

'[H]andsome, clever, and rich': Andrew Davies' *Emma* (1996)

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Abstract

Jane Austen (1775–1817) is not only a paradigmatic example in adaptation studies but also one of the most complex cultural phenomena of our times. The countless adaptations in various media and a seemingly never-ending interest in everything Austen-related have led to a popular construction of both Austen and her work that is equally defined by the existing body of adaptations and subsequent new recreations. Although academics in the field are now exploring this and other related phenomena, scholarly attention is rarely bestowed on the role of the screenwriter in the process. This article explores the importance of such role by considering Andrew Davies, whose work on Austen and in other heritage adaptations is proof of how one screenwriter's vision has contributed to the contemporary image of Austen. In particular, I focus my attention on *Emma*/Emma, whom Jane Austen reportedly described as 'a heroine no one but myself will much like'. My article aims at discussing the importance of the screenwriter in modelling Emma's character to modern audiences. Especially known for BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), his work on ITV's *Emma* (1996) is just as meaningful and even more challenging, if less recognized. By analysing Davies' *Emma*/Emma I will argue how his interpretation influenced subsequent adaptations of the 1816 novel and heroine, thus reshaping them for a twenty-first-century audience.

Keywords

Andrew Davies

Jane Austen

adaptation

EMMA is one of Jane Austen's great novels. Many would argue it is her finest, but it posed many difficulties in adapting it for television.

(Birtwistle and Conklin 1996)

When writing *Emma* (1816), Jane Austen reportedly described its unlikeliness as a favourite among her readers. According to her first biography, published in 1869 (second extended edition in 1871) and more than 50 years after her death by her nephew James Austen-Leigh, the then-experienced novelist had some reservations as to the reception of her fourth published work:

She was very fond of Emma, but did not reckon on her being a general favourite; for, when commencing that work, she said, 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like'. (1871/2016: 241)

The quotation has now become so frequent, and often misapplied, that it has in some degree mangled the interpretation of Emma, both the character and the novel. Even so, and despite its second-hand nature, its accurateness seems to be confirmed by another very similar remark made by its author. In one of her own letters, on the occasion of the publication of *Emma*, Austen writes:

[...] whatever may be my wishes for its' success, I am very strongly haunted by the idea that those Readers who have preferred P&P. [*Pride and Prejudice*] it will appear inferior in wit, & to those who have preferred MP. [*Mansfield Park*] very inferior in good Sense. (Le Faye 2011: 319)

Although Austen's comment seems to echo her nephew's account, its context should not be overlooked. Austen was addressing the Librarian at Carlton House, James Stanier Clarke, who had informed her earlier that year that a dedication to the Prince Regent, the future George IV and a reported admirer of her novels, would be well received (Le Faye 2011: 308–09). It is by now impossible to ascertain whether Austen's unwillingness to praise her novel originates in her nervousness in the face of an aristocratic reader such as the Prince Regent, or whether it reveals a more begrudging politeness in the face of a dedication that was nearly imposed upon her. In fact, in almost all surviving letters addressed to the Prince Regent's librarian, Austen claims her modesty as an authoress, an attitude that seems to originate in Clarke's tendency to suggest themes or characters for her future works. And even if Austen's dislike of the future George IV is generally accepted (Sheehan 2006), the prospect of the dedication seems, at the very least, to have caused her a considerable amount of anxiety (Le Faye 2011: 318). Either way, such conditions were bound to make any consideration of the novel's quality modest. Austen's reserve also speaks to *Emma's* uniqueness among the other novels in her moderately short body of work. In general terms, it emerges as a more mature novel when compared to her previously published works, particularly *Sense and Sensibility* (Austen 1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen 1813). A general tendency among critics is to divide Austen's novels into two groups: *Emma*, together with *Persuasion* (Austen 1818) and *Mansfield Park* (Austen 1814), belonging to a darker set, in opposition to her earlier though later revised works, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Northanger Abbey* (Austen 1818). Others, like the influential Marilyn Butler, go so far as to acknowledge it as 'the greatest novel of the period' (1975: 250). Such distinctiveness has, perhaps unsurprisingly, been transferred to screen adaptations of *Emma*, where the reputation of its heroine as a less empathetic character seems to have haunted her

adaptors, determined to prove her a true Austen heroine in the model of Elizabeth Bennett or the Dashwood sisters.

ITV's 1996 *Emma* is a particularly valuable example of how the process of adapting *Emma* is revealing of Austen's composite reconstruction. Austen's afterlife goes beyond the materiality of her reduced work and the scarce (and often biased) surviving biographical detail: it includes the many adaptations of both her work and her life, having created an apparently fixed image of Austen as a source of unproblematic, romantic stories taking place in a idealized past. ITV's *Emma* shows us how each adaptation tries to find its place in this very particular construct. One of the lesser known of *Emma*'s screen versions – it is somewhat forgotten between the other two recent adaptations of the novel, Miramax's 1996 film and BBC's 2009 series – the production of ITV's television film stands as a significant moment in the evolution of how this novel and this heroine's singularity is successfully adapted on-screen. Following fast on BBC's major success, *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), this ITV production aimed at becoming the new costume drama hit by enrolling several members of the latter crew, including acclaimed screenwriter Andrew Davies, as well as creating a winning cast list by combining a number of experienced actors, such as Bernard Hepton, with rising stars Mark Strong and Kate Beckinsale. This article will therefore trace the backstory of adapting *Emma* on-screen by re-acknowledging the importance of this particular production, allowing for a better understanding of how this very unique Austen heroine has been adapted for new audiences. In a time when Austen has been appropriated by popular culture in ways perhaps unrivalled by any other writer other than Shakespeare, this distinctiveness is all the more significant: *Emma*'s apparent relative shortcomings make its contemporary adaptations even more challenging and their subsequent analysis more meaningful. As had been the case with *Pride and Prejudice*, the way in which Davies' script re-

interpreted Austen's work would both update the novel and the heroine to a 90s' audience and influence subsequent re-creations of *Emma*.

From Austen, 1775–1817, to Austen 2.0

Before focusing on Davies's *Emma*, it is worth recognizing that an analysis of any Austen adaptation today means taking into consideration not only the adapted work and the adaptation itself – including a number of issues connected to the process of adapting – but also Austen herself as a popular literary commodity. Invoking Jane Austen's name today summons an array of different but interconnected concepts, interwoven by threads of both traditional literary criticism and postmodern popular culture. From the first half of the twentieth century, when her place in the literary canon was not a given fact, to her twenty-first-century status as a popular cultural icon, much has happened to shape Jane Austen's multiple afterlives. Over the last 100 years Austen has been re-interpreted, both critically and creatively, with an unprecedented degree of simultaneity: a process that has been crucially shaped by adaptations of her work. On the one hand, her body of work has now been granted centre-stage in the history of the novel and in the literary canon. On the other hand, her widespread popularity in contemporaneity, materializing in all sorts of objects from online videogames and spin-off novels to teacups and romantic self-help guides, turns her into a distinctive case in literary studies in general and in adaptation circles in particular. This double, and sometimes paradoxical, condition has led John Wiltshire in *Recreating Jane Austen* to contrast Jane Austen, the author of the texts, to “Jane Austen”, a ‘cultural image’ and ‘the object of idealizing and romantic fantasy’ (2004: 10). Claire Harmon also analyses this particular evolution in *Jane's Fame*, ‘Jane AustenTM’, noting that Austen is ‘A genuinely popular author as well as a great one, she

has come to exist, more obviously than any other English writer, in several mutually exclusive spheres at once' (2009: 243). The fact remains that this re-interpreted Jane Austen could not, in several aspects, be more at odds with the 'real' author and her works, the most obvious paradox being her appropriation by the romance industry when both her works and surviving biographical data openly oppose, and often criticize, such commodification.

The complexity of Austen's authorial identity, as recognized by Wiltshire's 'Jane Austen' and Harmon's 'Jane AustenTM', is thus cultivated by a potent combination of the adaptations based on Austen's literary production and her (scarce) biographical facts. Together, these two apparently different spheres – one dealing with the author's life and the other with her works – have, in Austen's case, merged into what seems to be one unavoidable and continually growing image of Austen on-screen. The interconnectedness of this process will only increase, moreover. As each new adaptation is bound to take its place among and in relation to previous ones, the text is both defined by an existing body of works and defines in its own terms; adaptation thus both influences new adaptations and is, in turn, influenced. In more concrete terms, each new successful adaptation not only sets audience expectations but also holds creative influence, acknowledged or not, over any subsequent team of adaptors. Among the myriad of Austen adaptations, the many successful and profitable TV adaptations, including ITV's 1996 *Emma*, have certainly contributed to the re-interpretation of Jane Austen in contemporaneity.

So, what about *Emma*?

As briefly discussed above, *Emma*'s position among Austen's relatively modest literary production makes it a particularly enticing object of study in terms of adaptation studies. Throughout this article I wish to point out some of the aspects that have

contributed to *Emma*/Emma's singularity and the importance it holds for both adaptations of the novel and our interpretation of them. The first paragraphs of the novel are particularly useful in this regard, serving to contextualize some of the more general but nevertheless crucial characteristics of the novel and its heroine. The first of these small but significant peculiarities is the fact that Emma is the only heroine of Austen's main body of work whose name is also the novel's title, thus signalling from the start her individual importance. Another even more significant element that turns this heroine into an extraordinary character is that, unlike Elizabeth or other Austen heroines, Emma does not apparently need to be saved from adverse external conditions; in other words, she does not need a Prince Charming and her more secure position allows her a financial liberty other Austen heroines are deprived of. That this liberty has, in fact, not appealed to contemporary audiences as much as the more acute financial pressures placed on the Bennet sisters, for instance, is thought provoking.

Finally, and almost in contradiction to the more favourable conditions discussed in the previous paragraph, Emma is also the most constrained of Austen's heroines in terms of spatial (and arguably social) liberty, her world being limited to her father's estate, Hartfield, and Highbury's society, 'the large and populous village *almost* amounting to a town' (Austen 1816/1933: 7, emphasis added). This detail, exposed to the attentive reader's consideration in the first paragraph, should throw a different light onto the heroine's apparently unempathetic nature. Austen's characteristically subtle irony is meant to put the reader on their guard in terms of what to expect:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, *seemed* to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her. (1816/1933: 5, emphasis added)

A careful reading of this passage offers a potential reason for the novel's difficulty: despite the apparent advantages in comparison to other Austen heroines, Emma's existence is monotonous and her perspectives in terms of future improvement rather narrow. In truth, her 'blessings' are limited to her wealth, as her intelligence and lively character are restrained by an oppressive (if kind) father in a very small rural society. In this regard, the novel's first paragraph echoes Austen's personal remarks on its publication, carrying more meaning than a first, candid reading otherwise reveals. Such nuances have sometimes been ignored by adaptors, as Laurie Kaplan particularly argues when analysing the first episode of BBC's 2009 *Emma*:

Infantilized, Emma displays annoying mannerisms that serve only to emphasize the adult Emma's misplaced sense of superiority. [...] Emma is so very unlikable as a young person that it is no wonder the ratings for the series fell dramatically – by more than one million viewers – after the first episode. (2009: 6)

Kaplan also criticizes the series' initial sequence for creating 'an extended and irrelevant back story' (2009: 3) that 'obscure[s] the central consciousness of the novel' and, as side effect, 'turn the viewer against Emma' (2009: 4).¹ However, as Kaplan's analysis also proves, adapting *Emma* is a complex process, her singularity weighing down on adaptors.

Returning to producer Sue Birtwistle and script editor Susie Conklin's words in the opening of this article, *Emma* is not exactly straightforward TV material. So how does the 1996 television adaptation address this issue on-screen, without overly simplifying Emma, like other adaptations such as the 2009 series would (arguably) later do? In fact, how does one adapt *Emma*? How is this character 'whom no one will much like' recreated on-

screen so as to gain the audience's favour? And, in Austen's own words, how can she compete with such 'delightful a creature' as Lizzie Bennet (Le Faye 2011: 210), especially given the success of BBC's 1995 adaptation, which it immediately succeeded and which was created by the same team although for a different network?

(Re)Introducing *Emma* to a new audience: ITV's 1996 adaptation

The deeply rooted idea that Emma is unlike other Austen heroines and the need to live up to the expectations created by BBC's immensely successful 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* thus turned ITV's project of adapting *Emma* into a challenge, as acknowledged by its adaptors:

Unlike most of Austen's other heroines, Emma doesn't need to marry for financial security which, as she points out to Harriet one day, means she can see no reason for marrying at all. But these aren't the only qualities which set her apart. More disturbingly, particularly for a modern audience, she's a social snob who wants everything done in her own terms, and she interferes (often with disastrous results) in other people's lives. Without softening Jane Austen's intentions for television, there was a need to dramatize her in such a way as to prevent the audience from switching off. (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 8)

As becomes evident, the adaptors' first and foremost concern was with the peculiarities of Emma as a heroine, that 'which set her apart'. Bearing in mind that their first objective was to keep Austen-familiar viewers from 'switching off' (as the 2009 would later adaptation fail to do), this adaptation works its transformation of the heroine through a carefully constructed screenplay, also written by the prominent screenwriter

and author of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* series, Andrew Davies. Often neglected or, at least, hidden behind any other individual or collective authorship, the screenwriter's contribution to a final on-screen object is often omitted, even among scholars of a discipline as self-questioning as adaptation studies. As Jack Boozer argues, '[...] the study of literature-to-film adaptation has generally overlooked the actual process through which a source text is transformed into a motion picture. This process includes in particular the central role of the screenplay' (2008: 1). Despite the fact that Davies' reputation, both then and now, set him apart as a particularly visible screenwriter,² scarce attention has been paid to the analysis of his reshaping of *Emma/Emma* through the screenplay. The fact is even more surprising given the availability and even unusual prominence of the screenplay in the film's tie-in publication, *The Making of Emma* (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996), which includes the complete shooting script and an 8-page-long first chapter (in an 80-page-long account) entitled 'The script'. In fact, most of the adaptation scholarship based on Davies focuses on his screenplay for the acclaimed BBC's 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, with a special emphasis on the impact of his re-interpretation of Mr Darcy's character. Produced immediately after this successful and climactic adaptation, ITV's 1996 *Emma* is rarely the object of study, in terms of both Austen adaptations and the work of Davies. The release of the Miramax feature film in the same year, *Emma* (McGrath, 1996), further contributed to eclipsing this particular adaptation, even when the choice of adapting this particular novel in the aftermath of the BBC's 1996 series should in itself arouse interest.

In the case of ITV's 1996 *Emma*, the strategies used by Davies are particularly thought provoking for their reshaping of Emma as a character for modern audiences and are evident in effect even in the initial sequence. Indeed, the importance of such a sequence is parallel to that of the novel's first pages: the first images establish both our idea of the character and the feeling of the film as a whole. After a brief scene of poultry

theft, which starts before the title comes on-screen and in which Davies again defies the traditional opening of television costume drama, the film begins with a scene of Emma (Kate Beckinsale) and her father, Mr Woodhouse (Bernard Hepton), in their carriage as they drive Miss Taylor to her wedding to Mr Weston. The first impression of this Emma is that of a sweet young girl, loving to her friends and particularly to her valetudinarian father. In the short carriage scene, the script makes this obvious in two specific references, ‘Emma, already in, leans towards him to give him a hand...’ and ‘Emma arranges the rug over Mr Woodhouse’s knees’ (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 78).³ Although none of the indications made it through on-screen, her care and patience are evident enough, even in such a brief sequence. When alone at night with her father, Emma appears rather calm and reserved, content with her situation, which, although privileged, is somewhat sad and lonely when considering her age: an idea particularly emphasized by the gloomy and grim atmosphere of the poorly lit set used for this first scene of Hartfield at night. The snobbishness for which Emma is perhaps best known is thus absent from our first impression of the character.

The various short scenes that depict Emma and her father’s attendance of Miss Taylor’s wedding and their return home also seem far from Austen’s very blunt description of her as ‘having too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself’ (Austen 1816/1933: 1). Curiously enough, the final product goes beyond Davies’ smoothing of Emma’s character, as this particular part of the script never makes it into the final cut:

[Mr. Woodhouse, Emma and Miss Taylor are in the carriage, on the way to the latter’s wedding] *Respectful villagers on the road are raising their hats. Emma acknowledges them graciously too, rather like royalty... When they’ve passed, the*

villagers [as you might] look at each other, as though to say 'All right for them'.

(Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 79, original emphasis)

Although its omission may well be a matter of screen economy, it is interesting to find that the only hint of Emma's pride in the first scene of Davies' screenplay is cut, favouring instead a representation of her father, who promptly greets a group of farm workers as the carriage drives past them. It is also worth noting that the '*[r]espectful villagers*' have been replaced by farm workers, as this scene merges with the one described next as '*Now they're going past a couple of ramshackle cottages of extraordinary squalor. A couple of ragged barefoot children have come out to gawp at them*' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 79, original emphasis). The representation of the lower ranks of society is a characteristic of Davies who acknowledged he 'wanted to give some weight to the social context of the story' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 13). The same strategy is used in the next scene as Mr Knightley (Mark Strong) arrives at Hartfield, at night, his first line directed at a servant to ask about him and his family. Because Emma's snobbish attitude towards the farm workers was never shown, the contrast with Mr Knightley's superior attitude is not offered to the viewers' contemplation. However, he does stand out as a noble yet down-to-earth character from this very short scene. As a contrast to the Hartfield residents, Mr Knightley is drawn from the start as '*vigorous, animated, decisive*' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 80, original emphasis). As for Emma, even when she proclaims her abilities in matchmaking she does so in a rather timid and naïve way, thus reinforcing her positive image during the entire initial sequence.

As the narrative goes on, and Emma's meddling character becomes increasingly integral to the development of the plot, the quality referred to by Austen as 'a disposition to think a little too well of herself' (Austen 1816/1933: 1) is shown but simultaneously lessened. Even if the viewer is frequently denied the glimpse into the character's

interiority Austen allows her reader in several moments of non-action during the novel. And although Emma's moments of reflection and personal growth are not directly portrayed, there are several scenes in which these are hinted at, thus favouring the audience's opinion of the character. For instance, after the Box Hill picnic, she is seen regretting the offence to Mrs Bates, which, in this adaptation, is clearly meant as more of an ill-timed joke rather than an intentional offence, the screenplay indicating '*She says it very merrily*' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 138, original emphasis). Even earlier, when discovering Mr Martin's disappointment at Harriet's refusal, Emma looks truthful when expressing her sorrow. Her snobbish attitude is subtly represented and, in contrast, Davies chooses to emphasize Emma's 'artistic sensibility' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 9). Davies thus softens Emma's possibly annoying attitudes by making them the result of an oversensitive personality who (perhaps ironically), much like a novelist, imagines and controls other characters' narratives. In this way, one could surmise that Emma might exist more sympathetically for Davies because of their shared 'artistic' qualities. As an author and screenwriter, Davies has frequently remarked on his own artistic sensibility and the importance of following his own vision.⁴ While acknowledging the adapting process as a collaborative effort, he is confident, much like Emma, in his creative capacity, as Sarah Cardwell explains:

Davies has an unshakeable confidence in his vocation as a writer, and holds strong views on the process and purpose of writing. He argues that 'being a writer is all about trusting your own feelings and your own perceptions, rather than other people's'. While this may sound solipsistic, Davies is keen to emphasize his commitment to the audience's enjoyment, stimulation and development. (2005: 194)

As well as sharing a belief in their own powers of narrative creativity, a further comparison can be made in the way they can both be thought of as meddling matchmakers: Davies is known for inserting romantic trysts or erotic tension inexistent in the adapted sources and Emma cannot help imagining romance where there is none. While the former is clearly more successful in his matchmaking endeavours the result of this author identification with Emma arguably contributes to her being more well received by audiences.

One of the strategies used to make this artistic sensibility clear is by filming Emma's reveries as a way of bringing her closer to audiences according to Davies; this 'makes her much more likeable, because we all day-dream' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 9). This also effectively foregrounds her altruistic side, since she seems to think of everyone's happiness except her own. Their importance is also undeniable since these fantasies amount to a total of five in a 107-minute film.⁵ This strategy is not entirely of Davies' creation as it closely follows the novel itself: Austen's narrative sometimes resorts to a similar technique in order to reveal Emma's character and interiority to the reader. In one of the rare studies on *Emma* to include this adaptation, J. P. C. Brown discusses one particular scene where Emma is looking out of the window in Ford's shop. According to Brown, adaptors have repeatedly ignored the scene's apparently cinematic quality, choosing not to render it on-screen, effectively obscuring one of Emma's most important traits, her active conscience (2015: 217). Despite not including this scene, ITV's 1996 adaptation of *Emma* chooses to screen both Emma's fantasies and her nightmares as a way of revealing her character. The use of such reveries, while arguably making her a more likeable character, has perhaps an unintended effect. It reinforces the 'romantic' aspect of the adaptation, visually summoning the complex implications the word holds in relation to Austen's contemporaneity. This is particularly true for the last of such filmed fantasies. Accordingly, Mr Knightley's character is developed to fit the postmodern ideal

of the Austen hero as being both strong and sensitive, an ambivalent conception defined by Martine Voiret:

They must be stoic, independent, self-possessed [...]. In the wake of the feminist revolution, we now want men to be egalitarian, sensitive, nurturing, and expressive. We, in other words, expect men to possess two sets of somewhat irreconcilable qualities. [...] Jane Austen's movie adaptations reflect this ambivalence. They translate contemporary desires for a type of masculinity that happily embodies these conflicting features. (2003: 238)

Accordingly, the mature Mark Strong stresses in an interview the emotional aspect of his character, traditionally seen as one of Austen's more sensible heroes: 'What I found underneath, however, was a man desperately struggling with his emotions' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 21). In this way, the building-up of the male protagonist is done by emphasizing his emotional side, without sacrificing his manly attributes.

Although more of a countryside gentleman, Mr Knightley is thus remarkably similar to Colin Firth's Mr Darcy in the 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Davies has since explained in an interview how important the coexistence of emotional and physical characterization had been when it came to rewriting Austen's most famous male hero:

If we saw him [Darcy] suffering or just doing something very physical, the audience would treat him more like a real person, and not just have Elizabeth's view, where she only sees him when he's in a bad mood all dressed up in evening dress. (Cartmell and Whelehan 2007: 244)

Accordingly, as the 107-minute film continues, Knightley stands out as the noblest, most desirable man in the neighbourhood, especially when compared to the newly arrived and deceiving Mr Frank Churchill (Raymond Coulthard). Mr Weston's son and the object of Emma's initial attention, Churchill is a complex character in this film and his ambiguous behaviour, emphasized by Coulthard's frequent expression of pain when concealing his attachment to Jane Fairfax, can be interpreted by the attentive viewer as the necessary consequence for a man who, not unlike our heroine, is not in complete control of his destiny.⁶ Coulthard's performance, however, jars with what we see of Davies' intention from the screenplay: 'Frank Churchill is both disturbed and dangerous in my view. [...] I think he's a clever, dangerous misogynistic charmer' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 11). Ultimately, though, it is Davies' less sympathetically drawn Churchill who appears in our final impression of the character in the film; in the final sequence Churchill continues to tease Jane Fairfax while talking to Emma, confirming his unreformed flirtatious nature. Ultimately, his screen representation serves the primary purpose of enhancing Mr Knightley's exceptionality, proving him as the ideal romantic partner for Emma.

The final sequence, the harvest supper, is also another manifestation of the screenwriter's intervention in the novel's romantic politics. This scene is intended, according to Davies, to give 'a sense of [...] wholeness in the community' (Birtwistle and Conklin 1996: 58), as well as to offer a balanced ending to this adaptation of *Emma*. As an alternative to the traditional final wedding scene of Austen adaptations, the harvest supper (which ends with a dance where the three soon-to-be-wed couples take centre-stage) also responds to the audience's expectations of a romantic climax. As Brown puts it, 'It has an air of wish-fulfilment – for us as much as for Emma' (2015: 229). This could in fact be the reason why the scripted conversation between Emma and Jane Fairfax, in which they apologise for each other's behaviour, is cut from the final product. The only remnant of this conciliatory moment is the final conversation between Emma and Frank

Churchill. But this conversation is, instead, one that ultimately serves to underline the truthfulness of Emma and Knightley's future life by hinting at its contrast in Frank and Jane's.

***Emma*: Looking to the future**

Returning to my initial question of how the 1996 ITV adaptation addresses Emma's singularity on-screen and how it influences subsequent adaptations, I am left not with an unequivocal answer but with a new hypothesis. It is not so much that Emma is un-filmable, but that she may not fit as well into the contemporaneous Austen model where a worthy female character is rewarded with a fairytale-like ending and its attendant Prince Charming.⁷ Therefore, while *Emma*/Emma appears to offer a greater resistance to an over-explored formula in Austen adaptations, a direct consequence of this is that adaptations tend to distance themselves from Emma's peculiarities as a heroine. The fact that this particular heroine is, on the surface, less empathetically presented – and as such also non-conforming to not only the televised/cinematic Austenian model but to wider sociocultural norms of femininity – has haunted adaptors even before they take on the project.

From another viewpoint, even if no remarkable model for Emma seems to stand out (unlike the 1995 Elizabeth Bennet or Elinor Dashwood), each adaptation contributes to a contemporary vision of this complex character. In this dialogical creative process Andrew Davies' influence is clear: his choices are pivotal in reshaping Emma as a character the audience can identify with. Unlike Austen, Davies' screenplay avoids the potentially alienating strategy of confronting the audience with a heroine apparently so unlike any other Austen heroine. Opposed to the reader of the novel, confronted with an apparently unsuitable heroine whose limitations (personal and socially imposed) he or she is

challenged to understand, the viewer is presented from the start with an empathetic heroine whose failings are meant to be framed, and ultimately forgiven.

Davies' conscious interpretation of Emma implies, therefore, a reworking of a snobbish and proud character into an empathetic if flawed heroine whose personal improvement the viewer is meant to appraise. Perhaps, such a complex character, with a long psychological and emotional growth throughout the narrative, would be difficult to portray in an already particularly fast-paced film. Screen economy may on several occasions have imposed a greater softening of the character, just as Emma's on-screen likeability may have to the series' executive producers, but in its essence Davies' screenplay works to build a multi-layered heroine whose flaws are meant to be displayed and taken as part of a believable heroine. As a contrast, one might look into McGrath's film, which premiered the same year. Although also attempting to round Emma's harsher edges for its audience, this screen adaptation of *Emma* adopts a different strategy. Probably the most well-known film adaptation of *Emma*, McGrath's adaptation for Miramax and Matchmaker Films has left an enduring, if not necessarily successful, image of Emma as a modern, feminine, intelligent and fashionable girl. Building on Gwyneth Paltrow's rising status as a star at the time, the film creates a feeling of 'youthful country freshness and city-chick sophistication'⁸; a significant divergence from the literary character but an effective compensation for the supposed less-likeable aspects of the heroine. In the end, both strategies may have survived in twenty-first-century adaptations of *Emma*/Emma: BBC's 2009 *Emma* retains the idea of a young and naïve girl while making her at the same time the fashionable centripetal force of a small rural society.

In the end, Andrew Davies' screenplay is a balanced adaptation of Austen's work, as is its subsequent rendering on-screen. Davies has been highly influential in shaping and, indeed, perhaps initiating the romantic view of both Austen and her characters that has persisted from the 1990s onwards. The famous wet-shirt scene from the BBC's 1995

adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, did more than originate a Darcymania fandom. It is the symbol of a postmodern retake on a 'classical' author, revealing with extreme clarity our contemporary anxieties and wishes but also signalling the importance of the screenwriter's role in shaping the way a text is to be reappropriated by a new audience.⁹ In the case of ITV's 1996 *Emma*, although there is no such iconic scene, the influence of Davies' screenplay in the re-interpretation of *Emma* is undeniable, particularly in his choice to write the heroine sympathetically as a naïve, inexperienced young girl rather than a calculated gossip. In order to better comprehend the ways in which Austen is re-interpreted it is thus crucial to reanalyse neglected television adaptations such as *ITV's Emma*, paying special attention to the screenplay, which, in Jamie Sherry's words, stands as 'an interstitial text – a liminal entity that falls between two modes of storytelling' (2016: 20). In a time when the boundaries between popular culture and the literary canon seem to overlap and blur, looking at 'liminal' elements may just be the most successful way to think about adaptation.

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Notes

¹ See Laurie Kaplan's (2009) analysis of BBC's 2009 *Emma*, quoted above, for further discussion of an over-simplified Emma.

² See Simone Murray on "'Star' literary adaptors' (2012: 147–51).

³ All references to the screenplay are from the published version in Birtwistle and Conklin (1996).

⁴ In a letter dated 10 July 1991 to David Snodin, Davies strongly defends his author persona, rebutting his correspondent for not realizing that artists need to be treated with care and sensitivity, as he explains: 'writers are fragile creatures'. For further reference, the Papers of Andrew Davies (GB3071 D/061) including correspondence can be accessed through the Centre for Adaptations at De Montfort University's Archive and Special Collections based in the Kimberlin Library (UK). Document accessed 23 November 2016.

⁵ These reveries are: Mr Elton and Harriet's wedding, Emma and Frank Churchill's imaginary meeting, the storm off Weymouth, Mr Knightley and Jane Fairfax' wedding, Frank Churchill and Harriet galloping away.

⁶ Several scenes hint at this possibility as, for example, when Frank Churchill and Emma comment during dinner on how the pianoforte mysteriously given to Jane Fairfax must be an offer of love. In another scene, when preparing to leave Hartfield because of his aunt, Frank Churchill seems disturbed with his own lie and almost confesses to Emma before being interrupted. This strongly differs from Ewan's McGregor's more effusive and openly untrustworthy Frank Churchill in the Miramax film.

⁷ See, for example, Deborah Cartmell's analysis of the screen openings of several adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*:

[...] the preoccupation of most of these screen *Pride and Prejudices* is essentially with gender and a reiteration of what is often regarded as central to the novel's popularity: the 'timeless' desire to achieve happiness through a marriage of equal minds. (2010: 58)

⁸ *Entertainment Weekly's* original 1996 review of *Emma* (<http://www.ew.com/article/1996/08/09/emma>).

⁹ In Davies' own words:

[on the famous wet-shirt scene] But I think the kind of serious lesson from all this is that when it is in a visual medium it's those visual things that stick in the mind most, just as in the book you remember the dialogue and the descriptions and the interior feelings and so on as conveyed in words. (Cartmell and Whelehan 2007: 246).