Parrill writes:

In the Miramax film, Toni Collette is good at looking and acting stupid, but she is so very unprepossessing that it is difficult to imagine that Emma would be interested in her as a friend. The term 'bovine' may even creep into the viewer's mind....Her portrayal of Harriet reveals few gradations of development or nuances of feeling. She holds nothing back, she gushes with happiness—over puppies, Mr. Elton's pencil, Mr. Martin's letter—or weeps copiously at disappointments. In her tendency to excess, Collette is, perhaps, a more pathetic figure than the other Harriets. (125)

However, Collette has two excellent scenes as Harriet, both of which are genuinely moving despite some humorous undercurrents, and these scenes effectively evoke viewer sympathy for Harriet without casting her as secretly brilliant or deep. The first is the one in which she sits and listens as Emma begs forgiveness for encouraging her to pursue Mr. Elton and the second involves her ceremonial disposal of her mementoes of the failed romance with Elton. The burning ceremony should be either funny and absurd or touching and sweet, but somehow it manages to evoke both reactions from the audience, and the solid acting from Collette is what makes this possible.

Perhaps the supporting character who is most effectively portrayed is Miss Bates who, despite being a little younger than one might expect her to be, is almost as significant a character in this film as she is in Judy Campbell's screenplay. On the subject of Miss Bates,

Parrill writes in "The Cassandra of Highbury: Miss Bates on Film" that:

Sophie Thompson's Miss Bates is by far the most memorable rendering of the character. Thompson brings the character to life by blending the comic and the pathetic. Her mannerisms are comic—the constant smile, the myopic peering, the hesitations in speech, the nervous giggle. Yet, her delight at the thought of food, her concern for her niece and her mother, and her pain at Emma's jest are rendered with feeling (3).

Although her perspective on events is not granted the same weight as it is in Campbell's screenplay, Miss Bates is of central importance to the McGrath film because she represents, with her sweetness and tiresomeness taken as a whole, all that is wonderful and all that is trying about Emma's life in Highbury. McGrath gives Miss Bates several long monologues in imitation of her extended speeches from the novel, which Thompson delivers with great comedic flair, allowing viewers to feel with full force why Mr. Knightley would like her and why Emma would *not*. This version sets up the Box Hill scene quite well, increasing its ultimate dramatic impact. When Emma finally insults Miss Bates, all conversation ceases and Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston (not absent from the picnic in this film, and not pregnant) look upon Emma with disapproval. As John Wiltshire observes, "This is a moment to make readers of the novel shiver, its sudden interruption into the supposedly convivial scene well caught in the Douglas McGrath film of *Emma*, as the camera is allowed to dwell upon Miss Bates's face, her nervous words spelling out the full significance of the jibe, only implied in the novel" (125–126).

In interviews, McGrath has called this scene the "emotional centerpiece of the film," and one might well say that he succeeded in granting the Box Hill picnic a place of prominence as the most important scene in the film. The Box Hill segment in general is filled with superb acting, from Sophie Thompson's moving performance as the wounded Miss Bates to Jeremy Northam's powerful speech criticizing Emma for her infraction against the poor woman, but one must not forget how moving a moment it is when Paltrow's Emma sheds tears of shame at the scene's end.

Readings of the novel as a domestic Bildungsroman have constantly grappled with the issue of Emma's infraction on Box Hill and of the lesson that she must learn by the end of the story. The McGrath

film manages to succeed in maintaining audience sympathy for Emma without minimizing the significance of her harmful jest at Miss Bates' expense. It also takes great care in dramatizing Emma's thought processes and emotional development. In this emphasis, it evokes Denise Kohn's interpretation of the novel as a coming-of-age story, and portrays Emma's growth in a similar vein:

In the beginning of the novel, Emma takes pride in the fact that she had helped to make a match between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston. Although Knightley discredits her role, Emma explains that she has taken an appropriate middle-ground as a matchmaker, "something between the do-nothing and the do-all" (7). Her explanation of her role seems reasonable: she "promoted Mr. Weston's visits," gave many "little encouragements," and "smoothed many little matters" (7). Emma's success as a matchmaker, however, leads her to abuse her power as she exchanges her role as social facilitator to become a social manipulator. She tries to realign Harriet's affections and soon believes she can judge everyone's true emotions. When she tries to be the "do all" and force others to follow her plans, Emma crosses the threshold of Austen's depiction of the ideal "lady" (13). Her "kind designs" for Harriet lead her to the grossest unkindness—the belief that she can recreate Harriet on and off the canvas. Emma's desire for social control also causes her snobbery to the Martins and her rudeness to Miss Bates. Her snobbery to the Martins is morally reprehensible to the modern reader, but it was also reprehensible to nineteenth century readers. Trilling writes that the yeoman class had always held a strong position in English class feeling, and at this time especially, only stupid or ignorant people "felt privileged to look down upon them" (37). And Emma's treatment of Miss Bates at the picnic is made to seem doubly heartless by Miss Bates' quiet acquiescence.

But Kohn, unlike many World War II era critics who celebrated Emma's humbling, is able to acknowledge Emma's flaws without judging her too harshly:

[T]hough Emma sometimes acts in an unconscionable manner, the reader is well aware that she is not without a conscience. It pricks her throughout. For instance, after Harriet meets Robert Martin at Ford's, Emma realizes that she was "not thoroughly comfortable" with her own actions. At the end, though, Emma has changed enough to think it "would be a great pleasure to know Robert Martin" and happily attends the wedding (328). She apologizes to Miss Bates and befriends Jane Fairfax. She learns to treat others with tenderness and to respect their personal privacy and autonomy. She learns to reject both the roles of a "do-nothing" and a "do-all." At the end she considers a future match between Mrs. Weston's daughter and one of Isabella's sons, but her matchmaking is no longer dangerous because she now realizes the problems caused by the abuse of power. She has learned a

lesson: a lady is not a bully. But Emma also learns an equally important lesson: a lady is not a weakling. Unlike so many nineteenth-century heroines, she does not confuse kindness to others with fear of others and subjection of self. At the end of the novel, she is still able to say to Knightley, "I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other" (327).

Emma's awareness of her own "unpardonable arrogance" allows readers to continue their empathetic construction of her character. Emma has learned to balance power and propriety, reflecting Austen's ideal of a lady as a woman who is strong but not manipulative. (Kohn 51)

In the film, when Emma goes to visit Miss Bates to apologize, her overtures are spurned as Miss Bates races from the room. Although the apology is neither heard nor accepted on screen, the attempt marks the beginning of Emma's reform in the film. Shortly thereafter, when she comes to realize her love for Mr. Knightley, her journey towards self-knowledge and sensitivity to others is well underway. Hence, by the time Mr. Knightley proposes to Emma, there is a feeling that Emma is ready for, and deserving of, marriage to Mr. Knightley. But what makes the proposal scene even more intriguing for readers of the novel is that it emphasizes Mr. Knightley's moral and emotional journey as well, demonstrating that he needed to learn and grow as much as she did in order to be ready to take on the role of ideal husband. As Schor explains:

McGrath writes a perfectly acceptable speech for Emma (one which stresses her own unworthiness, allowing them to find each other in a chorus of self-dismissal) but the revision of Knightley's authority seems to me to capture something far more interesting about the film's relationship to the novel. If Emma's story is marked by the subtle correction of her thoughts, signaled in the film by the evolution of her voice-overs from self-delusion to self-awareness, Knightley's is marked both by his subtle domination of the film through voice, and his growing need to confess, to express something internal. One of the film's most striking elements is its attention to Knightley's inner life: the film cannot recapture the one chapter in the novel which is given over entirely to Knightley's point of view, the one in which he "discovers" the relationship between Frank and Jane and interrogates Emma about her cruel running joke with Frank about "Dixon," but it does give a powerful sense of how much of his life is spent following, watching, admonishing, and being amused by Emma. One of the films signal interpolations is of banter between the two....

...in addition an emphasis on Knightley's growing awareness of his affection for Emma, something the book cannot show with such clarity....In

his proposal speech, he retells the plot from his point of view—a speech that reveals, as does his earlier comment that he could not tell from her actions how deep her affection for Frank Churchill was, that he had been studying her and obsessed with her romantic imaginings all along. In the novel, this speech comes after his declaration of love and is given not directly in his voice, but in a version of free indirect discourse. It is an important speech, to be sure, but it has much less dramatic weight than if it had come before Emma was certain of his love; in a sense, it comes after the suspense, in a slight let-down of reader attention, which is no doubt why it has gone unnoticed in most Austen criticism.

However, in the film the speech is Knightley's proposal. His proposal is nothing other than the confession that he has been as blind and jealous and confused as the supposedly much-mistaken Emma all along; that he, too, has been blind in the affairs of the heart. (168)

The film's portrayal of Mr. Knightley as flawed and in need of correction also dovetails with Kohn's depiction of the character:

...Knightley, like Emma, has publicly embarrassed himself through a misreading of the relationship between Jane and Frank....So while the secret of Jane and Frank's engagement plays a joke upon Emma, it also—for a while—becomes a joke upon Knightley. And in an age when "making love" to a woman meant simply calling upon her and praising her publicly, it is hardly surprising that Knightley's attention to Jane has caused rumors....In short, Knightley is not, as he has traditionally been portrayed by critics, a paragon of personal judgment. He, like Emma, is deceived by the differences between his own perceptions and reality. In constructing Knightley's character, critics also overlook the fact that he apologizes to Emma for his previous paternal role. He tells Emma, "It was very natural of you to say, what right has he to lecture me?...I do not believe I did you any good." Their mutual worship is simply Austen's depiction of the first flush of romantic love, not a sign that Knightley is infallible.

Because both characters grow and change before the end of the film, and since each seems to love and respect the other, the film works to convince the audience that its representation of the romance is as balanced and romantic as Kohn sees it in Austen's novel.

Since the adaptation of *Emma* written and directed by Douglas McGrath bears a close resemblance to readings of the novel written by literary critic Denise Kohn and film critic Molly Haskell, it seems fair to say that the film represents a legitimate interpretation and dramatization. In emphasizing the growing love between Emma and Mr. Knightley, and the ways in which both characters mature emotionally and socially during the course of the text, the McGrath film

places some of the larger social and class issues from the novel into the background without eliminating them altogether. Since, to my mind, no other adaptation presents the romance in as satisfying a manner, or (*Clueless* aside) foregrounds Emma's inner life and emotional development so effectively, this adaptation stands out as one of the best made from Austen's novel. However, for those who object to the romanticism of the film, and to the harsh cuts made to the Jane Fairfax storyline, the adaptation which follows, a British telefilm starring Kate Beckinsale, offers a far more satisfying and thorough treatment of issues of class and gender than the Douglas McGrath film.

The Lawrence-Davies *Emma*, starring Kate Beckinsale

Jane Austen's *Emma*. 1996 (UK) February 16, 1997 (US).

(Meridian-ITV/A&E "telemovie," Color, 107 minutes)

Jane Austen's "Emma" starring Kate Beckinsale is noteworthy as being both the most recent of the period piece adaptations of the novel and one of the most innovative.¹¹ As the only commentary adaptation of *Emma*, this Meridian-ITV/A&E television movie is the one that draws most noticeably upon radical or progressive critical literary readings of the text that a more traditional adaptation such as McGrath's seems to ignore completely. In doing so, this version of *Emma* uses recent psychoanalytic theory to deconstruct the motivations of its protagonists; and it has also been inspired by recent Marxist-historicist writings to dramatize in unusual detail the lives and perspectives of the servant class of Highbury, characters whom Austen chose not to represent directly. Additionally, director Diarmuid Lawrence and screenwriter Andrew Davies appear to be consciously looking back on the Regency period and evaluating it, criticizing the more rigid class structure of the time while praising the powerful, wealthy Mr. Knightley for having a greater sense of civic responsibility and fairness than contemporary globalist corporations have. In telling the story of *Emma* primarily as a social critique, *Jane Austen's "Emma"* has been applauded by many feminist and new historicist critics for granting primacy to issues of class and gender instead of casting the

story as a sort of Regency period Harlequin romance, while other critics have taken exception to the emphasis that the production places on servants who have no discernable role in Austen's text.

As supporters of the adaptation, William Phillips and Louise Heal, authors of "Extensive Grounds and Classic Columns: *Emma* on Film," credit the screenwriter for making most of the innovations in the story:

Andrew Davies, whose screenplays are often controversial, has said he particularly relishes adapting Austen. He claims that 'there's...always some hidden scenes in the book that Austen didn't get around to writing herself, and it's nice to fill in some of those little gaps.' In addition to raising the questions for further study, Davies's vision of what is between the lines gives this film some of its visually better moments, such as several scenes which elaborate Austen's characterization of Emma as an 'imagist' (6).

Consequently, Phillips and Heal suggest that the Lawrence-Davies film "is perhaps the most important of the period adaptations" despite its tendency to violate "the spirit of *Emma*," because it "raises questions about the lives of characters who rarely, if ever, appear in the pages of Austen—the servants (6)."

While the McGrath *Emma* embraces a reading of the novel that portrays the romance between Emma and Mr. Knightley as healthy and fulfilling, the Lawrence-Davies film suggests that Mr. Knightley is clearly the more dominant personality, as well as the more morally righteous. The implication is that their marriage will involve Emma submitting herself to Mr. Knightley's wiser, paternalistic judgment and curbing her will to his. This depiction of the relationship is far from unusual as, aside from the McGrath film and the Glenister-Constanduros film, all of the other period piece adaptations suggest much the same thing, only in this version, Mr. Knightley has far more of a temper, making one fear he might have occasion to treat Emma too harshly once they are married. Consequently, the relationship between Emma and Mr. Knightley in this adaptation bears a close resemblance to the one described by Frances L. Restuccia in her psychoanalytic interpretation of the novel "A Black Morning: Kristevan Melancholia in Jane Austen's *Emma*."

Restuccia argues that Emma's unresolved feelings of grief over her mother's premature death caused her to seek out a parental replacement as an inappropriate and almost incestuous love-match,

forever preventing her from recovering fully from her mother's death. Restuccia employs Julia Kristeva's theory from *Black Sun* to view *Emma* as a melancholic/masochistic text, whose addiction to the 'maternal Thing' operates both at the level of the story (the *fabula*) and at the level of the functioning of the narrative itself (the *sjuzet*)" (451). The article, which first appeared in *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture* in 1994, explains that, "[t]o Kristeva, matricide is the first step toward autonomy' one must 'kill' the mother to become individuated. And daughters are especially prone to dodge this murderous act by enclosing within themselves, by consuming, 'the lost object' (or, in Kristeva's lexicon, 'the mother-Thing,' the 'maternal Thing.'). which is then 'not so fully lost'" (452). Notably, the novel *Emma*

...commences with a double maternal loss—the latter [the marriage and departure of Emma's governess Miss Taylor] so traumatic, effecting a "melancholy change"...because founded on the former [the death of Emma's biological mother, Mrs. Woodhouse]. Emma begins by offering a glimpse into the abyss—sustained throughout the novel by the accumulation of lost, dead, and dying mothers—for which it attempts to provide compensation.

In Restuccia's view of the novel, Emma's matchmaking enterprises become an outlet through which Emma can "vicariously pursue an 'other' who can liquefy the mother inhabiting her" but it is a half-measure that "also conveniently exempts her from participating in desiring bonds that would threaten her primary allegiance" (453). Since Emma's ultimate love object is old enough to be her parent and is fond of referring to her as "a spoiled child" or as "little Emma," Restuccia views Mr. Knightley as a substitute mother figure. Indeed, "[j]ust as the loss of Miss Taylor revives Emma's sadness over the loss of her mother, the potential loss of Mr. Knightley seems instantaneously to trigger panic that is a function of Emma's history of loss" (460). According to Restuccia, the unhealthy ramifications of Emma's mental association of her husband with her dead mother are far-reaching. "It might be tempting to ignore Knightley's linkage with Emma's mother and to conceive" of the marriage at the end of the novel as a triumph in which "all traces of the mother [are] wiped out, her loss negated" but such a reading is undercut by Emma's altered behavior on becoming engaged to Mr. Knightley. "In the last chap-

ters, we find Emma parroting Mr. Knightley's views (especially on Harriet) and failing to speak, as if in rehearsal for what promises to be a silencing marriage celebrated at the very end. The Emma we knew, sparkling with wit, is reduced to insipid remarks of gratitude to Knightley" (463) who, for his part, will likely make Emma a "distant, punishing husband" (468).

In matching Restuccia's diagnosis of the novel's leading characters, the British telefilm directed by Lawrence and written by Davies brings a more radical interpretation of the original text to the screen than has been seen before, even in the previous adaptation that wrestled with the issue of Emma's mental health, the Glenister-Constanduros miniseries. The Lawrence-Davies film makes manifest Emma's thought-processes by allowing the audience to see the world as she sees it during key moments in the story. The scenes that result evoke strong emotions from viewers that at once applaud Emma for her colorful and vivid imagination and fear that she is living too much in a fantasy world of her own creation to see the world as it truly is. Seemingly paradoxically, at the same time that the film works to present an unfiltered view of Emma's perceptions of reality, it radically realigns the overarching perspective through which the story is told by relating the narrative primarily from the perspective of the servant class of Highbury. There is an interesting incongruity to splitting the perspective of the film between Emma herself and the servants. There is little rhyme or reason to when and how this shift in narrative perspective will occur, but that is, perhaps, one of the best possible ways for a film to recreate the free-indirect style of Austen's narrative, which breaks similar narrative conventions with equal off-handedness.

The experiment should not work as well as it does but, somehow, Lawrence and Davies manage to tell the story through two radically different narrative lenses—presenting Emma's own fanciful outlook on events and contrasting it sharply with the perspectives of the less financially and socially powerful members of Highbury. Consequently, the film demonstrates that Emma's chief problem is that her imagination clouds her perceptions of reality to the point that she is blind to the very real suffering of Harriet (who would be happier marrying a yeoman farmer than Emma is willing to admit to herself), Jane Fairfax (whose love life is far less romantic and far more troubled

than Emma can understand), and the servants (who go to great lengths setting up a lot of heavy furniture on Box Hill so that an assembly of well-off Highbury natives can experience a socially awkward and upsetting afternoon outdoors). In this manner, the Davies-Lawrence film makes Emma a misguided figure with a slight snob-bish streak and a very vivid imagination who needs to observe with greater clarity and empathy the people who populate the community of Highbury.

While Emma is primarily kept at a solid critical distance from the viewer to encourage a more objective view of her actions than the McGrath film offers, there are key moments in the Lawrence-Davies film in which the viewer is allowed to share her perspective. During these moments, Emma has amusing and highly romanticized daydreams that are dramatized for the viewers through a combination of vignettes and special effects shots. These daydreams of Emma's, which are easily the most engaging segments in the movie, underscore an element of Emma's character that is rarely evoked by the film and television adaptations of the novel. To some extent, the Emma from the source novel shares some of the qualities of Jane Austen's earlier creation, Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey*, and of Charlotte Lennox's heroine from *The Female Quixote*. Principal among these qualities are an overactive imagination, a tendency to read too many romance novels instead of histories and more serious works of literature, and an inability to completely discern the difference between a novelistic convention in a book and an objective representation of reality. In the novel, one of the largest clues to Emma's skewed perception of reality is her expectation that Harriet's birth parents will be revealed to be royalty. In the popular fiction of the time, whenever an adopted character or an orphaned character was part of the story, by the novel's end it was usually revealed that the character's real parents were rich beyond the reader's wildest dreams. Since Emma expects a similar, novelistic development to occur in real life and validate her patronage of Harriet, she is not being realistic. Austen's presentation of Emma's misreading of the real world is partly at Emma's expense, but also partly a critique of the novels of the time, which gave an incomplete education to the women whose primary source of enlightenment were those cliché-ridden novels.¹²

Unfortunately, many of the film adaptations have found it difficult portraying Emma's fanciful side and this makes some of Emma's decisions difficult to fathom—especially her short-lived and amazingly unlikely project of trying to marry Harriet to Frank, or her assumption that Jane is in love with a married man. In most versions, particularly the Glenister-Constanduros version and the McGrath version, it is unclear why Emma jumps to the conclusion that Jane Fairfax has fallen for Mr. Dixon. In contrast, the ITV film makes it perfectly clear when she visualizes a disastrous sea voyage in which Jane is nearly washed overboard, only to be rescued by the chivalrous husband of her best friend. The moment is overblown, funny, and instantly graspable by an audience member unfamiliar with the original text. In a similar fashion, the issue of Harriet's mysterious birth is brought into sharp focus by another dream-image of Emma's, which also offers a clue as to one of the reasons why Emma has taken up matchmaking: she anticipates the warm thanks that she'll get for a match well made. She imagines a wedding between Mr. Elton and Harriet in which the two are standing together outside of the church, beaming at Emma. Mr. Elton says, "How can I ever thank you enough, Miss Woodhouse, for showing me where true joy was to be found? Mrs. Elton and I are eternally indebted to you!" And Harriet adds: "And to think that I should turn out to be the daughter of a baronet!" This is a really funny moment that works beautifully.

In establishing Emma so firmly as an imagist, Davies lays the proper groundwork for his adapting of the gypsy attack on Harriet, a segment from the novel which forms yet another part of Austen's satire of romantic fiction. Emma is not present for the scene, in which the hungry, pathetic gypsies seem to be looking primarily for food and do not constitute much of a threat to Harriet's safety. Later, when Emma hears of the encounter, and of Frank Churchill's prompt intervention on Harriet's behalf, she makes the observation that "It does seem like Providence—or something in a romance, full of brigands and outlaws...but for this to happen in Highbury..." This time the viewers are not let into Emma's thoughts, but if they were, one can wager that Emma's imagined recreation of Harriet's traumatic clash with the gypsies would look far more like a scene from adventure fiction of the time than what actually occurred. It is actually good of Da-

vies to trust the audience to have reached enough affinity with the character to do Emma's imagining for her.¹³

In one of the most successful dramatic explorations of 'Emma the imagist,' the Davies-Lawrence film actually improves upon the source material by providing Harriet with a memorable introductory scene.¹⁴ While attending church, Emma imagines which member of the congregation would make Reverend Elton a suitable bride. As if on cue, a seemingly divine light shines down from heaven onto Harriet. The scene is funny, provides an excellent character moment for Emma, and helps get the story started smoothly. David Monaghan, author of *"Emma and the Art of Adaptation,"* has a particularly noteworthy interpretation of this moment in the film and its significance to the overall themes of the Davies adaptation as a whole. He argues that Emma's fanciful imagination prevents her from recognizing just how socially vulnerable Harriet is. After all, should Harriet fail to marry successfully, she will become a spinster who, like Miss Bates, "will serve as a daily reminder of how flawed the patriarchal hierarchy is when it comes to accommodating women who fail in the marriage market." Therefore, instead of exercising her social responsibility to "mitigate Harriet's situation" by encouraging her to marry the "eminently worthy but romantically uninteresting Robert Martin," Emma "puts the naïve young woman into great peril by persuading her to" think of Elton as an attainable mate. "The scene in the church is therefore significant not only because it gives visual expression to the seductive effect of fantasy on Emma, but also because it immediately points up the negative impact that Emma's preference for personal indulgence over responsible social involvement can have on the established order" (208).

While it is certainly true that Emma does neglect many of the duties of her station that she finds unpleasant, it is important to note that, in Austen's novel in particular, there is more to Emma than her fantasies. For all of her much-discussed daydreaming and snobberies, Emma is connected enough to the people of Highbury to perform charity work in the community, tend to her sick father, and agree to look after the Knightley children while John and Isabella are otherwise engaged. The Beckinsale film is very good at using the fantasy segments to demonstrate Emma's good intentions but the film, on balance, still seems hard on Emma, leaving out many of the novel's

arguments in Emma's favor while preserving some of her gravest inflections. For example, the screenplay scrupulously preserves the scene in which Emma brings Harriet to the Martin farm for a painfully brief visit (a quarter of an hour) but does not preserve the qualifier that exists in the novel—that she spent that fifteen minutes visiting a former servant who had retired to Donwell Abbey. In the novel, Emma has donated food to Miss Bates just as Mr. Knightley has donated food, but in this version only Knightley is congratulated for feeding the Bates family. Emma also knows quite a lot about her own servants' lives and their families in the novel, but here Knightley seems to know her servants far better than she does. Also, Knightley is shown playing with his brother's children, but Emma is not. At every point, Davies chooses to credit Knightley alone for a virtue that he and Emma share in the novel. However, these changes are all in the service of this adaptation's reading, which suggests that, despite the charity work that Emma has been doing regularly, she is not enough in touch with the needs of the poor and is too caught up in her own rose-colored perceptions of the world.

However, it is possible to interpret the dream motifs from the Lawrence-Davies adaptation as more than just attempts to make Emma seem foolish and irresponsible. At the risk of sounding condescending, the film's dream-images are charming, and Kate Beckinsale's performance as Emma is so captivating during these segments that she wins back viewer sympathy for her character that helps alleviate the dark feelings viewers develop contemplating the plight of Highbury's disenfranchised. These imaginings also, arguably, give her the power to mentally rebel against an oppressive, patriarchal world.

On the other hand, in "Emma and the Servants," Lisa Hopkins ponders the possibility that the dream sequences may be read more as involuntary hallucinations than as active creations of a gifted mind. They may suggest the power of Emma the artist and they may suggest the possibility that Emma is mentally ill. It is debatable to what extent Emma is presented as mentally unbalanced thanks to these hallucinations. I am inclined to think that Hopkins is closer to the mark when she assumes that Emma is in control of the fantasies than when she suggests that the fantasies control Emma. After all, Emma could be a mentally healthy person with a vivid fantasy life who, neverthe-

less, needs to learn how to see people as they truly are instead of as how she wants to see them.¹⁵

Hopkins also observes that the Mr. Knightley of the Davies film has a borderline incestuous attraction to Emma and argues that his bad temper is a sign of inner turmoil. Some of the behind-the-scenes literature written to accompany the broadcasting of the telefilm validates Hopkins' views, and has revealed that the production team intended to present Mr. Knightley as a conflicted character. In the book *The Making of Jane Austen's "Emma,"* written by Sue Birtwistle (the telefilm's producer) and Susie Conklin, Mark Strong revealed that he did not wish to play Mr. Knightley purely as a moral exemplar, but instead strove to emphasize Knightley's flaws. Essentially, Strong felt that the most meaningful and rewarding way to portray Mr. Knightley was as a man terrified that he is on the verge of losing his true love to a foppish rival. He says:

...a friend I spoke to who had read Emma at university said, 'Oh, you're playing boring old Knightley.' And I knew what he meant, reading it as a teenager you feel like this man is set up as 'Mr. Goody' or 'Mr. Establishment.' So I had to go back and find out who this man really was.

Jane Austen didn't give that many clues in the book as to his character. Other characters in the book say a lot about him and it's all good. What I found underneath, however, was a man desperately struggling with his emotions. For example, there's a scene where he gets really annoyed because Frank Churchill has gone all the way to London to get his hair cut. It's a witty scene, and you put Knightley's behavior down to his being an older guy who sees that as foppishness. But it suddenly came to life for me when I realized it is his jealousy of Frank that is motivating him. This is something I just didn't glean from the book the first time I read it (Birtwistle 20-21).

Strong's view of Mr. Knightley is a perfectly valid and interesting one, but it is possible that he plays Mr. Knightley as somewhat too jealous and a bit too angry, especially given the fact that he is supposed to act, in this version of the story, as a socially conscious, highly noble figure. In fact, Strong himself feared that he played the scene at Box Hill (when Mr. Knightley berates Emma) a little *too* fiercely. As he said, "At one point I worried that, because I was having a go at Emma, the audience might not see the love behind it" (Birtwistle 21). However, many critics have argued convincingly that Strong's performance as Knightley is far more interesting and complicated than

performances given by actors such as Carson and Northam, who make Mr. Knightley too affable.

For Sarah R. Morrison, one of the reasons that Mr. Knightley emerges as a brusque and sullen character in *Jane Austen's "Emma"* is that Andrew Davies did not pay enough attention to the dictates of decorum that were scrupulously adhered to by the protagonists of the novel. In "*Emma* Minus its Narrator: Decorum and Class Consciousness in Film Versions of the Novel," Morrison argues that screenwriters often feel the void left by the absence of the narrator when they adapt Austen's novels into screenplays, and they try to make up for it by placing lines attributed to the narrator into the mouths of the characters. (For example, in film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, the famous opening lines of the novel spoken by the narrator are usually delivered by the actress playing Elizabeth Bennet.) Screenwriters also have characters speak aloud sentiments that were thought, and publicly proclaim statements that were shared in private in the novel. As Morrison explains, these alterations to the original story usually have broader implications for the screen version than one might first think, especially when Mr. Knightley's reservations about Frank Churchill are not spoken privately to her but expressed publicly and angrily at dinner, for a large assemblage to hear. "These seemingly slight alterations," Morrison writes, "make this Mr. Knightley less courteous and less sensitive to others' feelings than he appears in the novel, where, critics generally agree, he functions as a moral authority and model" (3).

Essentially, the most disorienting, and possibly frustrating, element of the Lawrence-Davies adaptation is that it seems to want to simultaneously evoke two starkly different images of Mr. Knightley. On the one hand, Strong's Mr. Knightley is a fiercely jealous, abrasive figure who seems to have planned since the day of Emma's birth to mold her into his wife. On the other hand, he is meant to be seen as a wise and just landlord, a champion of the people, and the true hero of the story meant to set Emma straight on her outmoded social worldview. Both images of Mr. Knightley have some basis in the novel, and it may even be possible to imagine a portrayal of the character that could comfortably contain all these traits, but the effect is, perhaps, too jarring here. Mr. Knightley does, in key moments, champion the rights of the servant class of Highbury, and of characters such as Har-

riet and Jane, but the Lawrence-Davies film works best when these characters are allowed to tell their own stories directly to the audience, and not have their interests represented by a problematic figure such as Strong's Knightley.

Regarding the servant class of Highbury, Lisa Hopkins catalogues virtually all of the major moments in the film that highlight the presence of the lower classes in "Emma and the Servants," making a case for the fact that the servants have much more of a presence and a voice in the film than they do in the novel. She cite moments where the camera lingers on the servants as they provide candlelight to illuminate meal times, open doors for wealthier characters as they enter and leave rooms, chase chicken thieves away from Hartfield, and carry heavy furniture uphill to offer seating during the Box Hill picnic. One servant even has dialogue and converses with Mr. Knightley.

In comparison, none of the servants in the novel have speaking parts and their actions are given cursory attention by the narrator, so their existence is most keenly felt when one of them is mentioned by name and discussed by one of the central characters. William Larkins appears to be an important personal aide to Mr. Knightley, although the nature of his job, the extent of his responsibilities, and his degree of familiarity with Mr. Knightley is not clear. Other characters in the novel mention their servants by their Christian names, often to praise the household cooking. Miss Bates enthusiastically explains that "Patty makes an excellent apple-dumpling" (195) and Mrs. Elton explains that she "should be extremely displeased if Wright were to send us up such a dinner, as could make me regret having asked more than Jane Fairfax to partake of it" (229). After Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Elton is the character in the novel most concerned with her servants and their relative merit. She is particularly proud of her coaches and horsemen, who "drive faster than anybody" (258), but she seems to have more reservations about her housekeeper, whom she has been known to spend "a half hour shut up with" (225) giving directions. Still, she reserves most of her criticism for Knightley's servants at Donwell Abbey, on whom she repeatedly casts aspersions (361, 284).

Essentially, since the servants are never afforded the opportunity to speak for themselves, one can only grant the testimony of their employers as to their general state-of-being so much credence, especially since most employers consider themselves benevolent authority

figures whether or not that is the case. However, it does not necessarily follow that the Woodhouses make unreasonable demands of their servants, as they appear to in the Davies adaptation. In fact, enough scraps of evidence are presented early on in the novel that it would be just as reasonable to assume the opposite. While Mr. Woodhouse distrusts servants attached to other households—especially strange coachmen driving him through inclement weather (120)—he remains fiercely proud of his own servants, including his cook Serle, who “understands boiling an egg better than anybody” (38) and the unnamed butler, to whom he entrusts the security at Hartfield, and Emma’s maid, whom he trusts to look after his daughter’s health and comfort (176). Above all, Mr. Woodhouse seems to trust his coachman James with his own safety and with Emma’s. Although the valetudinarian feared for Emma’s going to the Coles’ party alone, some of Mr. Woodhouse’s concerns were alleviated when he contemplated Emma making the journey in James’ carriage: “I have no fears for you with him. We have never been there above once since the new approach was made; but still I have no doubt that James will take you safely” (175).

Amusingly, if Mr. Woodhouse is not praising James’ reliability, he is speaking aloud fears of putting James to too much trouble. And if he has made too much of sparing James, Mr. Woodhouse is apt to transfer his concern to the horses themselves, as on one occasion when he observes, “not that James ever complains, but it is right to spare the horses when we can” (206).¹⁶ (While this concern for James and the horses seems to speak well of Mr. Woodhouse’s empathy with the lower classes, it is most likely a selfish sympathy, as Austen establishes from early on in the novel, especially through Mr. Woodhouse’s relationship with Mr. Perry, that he is prone to project his own feelings onto others and his concern for James is merely nothing more than a manifestation of his hermit-like tendencies.) Mr. Woodhouse’s seeming fixation upon James is the most amusing running joke of the novel, primarily because James lacks subjectivity and is never granted the opportunity to speak for himself. However, we learn in the very first chapter that Mr. Woodhouse recommended James’ daughter to the Westons for a servant position at their home, Randalls, when no one else thought of her. Emma informs her father that “James is so obliged to you!” a sentiment that she would not pass

on if it were not true, suggesting that she has condescended to speak to James on this subject. Mr. Woodhouse said it was lucky he thought of Hannah for he “would not have James slighted on any account; and I am sure she will make a very good servant; she is a civil, pretty spoken girl; I have a great opinion of her. When I see her, she always curtsies and asks me how I do, in a very pretty manner; and when you have had her here to do the needlework, I observe she always turns the lock of the door and never bangs it. I am sure she will be an excellent servant; and it will be a real comfort to poor Miss Taylor to have somebody around who she is used to see. Whenever James goes over to see his daughter, you know, she will be hearing of us...he will be able to tell her how we all are” (26). Based on these passages, it might be reasonable to assume that the Emma from Austen’s novel cares more for her servants and their families, and knows more of their lives, than Kate Beckinsale’s Emma does.

In recent years, scholars such as Raymond Williams have criticized Austen for not granting enough attention to the lower classes in her novels. In *The Country and the City* (1973), Williams examined Jane Austen’s depictions of English country life alongside the writings of populist journalist William Cobbett and found Austen’s writing lacking awareness of broader social issues or of true class distinctions. According to Williams “for all the intricacy of her social description...[a]ll her discrimination is, understandably, internal and exclusive. She is concerned with the conduct of people who, in the complications of improvement, are repeatedly trying to make themselves into a class. But where only one class is seen, no classes are seen” (113).

By foregrounding the servants in their adaptation of *Emma*, Lawrence and Davies seem to be implicitly agreeing with Williams that Austen was remiss in not granting greater attention to the servants. It is noteworthy that, while previous screenwriters and directors granted even more attention to characters such as Jane Fairfax and Robert Martin than the novel does, Davies and Lawrence are the first to grant such dramatic emphasis to the servant class.¹⁷ In fact, one might argue that the servants are not only featured players in the Lawrence-Davies version, but that they are granted the prime narrative perspective and serve as the lens through which the story is told.

This adaptation begins and ends with poultry thieves stealing from the wealthier residents of Highbury and being chased off by rifle-toting household servants. That violent action seems an odd way to begin an Austen adaptation, but the opening gun shots are meant to shake out of complacency an audience that might think they already know everything there is to know about Jane Austen and to surprise them with just how much they don't know. For critic Sally Palmer, this bookend image is just part of the way that screenwriter Andrew Davies and director Diarmuid Lawrence give shape to their adaptation's unique narrative orientation. Unlike Phillips and Heal, who find this adaptation's employment of the servants innovative, Palmer objects to the politically liberal slant that it gives to a story that she had always interpreted as socially conservative. Although her overall review of the production is perhaps too unforgiving, Palmer does make an important observation concerning the effect that the use of servant-narrators has on the tone of the production and, by extension, on the audience:

Having so many servants in evidence during the events of the film has two effects. First, it shows how many people's labor is required to support the Hartfield lifestyle, prompting an awareness of the disproportionate outlay of money and energy necessary so that Emma and her friends may follow their whims. Viewers are meant to become appalled at this excess, and decry the political system that makes such arrangements possible. And secondly, keeping an abundance of servants in view, always neat and polite and hardworking, has the effect of arousing sympathy for their plight. Audiences continually confronted by scenes of lower-class toil, respond less fully to the light airiness, the archness that characterize Emma and her relations with her peers. The Lawrence film, then, has less humor and gaiety than the American versions. Its political subtext gives it a darker feel than its counterparts (2).

One might argue that the films' emphasis on the servant class acts as the same kind of rebuke of Austen that Williams leveled when he accused her of class-blindness. The filmmakers seem to be implicitly asking the question: If we had to rewrite Austen to get the servants into the story, why did she leave them out in the first place? However, one might just as easily respond to such a query with a counter-question: Why do modern readers feel that Austen *needed* to include the servants in the first place? Why is that, necessarily, a flaw in her artistry? In response to Williams, and to a similar criticism voiced by

post-colonial critic Edward Said concerning Austen's reticence to challenge British imperialism, Paul A. Cantor writes that:

Few authors have suffered as much at the hands of contemporary critics as has Jane Austen. She was just not made for a world of deconstructionism, new historicism, and race/class/gender criticism. She is subtle where contemporary critics are heavy-handed; she uses a tuning-fork where they swing away with sledgehammers. Many critics simply charge her with being blind to the important economic, social, and political developments of her day....Said's essay is typical of much contemporary criticism—he is more concerned with what Austen did not write than what she did....I want to offer a defense of Jane Austen on two grounds: first, that she was in fact more acute in her understanding of social and political questions than contemporary critics give her credit for, perhaps more acute than they themselves; second, that the ways in which she differs from contemporary critics have something to do with the fact that she was after all a novelist and not a political theorist (127–128).

Whatever viewers may think of the filmmaker's technique in including innovative and provocative footage of the servants, the Lawrence-Davies telefims's overall sympathy for the less powerful citizens of Highbury is actually in keeping with the general social critique bent of previous British television adaptations. The key difference is that, while Judy Campbell and Vincent Tilsley grant significant dramatic importance to the trials of Jane Fairfax and Robert Martin, they do not push the narrative far enough into the realm of populism and deconstructionism to qualify their adaptations as commentary adaptations instead of transposition adaptations. The Lawrence-Davies version does. However, the Lawrence-Davies film is the natural descendant of the previous adaptations in its interest in portraying Jane Fairfax, Harriet Smith, and Robert Martin as positively as possible.

Unlike the Robert Martins from the previous adaptations, who tended to come off as either sweet buffoons or quietly deferential figures, the Robert Martin played by Alistair Petrie in the Davies-Lawrence version seethes with rage that his wife-to-be was stolen from him by this prissy female rival. He quietly glares at Emma repeatedly during the course of the film, and the audience is encouraged to glare with him. He is not presented as a pleasant character, but his righteous indignation is expected to be shared.

As in the Glenister-Constanduros version, the camera often cuts to Jane Fairfax and Harriet Smith during moments when Emma is talk-

ing or when her attention is distracted, encouraging audience interest in these women and offering viewers insight into their psyches that the self-absorbed Emma lacks. Given the attention that this adaptation centers on these supporting characters, and given that the actresses who play both characters are so adept, it is not surprising that this version boasts two of the most interesting onscreen incarnations of Jane and Harriet. Sue Parrill in particular has praised the performances of Olivia Williams as Jane and Samantha Morton as Harriet:

Samantha Morton delivers the best portrayal of Harriet Smith [on film thus far], largely because she is such a good actress...We see Harriet develop from a fearful worshipper of Emma, to confident companion, to assured recipient of Mr. Knightley's attentions. Her Harriet never appears stupid... only slightly dense. (125–126)

Although Parrill does not assert that Williams is the best screen Jane Fairfax, she does observe that, "The director frequently shows Williams' face in closeup, enabling the viewer to see her expressive eyes. Although she rarely smiles and has little dialogue, Williams conveys a wide range of feelings with her eyes" (127).¹⁸

Critics William Phillips and Louise Heal see the emphasis on Jane Fairfax as one of the chief arguments in favor of the Lawrence-Davies adaptation.

Lawrence and Davies have clearly decided that Jane is an interesting character who deserves to be strongly featured. The clues to the Jane/Frank mystery are mostly there, while the story does not bludgeon us with the Emma/Mr. Knightley romance as the McGrath version does....Lawrence /Davies's Jane is a tough character, and the viewer sees the trouble and pain she is forced to endure in her unfortunate situation. This is a memorable Jane Fairfax, not the shadow of a character....

A strong, outspoken character, she (almost) gives Mrs. Elton as good as she gets. Jane's comment on the "flesh trade" rings painfully true in a film version that chooses to focus on the hardships endured by the servants surrounding Austen's characters (4).

On the same subject, Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield write:

The Davies film places more interest on the problems of Jane for their own sake—perhaps even more than the novel can, restricted as it is (more or less) to Emma's viewpoint. Certainly the shot of Jane Fairfax walking across the fields weeping while being observed sympathetically by Robert Martin makes us interested in her problems and reminds us of his blighted romance. Both these characters have been hurt, inadvertently, by Emma,

and this telefilm is interested in their reactions in the way the McGrath movie is not ("Filming Highbury" 5).

With its interest in the servant classes of Highbury, and in characters such as Jane, Harriet, and Robert, this social critique adaptation seems to present a bleak picture of a world divided by stark class lines that cannot be blurred. And yet, with its presentation of Mr. Knightley as a form of egalitarian figure, the Lawrence-Davies version works to undercut the insurmountable class differences that it took such pains to represent. Throughout the film, Mark Strong's Mr. Knightley champions the rights of the poorer residents of Highbury, speaking kindly but seriously to the servants and arguing fiercely with Emma over her treatment of Harriet and Jane. The screenplay appears to encourage the audience to view him favorably for his populism, despite his somewhat dark persona.

By the end of the story, when it appears that Emma has embraced Knightley's more democratic (if not borderline socialistic) worldview and agreed to be his wife, much of his rage melts away and he seems to uncoil somewhat. He is still serious, but more at peace when he celebrates his union with Emma alongside the community at large at a climactic harvest supper, an invented scene that is one of this adaptation's most striking innovations.

Rather than crafting an ending to the adaptation that emphasizes the wedding between Emma and Mr. Knightley, or that underscores the romantic nature of the story, Davies wrote a scene in which Mr. Knightley invited all of his tenants to an egalitarian harvest festival supper at Donwell Abbey. This harvest scene, which was specifically conceived for the film as a means of compressing an ending segment that Davies felt was unnecessarily drawn out in the novel, has inspired a host of commentaries by literary critics eager to tackle its thematic significance to the adaptation.

For Sally Palmer:

The most symbolic event of the harvest supper, amid scenes of washing dishes and serving food, occurs when Emma crosses the room to introduce herself to Robert Martin, shake his hand, and invite him and Harriet to visit her. Although she is clearly acting as the lady of the manor, this scene, followed by a dance where both upper- and lower-class couples participate, emphasizes the letting-down of class barriers where those who work for a living are given equal standing with those for whom they work. It signals the final triumph of Mr. Knightley in changing Emma into a socialist. In the

penultimate scene, we see everyone, the great and the small, moving together to the traditional rhythms of the dance. This seems to be Lawrence's statement: that all depend on one another; that if mutual respect and amiability are shown, all can move in harmony to the traditional season rhythms of rural life (5).

Notably, Mrs. Elton is the only character who objects to the social leveling that is achieved during the harvest supper in the final scene. She, therefore, emerges as more snobbish than she should for reacting to the socialist scene in a manner perfectly in keeping with the Tory sentiments of her time.¹⁹ According to Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield:

The community around Highbury does not clinch the happy ending in the novel because Emma has that community to begin with. By the end of the novel, Emma has only Augusta Elton (lamenting the pitiful lack of white satin at the wedding) as a significant addition to her circle, and she loses Harriet Smith, "which was not to be regretted." Though Emma finally comes to appreciate Jane Fairfax, the lady departs Highbury, to return to the Campbells and prepare for marriage to Frank Churchill. Not so in the Davies film: the community does provide the joyous conclusion. Any mention of Frank and Jane's departure is omitted, and Harriet and Robert Martin are welcomed into the company of gentlefolk, with no sense of contact to be diminished. Though the last shot in the telefilm is of turkey thieves, reminding us that there is still trouble in paradise, the images before that generally reinforce a sense of expanded community as the clincher for the happy ending (2).

Commenting on the controversial passage from the end of the novel, concerning the "necessity" that Emma and Harriet's friendship "must sink," Morrison says:

This "necessity" will not be apparent to a modern reader. Yet Austen not only makes it clear that Emma and Harriet will not continue to move in the same circle but expects her readers to see the divergence of their paths as inevitable. We are not far from the Emma who announced to Harriet, "I could not have visited Mrs. Robert Martin of Abbey Mill farm" (E 53). Now, when Emma utters comments such as this one, she is to be faulted, but the fault lies not in Emma's class consciousness so much as in the smug complacency behind it, the low motive of influencing Harriet against the impulses of her own heart, and the insensitivity that does not check the open expression of such a view to Harriet, whose social standing is far from secure. The above elegiac passage, coming late in the novel and dressed in the narrator's voice, seems to express Emma's understanding of the truth it contains, but Austen very carefully does not have Emma say as much to Mr.

Knightley, nor does she make it a conscious reflection on Emma's part. It is a "truth" presented as tacitly recognized by all, including the heroine (6).

If this is, indeed, Austen's original intention, then the films diverge rather sharply from the source material in ending with Emma and Harriet still friends. What motivated the filmmakers to make such a striking change in the end of the story, and what are the implications of the alterations?

Perhaps the rigid class distinctions of Regency England would be too much for a general film audience in contemporary democratic English speaking societies to handle. Clearly, the filmmakers either did not feel the need to preserve this feature of the society they were depicting or simply didn't want to make the effort to leave viewers without much sympathy for characters who remained so firmly class conscious (Phillips and Heal 6).

In an interview for *The Making of "Jane Austen's 'Emma,'"* Andrew Davies offers his rationale for his crafting of the egalitarian finale. He cites as his inspiration for the harvest supper itself the scenes in Hardy's and Tolstoy's novels, the scenes of "bringing the harvest home and the haymakers and the good gentleman farmer," but his thoughts behind the symbolic meaning of the harvest in his screenplay have a slightly different bent.

Though England didn't have a revolution, I think it must have been quite a narrow thing. The Georgians depended quite a lot on the Knightleys of this world, though few were probably as enlightened as he was. These landowners weren't decadent aristocrats who lived millions of miles away from their tenants and just withdrew the profits. They were actually there managing their estates. It's like old-fashioned conservatism, really....

I think in a historical period like the one we're living through there's a nostalgia—an "angry" nostalgia even—for any time where you had some sense of fairness—where you might not have had much money but you could believe that you would be treated fairly (58).

While critics such as Phillips and Heal have found Davies' approach to crafting the finale intelligent and intriguing (and while I find it to be in keeping with the sensibilities of a commentary adaptation), Palmer voices objections to Davies entire project. Sounding something like Paul A. Cantor, Palmer writes:

I suggest that this film version seeks to congratulate 20th-century viewers on their own century's superior political and social environment by foregrounding the inequities and unrest Austen passes over in her own century. In an attempt to highlight the need for today's socialist Labour

government, the filmmakers have annexed Austen's socially conservative novel, but invented for it additional scenes and dialogue to make a democratic rhetorical point of their own. Indeed, viewers of this film, unfamiliar with Austen's novel, or the other film versions, might well leave the theater convinced that *Emma* is a social-problem novel like Gaskell's *Mary Barton* or *North and South*, written by an author bent on effecting social change....Numerous readers over the years have pointed out elements in the Austen novels that suggest more enlightened attitudes towards women than were common in the early eighteen-hundreds, and certainly Austen was not blind to aristocratic folly or the inequities of male primogeniture, either. But the Lawrence attempt to show *Emma* as a populist tract succeeds only in confusing viewers by presenting contradictory messages that obscure Austen's main thrust in the novel. *Emma's* plot underscores the need for proper conduct and noblesse oblige, not abolition of the ruling class or widespread social reform." (1-2)

Palmer's poor review of this adaptation seems to stem primarily from the fact that she disagrees philosophically with the principle of making a commentary adaptation of a novel instead of a transposition adaptation. Based on published interviews with the members of the production and on the way the film plays on screen, it seems clear that the intent was to make a film that consciously commented on the novel, and even used Austen's story to make observations about contemporary society in the process, instead of merely working to translate the text, unchanged, to the screen. As someone who appears to be against the principle of commentary adaptation, Palmer frames the argument against the aims of the Lawrence-Davies version well. However, while less seen than the American cinematic versions, this adaptation has emerged as a critical favorite of academics who, despite a leaning towards viewing *Clueless* as the best adaptation of *Emma* thus far, have a tendency to praise the Davies-Lawrence version at the expense of the McGrath version. Far from being a flaw, the experimental nature of this adaptation, and the liberties it takes with the source text, arguably work in its favor as both a fresh look at the novel and as a form of entertainment.