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RENEGOTIATING LITERARY CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY FILM ADAPTATIONS OF JANE AUSTEN'S *MANSFIELD PARK* AND *EMMA*

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I will be examining two contemporary film adaptations of Jane Austen's novels. The films in question are Amy Heckerling's 1995 mainstream youth film *Clueless*, an adaptation of *Emma* (1816), and Whit Stillman's 1990 art-house film *Metropolitan*, an adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1814). Each film's contemporary approach to Austen's work significantly alters the narratives of their respective source texts. Hence, it is difficult for us to associate them directly with the world Austen presents to us in her novels. However, as I will argue, the manner in which these films remove Austen from her context illuminates her critique of literary culture. Austen's work is preoccupied with the status and reception of the literature of her era and her narratives critique our own responses to this literature. By bringing this critique into the modern era, *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* formulate a dialogue with their source texts. This dialogue highlights the relevance of this critique within our contemporary context. Furthermore, it allows *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* the opportunity to assess the way in which we read Austen's work within a contemporary modality. By exploring the dialogue which occurs between the Austen's novels and these films, I will address the broader claim that the process of adaptation is not linear. Rather, it is a dialogic process which promotes a constant interchange between the adapted text and the film adaptation.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before any other degree or examination in any other university.

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Adam Levin

15th day of February 2012

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I. INTRODUCTION

Literary culture is a central concern in the work of the early nineteenth-century novelist Jane Austen. During her lifetime, she witnessed the 'rise of the novel' as a popular literary form, and defended it against detractors who deemed it an inferior mode of literary engagement. Her novels draw our attention to both the novel's validity as an art form and its ability to instruct us in proper social or moral conduct.

Austen's novels consistently emphasise the subject of the reader's engagement with literary texts. When Austen's characters read and discuss literature, their dialogue is undercut by the narrator's discourse which subtly critiques their attitudes towards novels. This narrator's tone is a distinctly ironic one which emphasises the characters' values and the way these values either enrich or, most often, distort their readings of literary works. In doing so this narrator's discourse urges us to reconcile our own attitudes as readers with those of the characters, encouraging us to learn from their readerly[1] triumphs and failures. In many of her novels, Austen's voice appears to impinge on the narrative in the form of authorial interjections which directly critique our literary preferences and prejudices. In many instances Austen also self-consciously foregrounds her own writing process, providing us with insight into her efforts at shaping her narratives in ways which fulfill our desires as readers.

In this dissertation my focus will be on how Austen's critique of literary culture is represented in recent filmic adaptations of her novels. On a superficial level, the filmic medium does not appear ideally suited to articulating this critique. Films, of

[1] It is necessary to establish my use of the term "readerly" is not connected to Roland Barthes's definition of "readerly" and "writerly" texts. Barthes defines "readerly" texts as classical texts which are singular in their meaning, implying that the reader merely receives information from the text as opposed to actively engaging with it. Such texts are seen as pleasurable but disposable works of literature. In contrast "writerly" texts are those which require an active engagement from the reader who becomes involved in the construction of the text's meaning. In doing so the reader takes on the "writerly" role as he/she becomes involved in the process of 'writing' the text. ("Roland Barthes: Understanding The Text" arts.uwaterloo.ca). The term "readerly", throughout this dissertation, will be used in reference to the practice of reading a text.

course, rely on images to develop their narrative. This means that when novels are adapted into films, certain elements of the prose need to be rejected and substituted with visual imagery. The characters' dialogue in the novel, for example, has to be cut down in certain scenes so the film's visual narrative can remain at the forefront. Because film, as opposed to the novel form, has a limited time period in which to produce its narrative, certain scenes might have to be removed in the filming process. Most importantly, it is difficult for a film to capture the stylistic attributes of an author's words visually. The screenwriter and director may be able to accurately recreate such details as the period in which the novel is set. However, they are not always able to emulate the author's descriptive prose and the particular tone which this author brings to the narrative. Therefore, the screenwriter and director draw mainly on the novel's plot details as a blueprint from which to re-interpret and restructure its narrative to meet the demands of the filmic form.

In relation to Austen's work, the process of film adaptation is particularly problematic because it means dispensing the ironic, critical narrator, as well as Austen's authorial presence within the novels. On one hand, the novels' plots lose their ironic subtext. On another, the literary commentary which underlies these plots is lost. Without these crucial elements, it seems impossible that a film adaptation could even attempt to translate Austen's observations on literary culture. The argument I will make in this dissertation, however, will suggest that, despite its limitations in emulating the novel form, the filmic medium is, in fact, able to translate and even enhance Austen's critique of literary culture. I will argue that because the contemporary nature of film brings Austen's work into contact with our modern period, it brings new relevance to this critique. It encourages us not only to engage with Austen's critique but also to reassess the way we read her work within our contemporary context.

The two filmic case studies which I will use to assess how this critique is created on screen are ones which, quite literally, bring Austen's world into the present. The films in question are writer/ director Amy Heckerling's 1995 mainstream youth film

Clueless, an adaptation of *Emma* (1816), and Whit Stillman's 1990 independent film *Metropolitan*, an adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1814). Both these films transport Austen's narratives from nineteenth-century England to twentieth-century America and, in doing so, make her characters adopt the language and values of our modern times. It appears difficult to reconcile Austen's words with the new worlds that each of these films creates for her texts.

Of the two films, *Clueless* is the one which seems to be most at odds with Austen's world. Though the film is faithful to the plot of *Emma*, Austen's values appear to be lost in the youth mass-media obsessed universe which the film presents to us. *Clueless*'s target audience is teenage girls who, as David Monaghan notes, are probably unaware of the existence of *Emma* or, in fact, Austen (215). The film plays with this audience's love for fashion, television, film and music as it uses its Beverley Hills high-school setting to create a hyperbolic image of the social universe of upper-class America in the nineties. The film also completely dismantles Austen's eloquent language, replacing it with the popular speech of a variety of nineties youth subcultures. Indeed Austen's canonical status seems to place her entirely at odds with the values and sensibilities of the modern teenage viewer of *Clueless*.

In contrast to *Clueless*, *Metropolitan* appears better positioned to preserve Austen's canonical status. The film is primarily aimed at smaller art-house audiences who possess knowledge of a wide range of academic discourses. One of these discourses is, of course, literary discourse. In this case *Metropolitan* places particular emphasis on *Mansfield Park*, as well as Austen's other works. Unlike *Clueless*, a viewer cannot fully engage with this film unless they have read *Mansfield Park* or, at least, have some knowledge of Austen's value as a canonical figure. Discussions about Austen's work occur in numerous instances in *Metropolitan*. Viewers have to be familiar with the novel in order to understand the film's characters and their motivations. This emphasis on literary commentary implies that it may be easier to detect Austen's critique of literary culture in *Metropolitan* than it is in *Clueless*. However, the plot of

Metropolitan which centres on the exploits of a group of New York college students during their debutante season, departs from its source material to such an extent that, as Laura Carroll states, "there is some doubt about whether *Metropolitan*'s use of Austen can be called 'adaptation' at all" (169).

Though *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* depart completely from the historical context and many of the narrative details of Austen's work, I will argue that the liberties each film takes with their respective source texts, in fact, allow them to engage actively (and accurately) with Austen's critique of literary culture. By restructuring *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* in a manner which brings Austen closer to our modern world, *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* invite us to examine the values we bring to our contemporary readings of her work.

The universality and accessibility of Austen's plots and characters have allowed her work to gain a prominent status within mainstream popular culture. Her influence in this area has become so significant that it often comes into conflict with our perceptions of her as a canonical literary figure. *Clueless* and *Metropolitan*, I will suggest, foreground the tension between these contrasting versions of Austen's literary identity and ask whether it is possible for a reader to engage with her work in both its canonical and popular culture modalities.

In demonstrating how *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* both illuminate Austen's critique of literary culture and provide their own assessments of her work, I will also emphasise my view that the adaptation process itself does not necessarily cheapen or undermine the value of a canonical literary text. A film adaptation may appear to transform a text into a form that eliminates its prose and, in doing so, diminishes the novelist's voice. However, I will suggest that this process of dismantling and transforming a literary text into a visual one may, in fact, enrich our reading of it. I will show that the ways in which these films engage with Austen's novels open up new interpretive possibilities into her work.

The nature of the adaptation processes at work in *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* will also allow me to challenge the notion of a 'faithful' film adaptation. As I will prove through my analyses of the films, an adapted text does not have to precisely 'copy' the narrative details of its source material in order to stay true to the author's voice and the values of a text. As Linda Hutcheon states, "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. […] The urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute to it by copying" (*Adaptation* 7). As I will argue, the reconfiguring of a literary text into a mode which may initially seem estranged from it potentially allows us to revise our assumptions about the original text. I will suggest that these 'loose' film adaptations potentially come closer to capturing the voice of the author and the values of the novels than those which 'faithfully' translate a text's narrative to the screen.

I.i Austen, Wollstonecraft and the Problem of Education and Class

As a framework for my analyses of *Clueless* and *Metropolitan*, it is necessary to first establish how we read and interpret Austen's observations on literary culture in the original novels. As I mentioned previously, Austen's work is particularly concerned with the manner in which we apply our social and moral codes in our reading of literary texts. Austen's novels show us that, for nineteenth-century readers, these codes were largely formulated on the basis of a person's class and gender. Through her characters, Austen reflects on the different educational opportunities which were offered to men and woman of different classes during this period. A character's skill as a reader is often matched to the ideologies of the class they represent and their progress often depends on whether they can overcome the shortcomings of this class position. To fully comprehend the influence of class in Austen's characters' methods of reading, it is necessary to elaborate on the nature of the class system within her era.

Literary critics such as Margaret Kirkham have noted that the theories of Mary Wollstonecraft, an eighteenth-century social theorist and a contemporary of Austen's, are reflected in the class ideologies presented in Austen's novels. Following Kirkham, I will use Wollstonecraft's writing to illuminate the dynamics of the class system within Austen's era. Of Wollstonecraft's work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* are considered to be the texts which are most useful in assessing Austen's work. Each of these texts demonstrate the dynamics of the class system in relation to the gender ideologies of Wollstonecraft's period.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft addresses the deficiencies in the knowledge received by the women of her era. Within this period, women had limited access to education. Because of this, many women's primary focus was on securing a respectable husband. In order to accomplish this, Wollstonecraft claims that these women were schooled by their mothers into believing that beauty, "*outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, [would] obtain for them the protection of a man" (88). From Wollstonecraft's perspective, this form of "education" was ill-advised and detrimental to both a woman's intelligence and her authority. She believed that the only appropriate means through which a woman would be able to progress in both these respects was by adhering to the principles of reason and rationality.

During this period, a woman's access to education depended on her position within the class system. In her reading of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Kirkham suggests that Wollstonecraft believed poor women had the least access to education. Wollstonecraft, as Kirkham observes, claimed that the oppression suffered by this class of women through the act of physical labour implied that they "were in no position to think or act independently" (41). In contrast, she identified that rich women who had wider access to education were blinded by the nature of their upbringing. Kirkham suggests that Wollstonecraft classified this class of women as

"artificial" (41). Only middle-class women were capable of exercising the principles of reason and rationality efficiently. Because these middle-class women were in the "most natural state" (Kirkham 41), they were also capable of exercising moral independence far more effectively than the rich and poor classes of women.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft develops the subject of moral independence by observing that the men of her era faced a conflict which was similar to that of women. Central to her analysis of masculinity is Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. *Reflections* became renowned for its depiction of a scene which centres on the plight of Marie-Antoniette, the queen of France from 1774 to 1792. Claudia L. Johnson observes that in this scene the queen is held captive by "a gleefully violent band of ruffians" (2) who intend to attack and murder her. Johnson determines that *Reflections* uses the image of the ruffians as an allegory of the problematic downfall of "sentimentalised manhood" (4). Sentimentalised men were openly emotional and would make grand, dramatic gestures to display their feelings. Johnson elaborates that Burke believed that such men would have been inclined to treat Marie-Antoniette with dignity. For Burke, she claims, this form of manhood was "everlastingly masculine" (Johnson 5).

Building on the notion of sentimentalised manhood, Wollstonecraft's central thesis in *A Vindications of the Rights of Men* discredits the perspective offered by *Reflections*. Johnson argues that Wollstonecraft believed sentimentalised men were "decidedly conservative types" (8) who were inclined to resist change within their society (8). This resistance, Johnson notes, undermined progress because it valorized "the gallant ways of old England" (8). Hence Wollstonecraft advocates for (what Johnson terms) an older standard of "rationalised masculinity" (7). Johnson explains that the premise of "rationalised masculinity" (7) relies on a man's ability to exercise his reason and morality over the superficial nature of sentimentality.

Austen's key focus, in relation to Wollstonecraft's writings, is on the principles of reason and rationality which she explores through both her male and female characters. As I will elaborate on in my chapters on *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, Austen connects these principles to literary culture by emphasising that, in order to be able to exercise reason and rationality effectively, one must be able or must learn to read in an authentic, observant manner. Austen characters who read superficially are often (to return to Kirkham's term) also "artificial" (41) and sentimental in nature. These characters are punished both through the novels' plots and through our own perceptions of them, often due to their failure in making moral judgments. In contrast, the characters who read authentically make sound moral judgments and are rewarded through the novels' plots and by us as readers.

My analyses of *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* will focus primarily on this link between reading and the principles of reason and rationality. This focus will provide a good grounding for exploring how these questions are articulated in *Clueless* and *Metropolitan*. The contemporary approach taken by the films indicates there is little (if any) connection between them and Wollstonecraft's philosophies. However, in the films, as with Austen's novels, the characters' reading practices are influenced significantly by the ways in which they exercise their social values. In cases where their social prejudices distort their readings of text, they too are dealt with accordingly through the films' plots and through our perception of them as viewers.

I.ii The Language of Austen's World: "Discourse in the Novel" and *Rabelais and his World*

In analysing both the novels and the films I will be drawing significantly on the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's work deals specifically with the dynamics of language, both within a socio-historical context and within the novel form. In my analysis, I will appropriate his theory of dialogism to examine the

reciprocal relationship which develops between literary and filmic texts within the adaptation process.

In "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin establishes that the concept of dialogism is based on the premise that no text is made up of a single, monologic language but is, in fact, always in constant dialogue with the languages of other texts. Bakhtin refers to the varying languages we find in texts as languages of heteroglossia, a term which (as Sue Vice observes) implies "differentiated speech" (18). Bakhtin states that these heteroglossic languages each belong to different generations. The language of one generation represents contradictions which occur between differing eras of the past and different social and ideological groups in the present (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 291). However, though they appear distinct from one another, these languages "intersect with each other in many different ways" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 291). Bakhtin suggests that all languages of heteroglossia, despite possessing differing linguistic traits, represent individual "points of view on the world" (291) and, therefore, offer varying alternatives for constructing the world through words. Within the novel form, Bakhtin observes that heteroglossia emerges as *social* [2] heteroglossia where the individual languages of the characters consistently intersect and conflict with one another, enriching the characterization of the individual character by providing a context for greater speech diversity.

When these languages of heteroglossia intersect with one another through a dialogic interaction between texts, they form a reciprocal relationship between these texts. This relationship occurs on multiple levels. It may, for instance, occur in the intersection between the socio-historical discourses of these texts or the voices of the different speakers in these texts. Such an intersection may prompt an interaction between these texts' social heteroglossia as the characters from one text 'speak' to those in the other text. Simultaneously, the author or narrator of one text may 'speak' to the author or narrator of the other text. Whatever the case, Bakhtin observes that

[2] Bakhtin uses this emphasis on page 326 of "Discourse in the Novel".

the meaning of a text is partly constructed in terms of its reciprocal relationship to other texts.

In utilising Bakhtin's theories, I will firstly focus on how heteroglossia comes into play in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*. In these novels, a variety of voices constantly play off one another. As I have previously indicated, these voices are, amongst others, those of the characters and the narrator, as well as those which exist in the social heteroglossia of the characters. An assessment of heteroglossia in this context is crucial to decoding the readerly values of the characters and illuminating the role of the narrator in challenging these values. This discussion of the heteroglossia in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* will map onto my analysis of the dialogic interplay between these texts and *Clueless* and *Metropolitan*. In my chapters on the films, I will focus specifically on the reader's role in facilitating this dialogic interaction between a literary and a filmic text. In viewing a film adaptation, we expect that it would merely emulate the values of its source material and, therefore, we would experience it in the same way as we do the original text. Yet the complex adaptation processes at work in *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* demonstrates that a film adaptation is equally influential in altering our interpretation of its mother text through the dialogic process which Bakhtin describes. As I explore in later chapters, *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* have both been received as adaptations despite the fact that they were not originally marketed as such. This demonstrates that we never read (or view) a text autonomously. Rather, as I will show, we are always reading (or viewing) dialogically.

As an outline for looking at how dialogism occurs between Austen's texts and *Clueless* and *Metropolitan*, I will refer to Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* where he explores the carnivalesque, a concept which literary critics have often recognised in their readings of Austen's texts. The carnivalesque originated from the carnival culture of the Middle Ages which popularized a playful rebellion against the societal norms and ideologies of this period. Bakhtin claims that carnival culture "celebrate[d]

temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it mark[ed] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal" (*Rabelais* 10). In *Laughter, War and Feminism: Elements of Carnival in Three of Jane Austen's Novels*, Gabriela Castellanos observes that aesthetically carnival occurred through "the festive stance of carnival pageantry and artistic manifestations, as well as the language of the people of the marketplace" (2). These artistic and linguistic oppositions to officialdom provoked a melding together of divided social discourses, particularly at the level of class. For Bakhtin, she notes, this practice of breaking down the boundaries between discourses created a "utopian community" (Castellanos 2). As Castellanos implies, applications of the carnivalesque to literature have mostly focused on the intersection between the persona of the wise character, who acts a metaphor for officialdom, and the fool, a character who playfully transgresses the ideologies represented by this officialdom.

Castellanos establishes that elements of carnival in Austen's work are found in her characters' handling of official perspectives on class and gender discourses (3). She claims that "Austen's novels build upon traditional Christian morals but turn official ideologies of male superiority upside down by laughing at heroism" (Castellanos 3). This ridiculing of gender roles in her work extends to the ridiculing of "the worldly reverence for wealth [and] rank" (Castellanos 3). The function of these carnivalesque elements in Austen's work is crucial to the moral lessons we gain from our readings of her texts. It is through our recognition of the characters' contrasting wise and foolish traits that we learn of our strengths and deficiencies as readers.

In mapping Austen's texts onto *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* and, simultaneously, the films onto Austen's texts, we ourselves become part of the carnivalesque parody at work in the novels. As we actively create the dialogic interplay between the novels and films, we enact the reader roles that these novels present us with and the films reconstruct within a contemporary modality. The readerly attitudes we adopt in

initiating this process highlight our own 'wisdom' and/or 'foolery' because, as readers, we come to realise how our own social and literary values come in to play through the way in which we facilitate meaning between these texts.

I.iii Postmodernism and Adaptation

As I will show in the chapters which follow, *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* take a postmodern approach to the adaptation process. Considering the characteristics of postmodernism will prove a useful starting point in outlining the concept of adaptation itself, as well as establishing the intertextual role of the reader/ viewer in conceiving a film as an adaptation.

In *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Andreas Huyssen defines postmodernism in relation to modernism, the movement which preceded it. Modernism, as Huyssen points out, has been characterized by "a volatile relationship between high art and mass culture" (vii). Its emphasis is on the exclusion of the individual amidst the alienating, all-consuming nature of modernity. It perceives art as "autonomous" (Huyssen vii), implying a disassociation from the political and social concerns which popularise our everyday lives (Huyssen vii). From its inception, modernists have classified this approach as representing 'high' art and therefore have prompted, what Huyssen terms, the "Great Divide" (viii) between this 'high' art and the 'low' art of mass culture. Postmodernism challenges the "high/ low dichotomy" (Huyssen viii) of the Great Divide. It promotes the values of mass culture and the individual's relationship to and within this culture. Because postmodernism has been defined in terms of its emphasis and popularization of the 'low' art of mass culture, many of the works produced by this movement have been defined as "cultural trash (Kitsch)" (Huyssen ix) as opposed to 'high' art.

In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon expands on Huyssen's definition of postmodernism in its 'low' art modality by identifying parody as a central

component of the this movement. In locating her definition of parody, Hutcheon observes that it encompasses such terms as "ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation or intertextuality" (*Politics* 93). Of these terms, "pastiche" is most central to Hutcheon's argument which she foregrounds against Fredric Jameson's claim that postmodern parody is little more than "'pastiche' or empty parody" (*Politics* 94). For Jameson, Hutcheon claims, parody is rooted in "eighteenth-century notions of wit and ridicule" (*Politics* 94). He argues that parody has devolved in postmodern culture into mere pastiche, which disregards the past and is therefore unable to effectively resolve the tension between conflicting modes of art.

What is problematic about Jameson's assessment of postmodern parody as pastiche is that it disregards that postmodern texts, even within their simplest form, always have a foundation in a version of the past. More specifically, they either operate as a construct of the past or, more often, offer a response to it. Furthermore, because they are constantly informed by the past, postmodern texts are able to channel ideologies and aesthetics of past periods. This implies that the concept of parody is able to easily exist, alter and expand beyond the framework of "eighteenth-century notions of wit and ridicule" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 94) with which Jameson associates it.

Hutcheon addresses this discrepancy in her response to Jameson where she observes that postmodern parody "does not disregard the context of the past representations it cites, but uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated from that past today – by time and by the subsequent history of those representations" (*Politics* 94). She states that it does acknowledge continuity between past and present but it also 'plays' with the ironies of difference which exist between these two periods (Hutcheon, *Politics* 94). Hence, Hutcheon observes that postmodern parody is in constant interaction with the past but in a manner which rereads or contests it (*Politics* 95). In doing so it is able to both "confirm and subvert the power of the representation of history" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 95). When postmodern parody occurs in an art form, this piece of art maintains its own identity. Through the "self

reflexive" (Hutcheon *Politics* 101) nature of postmodern parody, however, it cannot deny that it is rooted and in constant interaction with the "aesthetic and even social past" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 101).

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon claims that the process of film adaptation itself resembles parody in that adaptations also emerge from and interact with pre-existing texts, with the exception that "adaptations usually openly announce [their] relationship [to these texts]" (*Adaptation* 3). In this regard, Hutcheon's observations on the nature of film adaptation are of significance to framing the argument I present throughout this dissertation because, in building on Bakhtin's conception of dialogism, Hutcheon argues that film adaptation is an "ongoing dialogical process" (*Adaptation* 21), as opposed to one which merely replicates the original text.

Hutcheon situates this argument by arguing against fidelity criticism which, as Brian McFarlane notes, is rooted in the assumption that a film adaptation's successful translation of its source material is attributed to its ability to render a single correct meaning/ translation for the reader/ viewer (21). In *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, McFarlane distinguishes between two differing approaches to fidelity criticism. The first of these is simply "being faithful to the 'letter'" (8) and the second is an approach which involves adhering to the "'spirit' or 'essence' of the work" (9). The first approach involves a process of accurate translation from text to film. In other words, the film conceived from the adaptation of a text is one that is identical to its source material, both in its plot and its aesthetics. The second approach involves multiple readings of a novel whereby the filmmaker's vision of the original text is able to complement and emulate that of the reader/ viewer (McFarlane 9).

Like McFarlane who claims that "fidelity criticism [is] unilluminating" (9), Hutcheon suggests that to assume the intention of an adaptation is merely to provide an accurate 'copy' of an original text is a mistake (*Adaptation* 7). As I have previously indicated, she believes that an adaptation is a "repetition" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 7) but not

necessarily a "replication" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 7) of an original text and that an adapted work may "consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or [..] call it into question" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 7).

Whatever the adaptation's approach to the literary text may be, the manner in which readers/viewers engage with it depends on their familiarity with this text. Hutcheon distinguishes these modes of engagement by classifying audiences as either "knowing" (*Adaptation* 120) or "unknowing" (*Adaptation* 120). "Unknowing" audiences are those which are unfamiliar with the original text on which the adaptation is based. This unfamiliarity implies that they do not view the adaptation with prior expectations. They simply experience the adaptation "as [they] would any other work" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 120). On the contrary, "knowing" viewers are those who have read the text prior to experiencing it as an adaptation. As they view the adapted text, these "knowing" viewers prompt the original text to "oscillate in [their] memories with what [they] are experiencing" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 120). Inevitably this oscillation implies that the "knowing" viewer's awareness of the original text will cause him or her to submit to a method of identifying omissions in the adaptation and, subsequently, filling in the relevant "gaps […] [with] information from the [original] text" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 121).

Hutcheon notes that oscillation occurs differently if the original text is canonical as opposed to contemporary. Because contemporary texts are situated in a modern world we are familiar with, we, to some extent, have a "direct experience" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 122) of them. In contrast, a canonical text (such as an Austen novel) presents a world with which we are mostly unfamiliar. Our experience of it is not "direct" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 122) but rather one which is formulated in relation to "a generally circulated cultural memory" (Ellis ctd. in *Adaptation* 122). Therefore when we view the adaptation we evaluate it against this "cultural memory" (Ellis ctd. in *Adaptation* 122) which precedes it.

On another level, Hutcheon observes that the experience of "knowing" audiences in viewing an adaptation is also an intertextual one. This is because, as these audiences view the adapted work, they become aware that it is "an adaptation of more than one specific text" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 21). This knowledge causes them to experience both the primary adapted text and these other works as distinctive layers within the adaptation which "resonate through repetition with variation" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 8).

In re-iterating both my and Hutcheon's claim that adaptation is an "ongoing dialogical process" (*Adaptation* 21), this definition of the role of the "knowing" viewer also provides a useful framework through which to demonstrate how audiences'/readers' responses to the adaptation processes at work in *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* contest the notion of fidelity criticism. This is because both *Clueless'* and *Metropolitan*'s identities as adaptations are not facilitated by the screenwriter's/ director's 'faithful' capturing of the novelist's voice. Rather they rely on the agency of the "knowing" viewer to construct these identities. My use of Hutcheon's theories will aid me in defining the adaptation approaches we find in the films and, in doing so, assist me in demonstrating the flaws which are inherent in fidelity criticism.

In utilising this framework for my chapters, I will frame my analysis of *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* by firstly assessing how Austen constructs her critique of literary culture in their respective source texts. In the next chapter I will begin by examining how this critique is articulated in *Emma*.

1. THE EDUCATION OF EMMA WOODHOUSE: THE PROBLEM OF READING IN *EMMA*

Throughout Jane Austen's 1816 novel *Emma*, the central characters are involved in a constant battle to prove themselves both socially and intellectually. As their battles escalate, the novel develops a carnivalesque tension between the wisdom these characters believe themselves to possess and the folly which underlies their dialogue. They achieve their redemption at the end of the novel by realising their folly and, in so doing, identifying the foolery of those around them. *Emma* explores this particular tension between the characters' wisdom and foolery by considering how the characters perceive their identities as readers. The heteroglossia of the novel frequently exposes us to these characters' efforts to prove themselves as knowledgeable readers. Austen plays with the irony that, though these characters consider themselves to be esteemed readers, their approaches to reading are, in fact, misguided and superficial.

With this in mind, this chapter will examine the varying facets of reading which occur in *Emma*. A particular aspect of the novel which I will consider in this discussion is the role of the narrator who develops a perplexing relationship with the novel's protagonist Emma Woodhouse, a wealthy socialite who considers herself to be a complex and sensitive reader. The narrator's opinion of Emma, however, differs significantly and there is a consistent irony in her words which enforces this contrasting perspective. By frequently undermining and exposing the flaws of Emma's efforts to prove her skills as a reader, this narrator also calls the qualities of the other characters' reading skills into question.

1.1 The Narrator of *Emma*

In order to distinguish the narrator's influence throughout *Emma*, it is useful to outline the distinction between the speech of the characters and the narrator's speech.

A suitable example of character speech is present in the following scene where Emma attempts to ease the anxieties of her neurotic father who is mourning the absence of Emma's recently married long-time governess:

> 'I cannot agree with you, papa; you know I cannot. Mr Weston is such a good-humoured, pleasant, excellent man, that he thoroughly deserves a good wife; —and you would not have had Miss Taylor live with us for ever and bear all my odd humours, when she might have a house of her own?' (8)

In this passage our perceptions of Emma are facilitated by the surface details which are provided in her dialogue. These details lead us to assume that Emma is a confident and self-assured young woman. We can deduce that, in her capacity as her father's caretaker, she is mature and independent, specifically in her ease at handling Miss Taylor's/Mrs Weston's departure. Earlier in this scene, however, Emma's thoughts are detailed by the narrator, giving us a very different perception of her:

> How was she to bear the change?— It was true that her friend was going only half a mile from them; but Emma was aware that great must be the difference between a Mrs Weston only half a mile from them, and a Miss Taylor in the house; and with all her advantages, natural and domestic, she was now in great danger of suffering intellectual solitude. She dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful. (6)

On one level, these passages of the narrator's speech reveal that Emma, in fact, shares her father's concern about Miss Taylor's departure. This causes us to question the maturity she puts across in her spoken utterance. On another, the narrator's mention of how Mr Woodhouse could not meet Emma "in conversation, rational or playful" (6) assists us in recognising Emma's loneliness and the distance she feels between herself and her father. Hence, this presumably omniscient narrator's speech affects our reading of the novel's character speech significantly as it sheds light on varying emotional facets and ironies behind this speech. These facets are absent when the character speech is read independently from the narrator's speech.

Within the novel form this intersection between narrator and character speech is referred to as free indirect discourse. Roy Pascal observes that this phenomenon was first closely considered in an article published by Charles Bally, a former student of linguistic theorist Ferdinand De Saussure in 1912. In this article Bally coined the term 'free indirect style' to suggest that the interplay between direct and indirect speech within the novel should not be studied as a grammatical form but rather as a "stylistic one" (Pascal 10). This concept was challenged by German literary theorist Etienne Lorck who developed the notion of 'erlebte Rede' which in English would be referred to as "experienced speech" (Pascal 22). 'erlebte Rede' focused on the "irrational function of language" (Pascal 23), highlighting it as a medium of experience as opposed to a means of merely conveying information (Pascal 25). Stylistically, the language of the narrator in 'erlebte Rede' is believed to be the language of the characters or, rather, the imagined language of the characters. In this context, the direct speech of the characters is not in a simple reported form. Instead it captures the thought processes which the characters undergo and its articulation reflects on the distinguishing features of these processes. Hence, the construction of character speech serves the intention of the narrator in the sense that it assists in structuring the narrative and emphasising its psychological or moral concerns (Pascal 26).

English scholars have come to perceive 'erlebte Rede' as the preferred medium for analysing the tension between narrator and character speech because it shows that interaction between these speech forms is more intricate than the one suggested through 'free indirect style'. In defining 'erlebte Rede' both English scholars and Pascal have used the term 'free indirect speech'. Though it is perhaps not the most concise term for this phenomenon, 'free indirect speech' nevertheless addresses the indirect speech devices employed by the narrator and highlights the subtext which underlies the intersection between character and narrator speech. In his critique of 'free indirect speech' Pascal notes "it is only a pity that the term does not suggest the mingling, even fusion, of two voices in a dual voice, neither simple narrator nor simple character" (32). It is from this discrepancy that Bakhtin's work departs.

Bakhtin supplements narrator speech with "the author's discourse" (*Discourse* 303) and observes that the interaction between this discourse and the character speech facilitates a double-voiced discourse (heteroglossia). This double-voicedness implies that another discourse exists within that of the author's. Though it appears to be constructed in the same manner as the author's discourse, this other discourse is in fact saturated with nuances, ideologies and intentions which contradict those of the author. This other discourse, of course, is that belonging to the novel's characters (and the narrator), leading Bakhtin to deduce that the languages of the author and the characters co-exist with one another. Hence, it is often difficult to distinguish each language from the other.

In relation to the engagement between the narrator and the characters' dialogue in Austen's work, more specifically *Emma*, Daniel P. Gunn's "Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in *Emma*" appears to capitalise on Bakhtin's understanding of "double-voiced discourse"(*Discourse* 303). Using the term 'free indirect discourse', as opposed to 'free indirect speech', Gunn stipulates that "much of the aesthetic pleasure in Austen's FID passages comes from subtle modulations among narrative registers as the prose moves in and out of a complex array of voices, including that of the narrator herself" (35). In *Emma*, he observes these modulations are implied by the manner through which the narrator filters and interprets the dialogue of the novel's characters through her own subjective voice (Gunn 40). Gunn elaborates that this voice influences the way the characters' dialogue is spoken. In doing so, it offers us alternative ways in which to interpret the characters' behaviour and motivations. We see this in effect in the following scene where Emma laments her failed efforts to matchmake her protégé Harriet with Mr Elton:

> The hair was curled and the maid sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable.— It was a wretched business, indeed! Such an overthrow of every thing she had been wishing for! Such a development of every thing most unwelcome!— Such a blow for Harriet! — That was the worst of all.
> […]

> How she could have been so deceived! —He protested that he had never thought seriously of Harriet —never! She looked back as well as she could; but it was all confusion. She had taken up the idea, she supposed, and made every thing bend to it. His manners, however, must have been unmarked, wavering, dubious, or she could not have been so misled.
> The picture! — How eager he had been about the picture! — and the charade!— and an hundred circumstances; — how clearly they had seemed to point at Harriet. To be sure, the charade with its 'ready wit'— but then, the 'soft eyes'— in fact it suited neither; it was a jumble without taste or truth. Who could have seen through such thick-headed nonsense? (121)

On one level, the phrasing of Emma's speech in this scene suggests that the narrator is simply imitating her discourse, representing Emma's own assessment of her character flaws. However, a further reading of this speech reveals that it is, in fact, influenced by the narrator's own perceptions of Emma. This is indicated specifically in the way Emma's questions to herself are accompanied by exclamation marks as opposed to question marks. In his essay "Asking Versus Telling: One Aspect of Jane Austen's Idea of Conversation", Bruce Stovel observes that "most of the questions asked by the characters in Jane Austen's novels are exclamations—statements disguised as questions, and put in question form to create more energy and intensity than a direct statement" (27). When questions are posed in this manner they assume the form of rhetorical questions because "such [...] question[s] [imply] that there is only one possible answer" (Stovel 29).

Hence, by framing Emma's questions as rhetorical ones, the narrator indicates that Emma is not declaring her weaknesses. Rather, these questions highlight Emma's penchant for melodrama and her desire to perceive herself as a faultless victim of her matchmaking plot. Because these exclamation marks are used consistently, they heighten the intensity of Emma's speech, emphasising her efforts to increase the dramatic tension as she becomes further immersed in her state of "victimhood". Through this emphasis, the narrator suggests to us that Emma's emotional responses are manipulated and inauthentic. They are merely a means through which she can fulfill her desired role in the romance plot she has created.

Interestingly, at the start of the novel, Austen creates the perception that Emma herself is the narrator of the novel. This is implied in the novel's opening lines which, though they are presented through the narrator's discourse, actually echo Emma's own impressions of herself:

> 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 very little to distress or vex her. (5)

The description of Emma as "handsome, clever, and rich (5) is ambiguous. If the narrator is meant to be a severe critic of Emma's actions then her efforts to compliment her character are misplaced here. Yet (at least at the beginning of the novel) we can imagine Emma having this perception of herself. Perhaps then this is a brief instance in the novel where Emma attempts to assume the role of the narrator. Slightly later in this opening scene, the narrator claims that "the real evils [...] of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (5). This is certainly the voice of the critical and ironic narrator that we come to know as the novel develops. However, the slight glimpse of Emma in the narrator's role establishes that there are fragments of her own voice embedded in that of the narrator's throughout the novel. If this is the case, then a complex two-sided dynamic is at play. On one hand, we are presented with a narrator who identifies and plays with the ironies of Emma's character. On the other, we are presented with the subtle influence of Emma's own voice which tries to manipulate our perceptions of her through her access to the narrator's voice.

1.2 Emma, Harriet and the Art of Reading and Narrating

The conflict between Emma's voice and the narrator's sentiments towards her behaviour becomes of particular interest in the scenes where Austen sets up a parallel between Emma's and Harriet's reading habits. To put this into perspective, it is

necessary to consider the scenes where the teacher-student dynamic between these two characters is at play. In the first of these scenes, Emma tries to persuade Harriet to reject the affections of Mr Martin, a young farmer who expresses interest in courting her:

> Mr Martin, I suppose, is not a man of information beyond the line of his own business. He does not read?'
> ' Oh yes—that is, no— I do not know —but I believe he has read a good deal— but not what you would think any thing of. He reads the Agricultural Reports and some other books, that lay in one of the window seats —but he reads all *them* to himself. But sometimes of an evening before we went to cards, he would read something aloud out of the Elegant Extracts —very entertaining. And I know he has read the Vicar of Wakefield. He never read the Romance of the Forest, nor the Children of the Abbey. He had never heard of such books before I mentioned them, but he is determined to get them now as soon as ever he can.'
> The next question was:
> 'What sort of looking man is Mr Martin?'
> 'Oh! Not handsome— not at all handsome. I thought him very plain at first, but I do not think him so plain now. One does not, you know, after a time." (26-27)

Within this scene, a carnivalesque tension is most apparent in Harriet's speech. Quite aware of her foolery, Harriet attempts to prove her worth to Emma by trying to emulate her 'intellectual' approach to discussing literature. However, though these efforts are admirable, Harriet fails dismally at speaking as Emma does. This is because Harriet's understanding of what constitutes canonical literature, particularly in relation to how Emma perceives it, is inaccurate and confused.

Of the texts that Harriet mentions in this conversation, her failure is made most apparent in her reference to the *Elegant Extracts*, a collective volume of prose and verse extracts compiled by Vicesimus Knox. Though the extracts included in this collection include works written by canonical literary figures such as William Shakespeare and John Milton, their work is merely presented in the form of brief fragments. Hence, the structure of the *Elegant Extracts* facilitates knowledge of literary works which is limited and superficial. Though Harriet and Mr Martin may

perceive their knowledge of the *Elegant Extracts* as implying awareness and understanding of canonical literature, the extracts merely provide a surface reading of this literature.[3]

Harriet's misunderstanding of the values of canonical literature extends to her reference to Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*. Within Austen's period of writing, Radcliffe's work was classified under the genre of gothic romance. James Watt observes that, throughout the twentieth century, gothic romance was considered by literary critics as being "a standardized, absolutely formulaic system of creating a certain kind of atmosphere in which a reader's sensibility toward fear and horror [was] exercised in predictable ways" (Napier ctd. in Watt 5). During Austen's time, both this genre and Radcliffe's work were treated with a similar sentiment, though critics of Radcliffe's work admired it for its pleasurable qualities. For instance, in his 1814 publication *The History of Fiction*, John Dunslop observed that Radcliffe's plots were "very absurd and her 'species' of romance neither very instructive in its nature, nor so fitted as some other kinds of fictitious writing, to leave agreeable impressions on the mind" (ctd. in Watt 123). However, he countered this assessment by writing that "romances of this kind afford a better relaxation than those which approach more nearly to the common business of life" (Dunslop ctd. in Watt 123). In contrast to this, Claudia L. Johnson's twentieth-century criticism of *Romance* of *the Forest* observes that this work subtly engages with a "sexual critique of heteroerotic sentimentality" (92). Yet she acknowledges that this novel "smoothes over the same difficulties it uncovers" (Johnson 92). She concludes it is "no wonder Harriet Smith likes *The*

[3] An alternative argument to mine is offered on a blog website entitled "AustenOnly". On this site Austen scholar JF Wakefield identifies that the *Elegant Extracts* were used predominantly in schools during the nineteenth century as a medium through which to inspire creative and analytical thought. As Knox himself states, "[the extracts] may be usefully read at the grammar schools, by explaining everything grammatically, historically, metrically and critically, and then giving a portion to be learned by memory" (Knox ctd on "AustenOnly.com)

With this in mind, Wakefield argues the credentials of the *Elegant Extracts* imply that Mr Martin is well-read and that he perceives reading good literature as a medium through which to glean intellectual self-improvement. Though this is a valid argument, I maintain my view that the extracts merely provide a skeletal framework through which to prompt literary analysis and understanding. Therefore the extracts do not provide an authentic barometer for Mr Martin's intelligence.

Romance of the Forest. Adopting fairy-tale protocols with little resistance, it does not upset her simplicity" (Johnson 93).

Hence, as Johnson's comments demonstrate, Harriet's mistake in her understanding of the literary qualities of *The Romance of the Forest* is that she misreads the novel's "fairy-tale protocols" (93) as being more complex than they appear. It is as if Harriet presumes that simply reading any form of writing, regardless of its literary qualities, is an intellectual endeavour. In this regard, the manner in which she engages with literature appears to differ greatly to Emma's. An example of this occurs in a scene where Emma assists Harriet in decoding a Charade which she presumes has been written by Mr Elton in a bid to win Harriet's affections. In addressing the presumed subtext of the Charade, Emma refers to the line "The course of true love never did run smooth" (69) and states "A Hartfield Edition of Shakespeare would have a long note on that passage" (69). Emma's knowledge of the characteristics of the "Hartfield Edition of Shakespeare" (69) seems to imply that she is able to engage with literature from an informed, observant and critical perspective. In contrast, Harriet is only able to make reference to the title of *The Romance of the Forest*. As with her reading of the *Elegant Extracts*, she is only able to comprehend this literary text at a surface level.

If we are to interpret the differences between Emma's and Harriet's reading habits from this perspective, Emma appears to be successfully countering the narrator's unflattering views of her character. In the context of *A Vindications of the Rights of Woman*, Harriet neatly fits the archetype of the poor woman who struggles to "think or act independently" (Kirkham 41). In contrast, Emma, though following the class ideals of the "artificial" (Kirkham 41) rich woman, seems to think (at least intellectually) with the perceptive skill of a middle-class woman. Yet this view of Emma proves increasingly problematic as the novel develops. Emma unknowingly demonstrates the discrepancies of her interpretive skills when she assists Harriet in analysing Mr Elton's Charade:

> ‘What can it be, Miss Woodhouse? —what can it be? I have not an idea —I cannot guess it in the least. What can it possibly be? Do try to find it out, Miss Woodhouse. Do help me. I never saw anything so hard. Is it kingdom? I wonder who the friend was— and who could be the young lady! Do you think it is a good one? Can it be a woman?
>
> And woman, lovely woman, reigns alone.
>
> Can it be Neptune?
>
> Behold him there, the monarchs of the seas!
>
> Or a trident? Or a mermaid? Or a shark? Oh, no! Shark is only one syllable. It must be very clever, or he would not have brought it. Oh! Miss Woodhouse, do you think we shall ever find it out?’
> ‘Mermaids and sharks! Nonsense! My dear Harriet, what are you thinking of? Where would be the use of his bringing us a charade made by a friend upon a mermaid or a shark? Give me the paper and listen.
>
> For Miss—, read Miss Smith.
>
> My first displays the wealth and pomp of kings,
> Lords of the earth! Their luxury and ease.
>
> That is *court*.
>
> Another view of man, my second brings;
> Behold him there, the monarch of the seas!
>
> That is *ship*; plain as can be.—Now for the cream.
>
> But ah! United, (*courtship*, you know,) what reverse we have!
> Man’s boasted power and freedom, all are flown.
> Lord of the earth and sea, he bends a slave,
> And woman, lovely woman, reigns alone.
>
> A very proper compliment!— and then follows the application, which I think, my dear Harriet, you can find much difficulty in comprehending. Read it in comfort to yourself. There can be no doubt of it written for and to you.’ (66-67)

The humour of this scene is revealed later in the novel when Mr Elton reveals his romantic feelings for Emma as opposed to Harriet. This incident in itself pinpoints the irony that though Emma is educated and well-read, her skills in interpreting literature are not as far removed from Harriet’s as they initially appear to be. The

confidence and ease Emma employs as she decodes the rather over-indulgent Charade emulates the skill of a woman who is in her "most natural state" (Kirkham 41), possessing the ability to think critically and independently. She appears to have a thorough knowledge of the intricacies of language and an understanding of the means through which to extrapolate meaning from a text.

However, as her altercation with Mr Elton attests to, there are clearly significant errors in Emma's reading. The folly of Emma's interpretation of the Charade is gestured to at a later point in this scene. In conversation with Emma, Mr Woodhouse refers to a riddle written by David Garrick in 1771. Unable to fully remember the riddle, he turns to Emma who reveals that she has copied out this riddle from the *Elegant Extracts* to add to a collection of charades she is compiling with Harriet. The irony of this is that, despite her judgement of Harriet and Robert Martin's literary preferences, she herself is a reader of the *Elegant Extracts*. In this case, she may approach her interpretation of Mr Elton's charade with more eloquence than Harriet and Robert Martin would but the "impressiveness" of her interpretive skills could merely be founded on the same skeletal framework that the extracts provide. From this perspective, Emma assumes the guise of the wise character commendably. Yet she reads from a limited perspective that is only enhanced by the mannerisms she has gleaned from her "artificial" (Kirkham 41) upbringing. She is, in fact, no wiser than Harriet, the fool. The limitations in Emma's interpretive skills filter into her understanding of class relations which itself appears to be based on a simplistic engagement with the conventions of romantic fiction. Ruth Perry puts this into perspective when she observes that "Emma imagines that Harriet, with her blond beauty and a sweet temper, might aspire— like the heroine in a sentimental novel—to a match far above her station" (187). This is clarified in the progression of Emma and Harriet's discussion concerning Mr Martin's merits:

> '[…] Mr Martin, I imagine, has his fortune entirely to make— cannot be at all beforehand with the world. Whatever money he might come into when his father died, whatever his share of the family property, it is, I dare say, all

> afloat, all employed in his stock, and so forth; and though, with diligence and good luck, he may be rich in time, it is next to impossible that he should have realized any thing yet.'
> To be sure, so it is. But they live very comfortably. They have no indoors man —else they do not want for any thing; and Mrs Martin talks of taking a boy another year.'
> [...]
> 'I wish you may not get into a scrape, Harriet […]. The misfortune of your birth ought to make you particularly careful as to your associates. There can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter, and you must support your claim to that station by every thing within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you.' (28)

In this passage Harriet departs from her insufficient defence of Mr Martin's literary preferences, choosing instead to focus on the progression of his family's class status. Naïvely, she believes that comfortable living and having an "indoors man" (28) are signs of social mobility. Again Emma appears to exercise the reasoning of a woman in her "most natural state" (Kirkham 41) as she disregards this notion of progression, preferring to identify a man's birthright and upbringing as the primary markers of his class status. However, she alters her view when considering Harriet's prospects for social mobility.

At the start of the novel, the narrator introduces Harriet as "the daughter of somebody" (21). This information is limited but it proves to be of great significance to Emma. The certainty of Mr Martin's class status implies that he has no place within the fiction Emma is creating. In contrast, the uncertainty of Harriet's origins allow Emma to exercise her powers as both a narrator and a reader in that it allows her to put her understanding of the conventions of romantic fiction into practice. In this capacity she chooses to deem Harriet a "gentleman's daughter" (28). This title assists her in facilitating an illusion which makes opportunities for self-improvement and social mobility possible for Harriet. Emma believes that Harriet can enact this particular role provided she is effectively able to comply with the characteristics of this persona. The issue with this belief, of course, is that social mobility cannot be achieved by merely portraying the role of a "gentleman's daughter" (28). Nor are

class boundaries as easily dissolved and reconciled as they are in the fiction which Emma has internalised. Hence, another irony is at play here as Harriet's foolery, once again, maps onto the deficiencies of Emma's skills as a narrator and reader.

By the end of the novel, Emma's failed attempts to matchmake Harriet with a suitor who is above her rank cause her to come to a realisation after she learns the truth about Harriet's parentage. In coming to this realisation, Emma abandons her roles as a narrator and reader:

> Harriet's parentage became known. She proved to be the daughter of a tradesman[...] —Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for!— It was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman: but what a connection had she been preparing for Mr Knightley— or for the Churchills— or even for Mr Elton!— The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed.
> […]
> Harriet, necessarily drawn by her engagements with the Martins, was less and less at Hartfield; which was not to be regretted.— The intimacy between her and Harriet must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of goodwill; and, fortunately, what ought to be, and must be, seemed already beginning, and in the most gradual, natural manner. (436-437)

In this passage, the narrator is granted a rare opportunity to observe Emma's character without being undermined by the trickery of Emma's eloquent dialogue. Emma now seems to be contemplating the narrator's words, inevitably turning them into her own. Her knowledge of Harriet's true parentage brings this process into effect as it prompts her to realise the severity of her errors in both her literary roles. As I have established, her offence as a reader is that she reads texts at a purely sentimental and superficial level. The consequences of this, as she realises here, is that it obscures her skills as a narrator, causing her to formulate narratives which are idealistic. Had the novel's plot allowed Harriet to end up with any one of the potential love matches Emma attempts to make for her, Emma would have continued to read and narrate in this way. This would have caused her to continue believing the illusion

that her speech, actions and thoughts are those of a woman in her "most natural state" (Kirkham 41).

Hence, by recognising Harriet's "stain of illegitimacy" (437), Emma realises the nature of her foolery and begins to enact the speech, thoughts and actions that the narrator has encouraged as opposed to the ones she has gleaned from her reading of romantic fiction. For this enactment to be complete— as Emma acknowledges— she must rid herself of Harriet's influence which has unconsciously been at the centre of her misreadings. By doing so, Emma rises above the artificialities of her class identity, showing potential for true intellectual growth, particularly in her role as a reader. Furthermore, the way in which her voice merges with that of the narrator creates a unity which provides her with the authentic narrator's voice as well as the reader's endorsement which she has been searching for throughout the novel.

1.3 The Sentimentality of Frank Churchill and the Foolery of Words

Emma's re-evaluation of Harriet's status and, subsequently her realisation of her own foolery, are aided by her choice of suitor at the end of the novel. Throughout the novel, the inaccuracies of Emma's role as a reader cause her to direct Harriet's desires to the figure of the sentimental man, the archetypal hero of romantic fiction. Emma is so entranced by this figure that at a certain point in the novel she attempts to revise her narrative in order to conceive a heroine role for herself. This action is prompted by the arrival of Frank Churchill, "one of the boasts of Highbury" (16), who plays the sentimental male impeccably.

When Frank Churchill's visit to Highbury is first announced, Emma debates the merits of his character with Mr Knightley, her eventual suitor, who is less than impressed with his credentials. Emma believes that he has the ability to "adapt his conversation to the taste of every body" (135) and be "universally agreeable" (135). Mr Knightley, on the other hand, believes him to be "a very weak young man" (133)

who is merely "a chattering coxcomb" (135). Interestingly, in her analysis of the novel, Gabriela Castellanos merges together both these perspectives of Frank Churchill's character. She claims Frank Churchill is one of the novel's clowns who is "aware of his roles and [plays] them with gusto" (181). In this case, he is unlike the other characters in *Emma*, each of whom "thinks he/she is acting in the most serious manner possible, doing his/her best to uphold a static official ideology" (Castellanos 181). Within the following passage, Frank Churchill certainly proves to be adept at playing two contrasting roles:

> Their subjects in general were such as belong to an opening acquaintance. On his side were the inquiries,— Was she a horsewoman?— Pleasant rides?— pleasant walks?— Had they a large neighbourhood?— Highbury, perhaps, afforded society enough?— There were several very pretty houses in and about.— Balls-had they balls?— Was it a musical society?' (173-174)

This passage is a particularly interesting one because it presents another instance where the narrator refracts a character's dialogue, manipulating it to suit her purposes. Simultaneously, it provides another opportunity for Emma to attempt to command the narrator's role, eliciting a further conflict with the novel's true narrator. Both these voices filter through here as Frank Churchill's questions accumulate and increase in intensity. The narrator has a similar opinion to Mr Knightley. For her, these questions indicate Frank Churchill's desperate need for attention and a desire to make himself appear more wise and worldly than he actually is.

In contrast, for Emma, the way in which these questions address the artistic attributes of Highbury, such as its status as a "musical society" (174), makes them symbolic of Frank Churchill's keen interest in the arts and his desire to learn how to fit in with Highbury society. This perception of his character makes Frank Churchill ideally suited to the romantic fantasies of Emma's narrative. On one hand, the vulnerable sentiment of these questions provides Emma with an opportunity to manipulate another person into playing a particular role in her narrative. On the other, she gains a

companion who has similar interests to her. Furthermore, he clearly is capable of using his words to indulge her need for attention and flattery.

Interestingly, Frank Churchill shares a number of commonalities with Emma as a reader, yet he appears more successful at exercising his particular skills. To elaborate on this, it is useful to refer to Joseph Litvak's essay "Reading Characters: Self, Society, and text in Emma" which refers to Frank Churchill as a "master reader" (765). Litvak directs us to Frank Churchill's strengths as a reader. Firstly, as Mr Knightley observes, he is able to "read everybody's character" (135). Secondly, in putting these readings into effect, he is able to play with his language in a manner which corresponds to the linguistic habits of all the novel's characters, be it the presumably "wise" and eloquent Emma or the foolish and awkward Harriet. In carnivalesque terms, he wears a mask which is "multiform" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 40) in nature. Such a mask "contains the playful elements of life" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 40) which allow him to play each role with "gusto" (Castellanos 181).

Frank Churchill's skills as a "master reader" (Litvak 765) are most evident in his interactions with Emma, where we see him comply almost precisely with the role of the sentimental male. The key to his success in this role lies with his musical talents. Throughout the novel constant allusions are made to these talents. In one scene, for instance, he performs a duet with Emma. After this performance, he is praised for "having a delightful voice, and a perfect knowledge of music" (205). In a later scene he coaches Jane Fairfax, his eventual fiancée, in playing her new grand pianoforte. While coaching her, he speaks to Emma about Irish music, most notably a melody called *Robin Adair* which was written by Lady Caroline Keppel, the "second daughter of the Earl of Albermale" (Adair Fitz Gerald 19) as a dedication to Robin Adair, her lost love. Of interest in this melody are the following lyrics which contain certain details which we find in Frank Churchill's dialogue:

Where all the joy and mirth

Made this town heaven on earth
Oh they're all fled with thee
Robin Adair
What made th' assembly shine
Robin Adair
What made the ball sae fine
Robin Adair
What when the play was o'er
What made my heart so sore
Oh, it was parting with Robin Adair (Keppel n.p.)

Keppel's emphasis on artistic leisure activities such as going to balls and watching plays is manifested in Frank Churchill's own interest in these activities which are highlighted in the previous passage. Conversely, her detailing of how Robin Adair made her town "heaven on earth" (n.p.) is subtly replicated in Frank Churchill's appraisal of Highbury in the following passage which he expresses to Emma and Mrs Weston who are taking him on a tour of the town:

> He was delighted with every thing; admired Hartfield sufficiently for Mr Woodhouse's ear; and when their going farther was resolved on, confessed his wish to be made acquainted with the whole village, and found matter of commendation and interest much oftener than Emma could have supposed. (179)

As with the previous passage, the narrator once again refracts Frank Churchill's dialogue, setting up a further conflict between her and Emma's respective voices. The manner in which the narrator encapsulates Frank Churchill's speech without the colourful eccentricities that we imagine would accompany it pinpoints the meaninglessness and frivolity of his words. She sees him as merely indulging in language for the sake of enacting the particular role he is required to adopt in this setting. Emma, on the contrary, perceives his words as possessing the same poeticism she would identify in a reading of the lyrics of *Robin Adair*. For her, the "commendation and interest" (179) that Frank Churchill takes in Highbury is very much a gesture to Keppel's town as "heaven on earth" (n.p.).

If Frank Churchill's words here do indeed possess a similar sentiment to Keppel's then his interpretation of *Robin Adair*, as well as the way in which he uses the melody's lyrics to play the sentimental male, is exceptional. This is because he possesses sensitivity to the language of texts (in this case, musical texts) which Emma lacks in comparison. As Emma's analysis of Mr Elton's charade demonstrates, her engagement with language is superficial. In contrast, Frank Churchill not only knows how to accurately interpret language but also how to expand on it and use it to his advantage. His genius lies in his ability to borrow and manipulate this language so that it seems like his own, making himself perfectly suited for the role Emma has conceptualised for him. From this perspective, Frank Churchill's skill as a "master reader" (Litvak 765) of people is, most certainly, informed by his ability to be a "master reader" (Litvak 765) of texts.

However, Frank Churchill's "multiform mask" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 40) begins to slip when the pretences of his language do little to excuse the actions he undertakes as the novel develops. At first, his offences are minor as he embarks on a trip to London with the sole intention of getting a haircut. Though Emma is willing to forgive the ridiculousness of this endeavour as she claims "silly things do cease to be silly if they are done by sensible people in an imprudent way" (192), she is less forgiving when, in a later scene, she observes his language more closely while conversing with him and Harriet:

> She had never seen Frank Churchill so silent and stupid. He said nothing worth hearing — looked without seeing — admired without intelligence — listened without knowing what she said. While he was so dull, it was no wonder that Harriet should be dull likewise, and they were both insufferable. (333)

Though Emma's thoughts are, once again, refracted by the narrator, "dull" (333) and "insufferable" (333) are words that belong distinctly to Emma's dialogue. This is essentially the moment where she begins to recognise the narrator's warnings, noting that Frank Churchill has little substance beyond his abilities as a "master reader"

(Litvak 765). This observation parallels the one we find in Wollstonecraft's grievances towards sentimental manhood which claim that such a man is unable to think and reason effectively. In the context of the novel, Frank Churchill is adept at reasoning out how to play his roles to the satisfaction of his 'audience'. However when he drops his mask as he does in this scene, we see a man who, despite his charms, is merely an actor whose thoughts are rarely his own.

For Emma, this realisation also brings her own idealisation of the sentimental male of romantic fiction into question. Her disillusionment with both Frank Churchill and this narrative figure are cemented at the end of the novel where it is revealed that Frank Churchill has been secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax all along. The disapproval and scrutiny that accompanies the manner in which this engagement has been conducted causes Emma to realise that, though Frank Churchill is romantic, he is also foolish and impulsive. As she maps these characteristics onto the 'heroic' figure in her romantic fiction, she begins to understand the frivolity of her readings up until this point in the novel. As a result, she begins to abandon her love for romantic fiction. Instead she embarks on a courtship with a man whose ability to think rationally, independently and progressively surpasses an ability to be a "master reader" (Litvak 765) who merely borrows and manipulates language to suit his purposes.

1.4 Mr Knightley, the Rational Man

The rational, independent and progressive thinker who ends up being Emma's suitor at the end of the novel is not at all a "[man] of feeling" (Johnson 6). Litvak establishes that, like Frank Churchill, Mr Knightley is a "master reader" (765). However, he utilises this skill in a manner which differs in motivation and execution to that of his opponent. As Litvak further points out, "if *Emma*, as many critics have noted, is a detective novel, then Knightley, even more than Emma herself, aspires to the role of chief detective" (765). If Mr Knightley is indeed the "chief detective" (Litvak 765) of the novel then his skills in this role are as admirable as Frank

Churchill's initially appear to be. Not only is Mr Knightley the only character who is able to see past the pretences of Frank Churchill's "multiform mask" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 40), he is also the only one who is able to foresee the failure of Emma's matchmaking endeavours and the impending doom of her friendship with Harriet. More than this, he is the only character who identifies the deficiencies of Emma's reading habits. In a conversation with Mrs Weston, he criticises Emma's efforts to develop Harriet's reading habits, identifying that Emma herself is not as well- read as she appears to be:

> "Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing-up at various times, of books that she meant to read regularly through— and very good lists they were, very well chosen, and very neatly arranged —sometimes alphabetically, and sometimes by some other rule. The list she drew up when only fourteen—I remember thinking it did her judgement so much credit, that I preserved it some time, and I dare say she may have made out a very good list now. But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding. Where Miss Taylor failed to stimulate, I may safely affirm that Harriet Smith will do nothing. You never could persuade half so much as she wished. You could not." (34)

In this passage, Mr Knightley employs the same mocking tone as the narrator as he provides us with evidence that substantiates the narrator's observations concerning Emma's character. Her endeavour to draw up lists of books that "she [means] to read" (34) and the fact that these lists are "well chosen and very neatly arranged" (34) certainly suggest that she is a woman who is capable of engaging with literary texts beyond the superficiality associated with romantic fiction and, as Mr Knightley stipulates, a woman who is able to exercise "[credible] judgement" (34). However, when he goes on to note that he is "done expecting any course of steady reading from Emma" (34), Mr Knightley identifies that though Emma has the practical credentials we come to associate with a 'good' reader, she lacks the "industry and patience" (34) to evolve her readership beyond these credentials.

If we, using Mr Knightley's method of interrogation, associate his claims here with Emma's efforts to interpret Mr Elton's charade in the passage I referred to earlier, we find that the narrator is correct in suggesting that she is incapable of fully and accurately undertaking the sensitive and insightful reading she believes she is applying. In this case, the correlation between Mr Knightley's words and those of the narrator implies that he is the character in the novel who validates our trust in the narrator, guiding us into accepting her observations and judgments as opposed to those of Emma.

Mr Knightley's correspondence with the narrator and, therefore, the fact that he is perhaps the only rational thinker in *Emma* certainly make him an ideal suitor for Emma. It is, after all, through his guidance that she comes to recognise the accuracy of the narrator's words through the manner in which he identifies the various lapses in judgement she makes in assessing the other characters in the novel. However, Emma is not the only character at the end of the novel who undergoes a process of "becoming, change and renewal" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10) as she learns to engage with the narrator's voice as well as the voices of those around her. Mr Knightley himself submits to a similar process as his emerging feelings for Emma cause him to question his own behaviour. This progression is made most explicit in the scene where he proposes to Emma, confessing his faults as he does so:

> 'Frank Churchill is, indeed, the favourite of fortune. [...]He has only to speak.—His friends are eager to promote his happiness.— He has used everybody ill— and they are all delighted to forgive him, — He is a fortunate man indeed!'
> 'You speak as if you envied him.'
> 'And I do envy him, Emma. In one respect he is the object of my envy.'
> [...]
> 'You will not ask me what is the point of envy.—You are determined, I see, to have no curiosity. —You are wise—but *I* cannot be wise. Emma, I must tell you what you will not ask, though I may wish it unsaid the next moment.'
> [...]
> Emma could not bear to give him pain. He was wishing to confide in her—perhaps to consult her; —cost her what it would, she would listen. She might assist his resolution, or reconcile him to it; [...] or, by representing to him his

> own independence, relieve him from that state of indecision, which must be more than any alternative to such a mind as his.'
> [...]
> 'I cannot make grand speeches Emma:' —he soon resumed; and in a tone of such sincere, decided, intelligible tenderness as was tolerably convincing. — 'If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am. —You hear nothing but truth from me.— I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it.— Bear with the truths I would tell you now, dearest Emma, as you have borne with them. The manner, perhaps, may have as little to recommend them. G-d knows, I have been a very indifferent lover—But you understand me.— Yes, you see, you understand my feelings —and will return them if you can [...]'. (388-390)

Stepping outside of the role of the "master reader" (Litvak 765) of Emma and the other characters in the novel, in this scene Mr Knightley proves his skill as a rational thinker by turning his method of interrogation on to himself. When he tells Emma "You are wise —but *I* cannot be wise" (388), his emphasis on the "*I*" in this statement subverts his and Emma's initial roles. Here it is she who becomes the "master reader" (Litvak 765) of Mr Knightley's character, while he becomes the 'fool'. Emma is the "master reader" (Litvak 765) because she has correctly interpreted Mr Knightley's true motivation behind his dislike of Frank Churchill, identifying that though he is skilled at reading other people, he is not as skilled at reading his own character. Therefore, when Emma, through the narrator's voice, observes that she must "assist his resolution, or reconcile him to it" (388) and "relieve [his] state of indecision" (389), she realises that it is she who must now assist Mr Knightley in reading his character just as he has assisted her in this endeavour. Because of his influence, the kind of reader Emma is now is not the one who lives by the social and moral codes of romantic fiction. Rather, she is now able to think, read and act from a rational perspective, subverting the narrator's perceptions of her. In doing so, she is now able to accurately decode and 'reason out' Mr Knightley's foolery.

Hence, when Mr Knightley states "I cannot make grand speeches" (389) he claims that, unlike Frank Churchill, he will not resort to making romantic gestures that will obscure her reading of his character. Instead, in his capacity as a rational thinker, he will allow himself to be subjected to the same scrutiny under which he has placed Emma. By doing so, he expresses his willingness (in abiding by Wollstonecraft's outline of rational masculinity) to be progressive in his nature. Therefore, the manner in which Emma now heeds the words of Mr Knightley and the narrator, as well as her newfound skills as a "master reader" (Litvak 765), provide her with the knowledge and agency to facilitate Mr Knightley's own process of "change and renewal" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10).

1.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated that the nature of reading, as it is represented in *Emma*, is complex and multi-faceted. As we read the novel, our perceptions of each of the characters' skills as readers is constantly challenged by their heteroglossic interrelation with the novel's narrator and their interactions with one another.

In our process of interpreting the characters' reading habits, we find that their readerly values echo the gender philosophies Mary Wollstonecraft writes of in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. We find that the readerly behaviour of the novel's protagonist, Emma Woodhouse in particular, maps itself onto Wollstonecraft's writings on the nature of class in relation to social and intellectual education. Emma evolves from a superficial reader who is influenced significantly by her "artificial upbringing" (Kirkham 41) to one who is able to read from a natural, rationally minded perspective. As she does so, she and the other characters in the novel echo the narrator's sentiments that to obtain authentic and rational skills as a reader, one must disregard romanticised stereotypes of gender and class.

The underlying presence of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindications of the Rights of Men* in *Emma* creates a carnivalesque tension between the characters where we see their perceptions of 'wise' and 'foolish' methods of reading challenged as they develop throughout the novel. In doing so, Austen fuels her novel with the constant presence of social heteroglossia which consistently plays with different ways of interpreting the characters' strengths and flaws as readers.

2. **"IT WASN'T HAMLET. IT WAS THAT POLONIUS GUY": READING POPULAR CULTURE IN *EMMA* AND *CLUELESS***

In a featurette for the DVD edition of her 1995 mainstream youth film *Clueless*, writer/ director Amy Heckerling claims that, though she was initially unaware of it, she found herself mapping the film's narrative onto Jane Austen's 1816 novel *Emma*. Indeed, the plot structure of *Clueless* follows that of *Emma* so closely that, as David Monaghan claims, "any reader of *Emma* who begins to look closely at *Clueless* will find that it is full of allusions to the novel" (214).

For readers who approach the film as Austen purists, this association is problematic because it appears to present a cheapened and vulgar variation on the original text. This is particularly because the conventions of the contemporary youth film genre require that the context and plot details of the novel be reconceptualised to suit the demands of the film's teenage audience. Heckerling replaces the small close-knit community of Highbury that is central to the novel with a bustling 1990s Los Angeles metropolis that is inhabited by privileged and media-obsessed teenagers who attend an elite private high school. She also transforms Austen's Emma, who appears to be an intelligent and independent-minded young woman, into a frivolous teenage girl whose identity is almost entirely constructed by the influence of media tropes. These details appear to be so far removed from the original text that Austen purists are probably relieved that Heckerling chose not to acknowledge *Clueless* as an adaptation of *Emma* in the film's credits.

The irony of this disapproving response to *Clueless* is that it parallels many nineteenth-century readers initial reactions to *Emma* when it was first published. Sir Walter Scott's review of the novel, which appeared in an 1816 edition of the *Quarterly Review*, gives us an idea of what this reaction may have been. Scott implies that he views Austen as being "an author of distinction" (Kirkham 75) and that her work is somewhat unique. However, Kirkham notes that this review concludes that,

through *Emma* Austen "teaches a 'doctrine of selfishness' and 'calculating prudence' which the 'youth [...]' does not need to be taught" (76). Just as the Austen purist protests that *Clueless* disrespects the literary values of Austen's work, Scott's statement here suggests that this work was considered to be disrespectful to the social and moral codes which were recognised during its period of publication. In this context, *Emma* itself was a novel that was considered a vulgar piece of literature, perhaps even an 'insult' to the work which was categorized as canonical within Austen's period.

In their dismissal of *Clueless*, Austen purists also crucially neglect to acknowledge that popular culture plays an instrumental role in Austen's fiction. *Northanger Abbey*, for example, famously critiques the reception of gothic fiction, and the novel in general, as an escapist and (to use James Watt's term) "immature" (10) alternative to respected canonical literature. In *Emma* we see this attitude towards the fiction genre reflected in Emma's interest in romantic fiction and Harriet Smith's preference for reading Gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*. In the novel there are also references to the popular music of Austen's era (Frank Churchill's conversations about Irish music, most notably *Robin Adair*), as well as the popular school literary guides of this period (*The Elegant Extracts*).

Again the irony here is that the popular culture references in the novel are not ones that we see in the same light today. For example Radcliffe's work, like Austen's, has now gained canonical status and the popular texts of our contemporary period are often met with the same scepticism. This changing definition of what we deem to be popular culture suggests that it is located on a continuum where its identity and values are consistently renegotiated.

In *Clueless*, the dynamics of this popular culture continuum become central to our viewing as the film "works not only from Jane Austen but from a multiplicity of printed, filmic and musical texts" (Harris 64). These texts range from those of both

past and present eras and each has a different status within the hierarchy of popular culture. Yet, in its capacity as a film which forms part of present popular culture, *Clueless* brings past popular culture texts into the present, making them part of our contemporary popular culture. Austen, her predecessors and her successors share the same literary status in this film, allowing Heckerling to question and revise the means by which we distinguish canonical texts from popular ones.

This act of questioning the values of canonicity is, of course, one we find in Austen's work itself. Most famously in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen briefly breaks away from the novel's narrative to evaluate the popular novels of her era in relation to the work of "Milton, Pope and Prior" (44), the canonical literary figures of her era. In her assessment, she concludes that the work of these figures "no longer concern[s] any one living and [that] their language too [is] frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it" (*Northanger Abbey* 44). In contrast, popular novels provide "the liveliest effusions of with wit and humour [which] are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language" (*Northanger Abbey* 44).

In *Clueless* we find a similar appraisal of popular culture, leading Nora Nachumi to deduce that of all the filmic adaptations of Austen's work, it is (much to the purist reader's surprise) the film which "[...] remains most faithful to Austen's spirit of pop-cultural critique" (130). Of course, the characteristics of the contemporary youth film genre imply that we experience this critique in a very different way to the eloquent literary commentaries we find in Austen's novels. *Clueless* is primarily targeted at "unknowing" youth audiences and, therefore, the film asks us to neglect our role as "knowing" readers of *Emma* and, to an extent, abandon the "cultural memory"(Ellis cited in Hutcheon 122) we bring to our reading of Austen's texts. By making us adopt the gaze of the "unknowing" viewer who is unfamiliar with Austen's work, the film prompts us to experience *Emma* and, by extension, Austen's other novels in their original "pop cultural" (Nachumi 130) modality, unrestricted by their present canonical values. As I will argue in this chapter, this "unknowing" viewing

experience leads us to question and revise Austen's "pop-cultural critique" (Nachumi 130) on two levels. On the first, it urges us to consider what Austen's work has to say about our own sensibilities as readers, particularly in relation to the way we differentiate canonical texts from popular ones. On the second, it brings into question the values Austen would expect us to adopt in reading her novels as popular culture texts.

In considering these questions, I will, firstly, focus on Cher, the film's protagonist and our "trusty" narrator, who considers herself (like us) to be an intelligent, distinguished and privileged reader. Like the protagonist of *Emma*, Cher indulges in matchmaking schemes, unaware that her efforts are completely misguided. As we know from our reading of *Emma*, the root of Emma's own "cluelessness" lies with her interest in romantic fiction which she often mistakenly maps onto her social reality. Cher similarly bases her knowledge of romance on the media texts she has "read" (or, for the most part, listened to and watched). The fun of watching *Clueless*, as with reading the novel, relies on our knowledge that Cher is completely unaware of how her preoccupation with media tropes influences both her matchmaking schemes and her view of the world. On another level, it also relies on our amusement as we watch Cher consistently try to prove herself as an esteemed reader but (to an even further extent than Emma) fail dismally in her efforts. As I will argue, *Clueless* cleverly uses Cher's literary "cluelessness" to bring into question our own values as 'privileged' readers, echoing Austen's thoughts on popular culture as it cheekily plays with the way in which canonical literature and popular culture texts intersect.

Following this, I will consider how some of the film's secondary characters bring to light particular approaches to reading an Austen text within a popular culture modality. Each character in the film presents a particular youth sub-culture, each of which is linked to a certain mode of reading. Though most of the characters in *Clueless* are never seen reading a literary text, there are brief scenes which give us an indication of what kind of readers these characters are. In mapping the reading

methods of the film's most distinctive readers, I will highlight how the film questions (and perhaps, even provides answers to) the problems we face in reading Austen's work as popular literature.

2.1 The 'High' and 'Low' Culture Conflict in *Clueless*

Mikita Hoy's essay "Bakhtin and Popular Culture" provides a framework through which to consider the conflict which occurs as *Clueless* plays with our definitions of canonical literature and popular culture. In appropriating Bakhtin's work on dialogism within a contemporary context, Hoy uses the terms "high culture" and "low culture" to distinguish canonical from popular texts. Hoy identifies our attitudes towards these two forms of culture as he refers to "high culture" as "good writing" (765), in contrast to "low culture" which he calls "nonliterature" (765).

Though high culture and low culture texts appear to be categorically differentiated from one another, Hoy reminds us of Bakhtin's assertion that, no matter how different their characteristics, texts, each of which represent particular languages of heteroglossia, will inevitably intersect with one another. Hence, when high culture and low culture texts intersect, they are dismantled and matched with discourses from which they are traditionally distanced. The dialogue which is created between the high culture "canonical literary system and the [low culture] generic languages of various subcultures" (Hoy 773) creates a double-parody. On one hand, it parodies the 'vulgar' "nonliterature" (Hoy 765) conventions of low culture. On the other, the conventions of the high culture literary tradition themselves are ridiculed. Within the novel form, Bakhtin refers to this amalgamated discourse as heteroglottal novelisation, a term which indicates that this discourse is, in fact, "a parody [of] itself" (Hoy 773).

2.2 Redefining the Narrator's Voice and the Problem of Defining Low Culture

In *Clueless*, heteroglottal novelisation occurs, most importantly, through the film's 'reimagining' of the narrator's role in *Emma*. Austen's use of free indirect discourse, which creates an ironic relationship between the narrator and character, is one of the most distinguishing features of her prose. Because of this, it is perhaps one of the most crucial concerns in mapping our "knowing" response onto the film. In our reading of *Emma* as a high culture text we delight in the 'superior' narrator's constant judgements of Emma and how these judgements draw our attention to the influence of low culture romantic fiction on Emma's idealised view of the world. We equally enjoy Emma's own efforts to gain control of the narrative as she attempts to defend and find truth in this romantic fiction. In dismantling and reconfiguring the narrator's voice to suit her low culture reading of *Emma* in *Clueless*, Heckerling, to some extent, performs a role reversal as she allows Cher to assume control of the narrative. The action of the film is informed by Cher's "oh-so literal [voice-over] narration" (Nachumi 136) which provides us with insight into how she interprets her social universe and her place within it. We come to learn that these insights are misguided through the film's visuals which substitute for the absence of the 'superior' omniscient narrator.

The tension between Cher's voice-over and the visual 'narrator' is recognised from the outset as the film's opening sequence dismantles the novel's opening lines in which the narrator (or is that Emma?) describes our heroine as being "handsome, clever and rich" (5) but disadvantaged by her tendency to "think a little too well of herself"(5). The film replaces these words with the visuals of what Cher calls a "Noxema commercial" (1).[4] We see Cher and her friends partying and shopping in

[4] The final shooting script for *Clueless* has not been published and is not available online. I will be referencing the first draft of the film's screenplay which contains most of the scenes which I discuss in this chapter. In instances where the scenes I reference are not present in this version of the screenplay, I will work from my own transcriptions that I compiled while watching the film. References which are without pagination are from my own transcript.

various Beverley Hills locations while Kim Wilde's *Kids in America* plays on the film's soundtrack. As the sequence comes to an end, Cher states "So OK you're probably thinking, 'Is this, like a Noxema commercial, or what?!". With these words, Cher attempts to 'cleverly' configure a high culture critique of low culture in a language which is familiar to the "unknowing" youthful viewer. In presenting this critique, Cher has us believing that, though she speaks the language of generic youth subculture (Hoy 773), she is able to distance herself from low culture media and the values it promotes. In doing so, she has us believe that she possesses the skills of a smart and observant social critic, much like the skills that Emma believes herself to possess. However, in the film's next scene, we see Cher using a computer screen to co-ordinate her fashion choice for the day (Nachumi 136). As she does this, her voice-over tries to make her morning routine sound mundane in an effort to prove to us that she has "a way normal life for a teenage girl". The irony of this, of course, is that Cher's approach to choosing her clothes and her wardrobe (which is comprised of a multitude of designer labels) suggests that her world is hyperbolic. She is clearly very much part of the low culture universe she claims to be disassociated from.

Just as *Emma*'s Mr Knightley's claims that he is "done [...] expecting any course of steady reading from Emma" (34), we are done expecting any form of authentic high culture critiques from Cher. The visual image of her morning routine stays with us throughout *Clueless* and is complemented by other visual scenes which enforce the irony of her so-called "intellectual" sensibilities. One such scene, as Nachumi points out, occurs when Cher, after being unsuccessful in her efforts to get her debate teacher to give her a higher grade, states in her voice-over that, to deal with her "grief", she needs "a quiet place to relax" (136). This remark is promptly followed by a shot of a shopping mall, accompanied by a grand musical score. Clearly, as this image reiterates, Cher is more concerned with shopping and clothes than she is with bettering herself intellectually. The "intellectualism" of Cher's social critiques, in this regard, continue to enforce the visual narrator's perception of her. In one scene, for instance, she observes her African-American best friend Dionne arguing with her

boyfriend, Murray. Her voice-over points out that they must have seen the "Ike and Tina Turner movie one too many times", using her low culture knowledge to support her belief that Ike and Tina Turner's abusive marriage is symbolic of the nature of all African-American relationships. Cher, however, is in her most "clueless" state when she attempts to engage with canonical texts.

Interestingly, "unknowing" viewers who have never read the canonical works mentioned throughout the film are as aware of Cher's literary "cluelessness" as the "knowing" readers of these works are. Though they may not know much about William Shakespeare, they are certainly 'in on the joke' when Cher claims that the Shakespearean sonnet *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day* is a "famous quote" (18) from "CliffsNotes" (18). They are equally aware of Cher's literary folly when, in a later scene, she conflates Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with its filmic adaptation as she debates with Heather, the girlfriend of her step-brother Josh, about whether Hamlet spoke the line "To Thineself be True". Cher believes that "it wasn't Hamlet" (70) but "that Polonius guy" who spoke this line. This is correct, but the irony here is that, much to the amusement of both "knowing" and "unknowing" viewers, Cher only knows this because she watched the Mel Gibson film adaptation of *Hamlet*. The "unknowing" viewers of *Clueless* are even able to identify the more obscure errors Cher makes in her literary knowledge. In one scene, for instance, she misquotes Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* when she says "tis a far, far better thing doing stuff for other people" (61). Again, "unknowing" viewers might have no knowledge of the quoted text or its author. However, they are aware that Cher is quoting a canonical text and that, in relating it to her "generic" (Hoy 773) language, she has failed to do so accurately.

"Unknowing" viewers are able to recognise and engage with the errors in Cher's literary references because, by making these errors, she is turning "high culture into low [culture]" (Harris 65). These texts essentially become parodies of their high culture status as, through Cher's words, they take on the same low culture

sensibilities as the "Noxema commercial" (1) and the other media references in the film. As a result, "unknowing" viewers are able to recognise these texts as part of their contemporary culture as opposed to ones that are completely distanced from it. In our capacity as "knowing" viewers, Cher's 'reinvention' of these high culture canonical texts within a low culture modality implies that our own sensibilities as readers are, in fact, part of this parody. Therefore, we also form part of the film's heteroglottal novelisation. As with Austen's work, we consider the work of Shakespeare and Dickens to be part of the literary canon. Yet, in applying our high culture readings to these canonical texts, we fail to realise that we attach values to them which were not at all associated with the low culture status they occupied when they were first published. Perhaps then, Cher's literary errors reflect on our own. Perhaps our efforts to turn low culture into high culture make us guilty of the same kind of textual misreadings that we associate with Cher.

Cher draws us further into the film's heteroglottal novelisation when she falls for Christian, one of her smooth-talking classmates. Prior to the scene where Christian is introduced to us, Cher provides another one of her pseudo-intellectual low culture critiques as her voice-over discusses the fashion sense of high-school boys. Though she claims that she does not want to be "a traitor to [her] generation" (75), she looks on with disgust at boys who wear "backwards caps"(74) and "baggy jeans", concluding that "searching for a boy in high-school is like searching for meaning in a Pauley Shore movie". Unlike these unkempt high-school boys, Christian is a well dressed and well groomed, bearing a distinct resemblance to the 1950s film star James Dean. We instantly recognise that Christian's counterpart in *Emma* is Frank Churchill because his classic film star look in itself is one that, within Cher's world, is "universally agreeable" (135). Like Frank Churchill, Christian takes a keen interest in music and other art forms. Because of *Clueless*'s characteristics as a youth film, we would expect his artistic tastes to echo those of the film's youth audience. Instead, however, his interests extend primarily to the popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s. The film constantly draws our attention to Christian's fanatical interest in this period.

Besides his James Dean-like fashion sense, he is also seen reading William S.Burrogh's *Junky*, a 1953 autobiographical novel that details Burrough's experiences as a drug addict, and listening to the music of 1950s singer Billie Holiday. As Cher notes, he also has a "thing" (91) for film star Tony Curtis.

What differentiates Christian most from Cher's image of dishevelled high-school boys is the way in which he emulates the Rat Pack's "linguistic practices" (Monaghan 216). Christian refers to a house as a "nice pile of bricks" (80), says "I dig" (80) as opposed to "I understand", and refers to Cher as either "duchess" (79), "doll face" or "honey". During the period of the Rat Pack's popularity, this vocabulary was most probably considered to be a vulgar and ridiculous manifestation of low culture. Had we occupied the role of high culture readers in the 1950s and 1960s, we would most likely have perceived this vocabulary and the low culture signifiers which complement it, with the same dismissive attitude that we attach to the low culture signifiers of Cher's social universe. Yet, within our contemporary context, our attitude towards this past era, which Christian represents, is somewhat similar to Cher's. Throughout her "courtship" of Christian, Cher associates him with the same god-like status she would attach to a Hollywood celebrity. She sees him as someone who, to an extent, is part of her low culture universe. However, because he speaks a language which is far removed from this present era, Cher, our "trusted" social critic, believes him to have a degree of credibility lacking in her peers. We too view this past Rat Pack era as one which is part of a low culture continuum. Yet, because its current identity is rooted in the past, we believe it to have a significantly higher status within the low culture hierarchy.

Though we, along with Cher, are confident in our understanding of the low culture hierarchy, this perception is called into question after Christian's homosexuality is revealed. Just as Emma's admiration for Frank Churchill dissolves after she learns of his secret engagement to Jane Fairfax, Christian becomes significantly less attractive to Cher because of this development. As the nature of Cher and Christian's

relationship changes, so does the character of their dialogue. Cher's voice-over shifts from describing Christian as "the hottest guy" at a club, to deeming him her "favourite shopping partner". Simultaneously, Christian's "linguistic practices" (Monaghan 216) become compatible with the language of our present era. When, for instance, he needs Cher's opinion on a piece of clothing he has bought, he asks: "This jacket-is it James Dean or Jason Priestly?" The very mention of Jason Priestly, a television star from the 1990s youth soap-opera *Beverley Hills 90210*, alongside James Dean, dismantles the low culture hierarchy Cher has believed in up to this point in the film. James Dean and Jason Priestly appear to be on opposite sides of the popular culture spectrum. Yet, as Christian's use of savvy 1950s jargon shifts seamlessly into the 1990s language that we associate with the latter screen icon, we realise that there is in fact a sense of continuity between their pop-cultural identities. In terms of their style choices, Dean and Priestly are, after all, somewhat interchangeable in their preference for greased hair, sun glasses and leather jackets. Christian encompasses both icons, showing us how the past one is very much part of the present one.

For Cher, the recognition of this continuum implies that Christian is not as far removed from the low culture sensibilities of her peer group as she previously thought. For us, in contrast, it prompts a realisation that the past canonical texts we hold in such esteem are, in many ways, mapped onto the present low culture forms we consider to be vulgar and puerile. Perhaps our failure to recognise this implies that, as readers, we are not as "knowing" as we make ourselves out to be. For if we cannot comprehend how these canonical texts 'live' in the present, have we truly understood what we have read? Ironically, though they may have never read the canonical texts which are referenced in *Clueless*, "unknowing" viewers who readily embrace these texts within the low culture framework of the film appear to have a better understanding of them than we do. Perhaps then we, like Cher, are misguided in the way we negotiate our low culture hierarchy.

2.3 "Making over the Soul": Renegotiating Our Relationship to Low Culture

If canonical texts are, indeed, informed by low culture and are present within contemporary low culture, how do we then define our readerly relationship with them? Do we continue to occupy a position of privilege and reject these texts because we now see them as occupying the same "vulgar" values of present low culture? Or do we learn to experience these texts within this low culture modality?

The answer to this question is given to us towards the end of *Clueless* where Cher, now fully aware of her "cluelessness", decides to "makeover [her] soul". The decision to undergo this "soul makeover" is prompted when she realises that she has romantic feelings for Josh. In the context of *Emma*, Josh is clearly Mr Knightley's counterpart. As I indicated in my previous chapter, within the novel Mr Knightley is the "master reader" who endorses the narrator's perceptions of Emma as he constantly scrutinises Emma's matchmaking efforts and highlights the influence of romantic fiction in these endeavours. In *Clueless*, Josh similarily endorses the omniscient visual narrator's opinion of Cher as he constantly makes fun of her ignorance about greater societal issues. He himself, as Cher professes, is a "do-gooder" who takes an interest in environmental and human rights issues. He is also an avid watcher of CNN news broadcasts and reads the work of philosopher Frederick Nietzsche in his spare time. He is clearly a high culture reader, the polar opposite of Cher. Therefore, to impress him, Cher realises that she must renegotiate her high culture values which, up to now, have been a façade.

Try as she might, Cher is unsuccessful in her efforts to adopt Josh's intellectual values. Earlier in the film, for example, she fails at emulating his philosophical discourse by claiming that a *Renn and Stimpy* cartoon is "way existential". Later, as Cher and Josh watch a CNN news broadcast on the Bosnian war, Cher, trying desperately to take an interest, hesitantly asks "I thought they declared peace in the Middle East?" Even her efforts to appeal to Josh's charitable nature are slightly

misguided as she decides to donate her father's caviar and her athletic equipment to the victims of the "Pismo Beach Disaster", believing these items to have as much significance as food and clothing.

What Cher does gain from her "soul makeover", is a newfound appreciation for her friends, each of whom speak their own low culture language. In a brief scene she thinks back to "what makes someone a better person", realising that each of her friends is really great in different ways" (112). She observes that Christian "always likes things to be beautiful and interesting" and that Dionne and Murray are "[really] considerate of one another". Cher, like Emma, learns to listen to other voices (Schor 172). She steps down from the position of social and readerly privilege she previously believed herself to occupy in order to acknowledge, embrace and interact with the different forms of low culture these other characters represent. We see this more overtly in her acceptance of Travis, a marijuana smoking skateboarder who, as she suggests earlier in the film, "no respectable girl [would] actually date" (42). Cher shows us how her perception of Travis has changed when, firstly, she accepts his union with her protégé Tai (the film's counterpart for Harriet Smith) and, secondly, when she takes an interest in his skateboarding activities. After watching him impress the judges at an amateur skateboarding competition, she tells Tai "I had no idea he was so motivated" (117). By recognising Travis's attributes, Cher indicates she is now learning to find meaning within her low culture world as she begins to reconsider and interact with the languages of social heteroglossia which she previously rejected.

When related to the process of reading literature, Cher's newfound engagement with other low culture voices and cultures reminds us of the favourable perception of low culture literature which Austen presents to the reader of *Northanger Abbey*. Just as Austen suggests, Cher embarks on a journey where she begins to explore the "liveliest effusions of wit and humour" (*Northanger Abbey* 44) that exist within the low culture languages of her world. Perhaps then this is the attitude we too should

adopt as we renegotiate the way we read our newly defined low culture canonical texts. To do this, we, like Cher, must step out of the role of the "knowing" reader and, in doing so, approach these texts from a perspective that mirrors the one of the "unknowing" viewer. Essentially, we should read as if we are experiencing these texts for the first time, with no readerly prejudices or high culture expectations. In this way, we, like Cher, can undergo a 'makeover' of our *readerly* souls.

2.4 The "Clueless" Austenian reader: Interpreting the Low Culture of Austen texts

Austen's defence of low culture literature makes us question the values she would have expected us to bring to our reading her own work. As I mentioned earlier, the film's secondary characters each represent a particular method of reading, inviting us to consider how we might read Austen's texts if we were to divest them of their canonical status. In considering these characters' reading methods, we identify that they resemble those which are endorsed in Austen's novels. As with Austen's texts, we view the interpretive abilities of the film's characters primarily through the way in which they interpret their social world.

The first kind of reader identity we can locate in *Clueless* is exemplified by Travis. In the context of *Emma*, Travis's counterpart is Robert Martin who, as we know, is a simpleton whose literary education extends to reading "Agricultural Reports" (27) and, as Harriet puts it, performing "entertaining" (27) renditions of *The Elegant Extracts*. In the world of *Clueless*, Robert Martin's interest in agriculture is humorously replaced by Travis's enthusiastic marijuana smoking habit. In turn, his *Elegant Extracts* renditions are transformed into Travis's permanent role as the class clown. In performing this role, he constantly says (to use Cher's term) "bonehead things" (42) within a classroom setting purely for the benefit of his classmates' amusement. In doing so, Travis completely mocks the conventions of academic discourse. Travis is at the height of his comedic "powers" in the following scene

where he performs an unsolicited speech after being "awarded" for receiving the most 'tardies' (late arrivals) in class:

> I would like to say this. Tardiness is not something you can do on your own. Many, many people contributed to my tardiness. I would like to thank my parents for never giving me a ride to school, the LA city bus driver who took a chance on an unknown kid and last but not least, the wonderful crew from McDonalds who spend hours making those Egg McMuffins without which I'd never be tardy. (20)

In this speech, Travis parodies and dismantles academic discourse on two levels. On the first, he replaces the serious subject matter we would expect to find in a classroom speech with the humorous details of his everyday plight to get to school on time. On the second, he substitutes the high culture, conservative structure of this form of speech with the self-indulgent and overwrought format of the Oscar speech. Ironically, by doing this, Travis also parodies his own interest in low culture which he clearly believes is as ridiculous as academic discourse. Yet, despite this attitude towards both high culture and low culture, Travis still favours the latter. This is because, as he indicates in this speech, low culture is an essential tool in forming his comical social identity.

Travis is clearly not a character who would even attempt to read a canonical text. He would most likely associate such texts with their contemporary high culture framework, perceiving them as boring and irrelevant. In this regard, it is highly unlikely that his impression of an Austen text would be any different. If he were to read a text such as *Emma* with his low culture sensibilities, we would be right to suggest that he would do so with the same foolery that we imagine Robert Martin displays in his performance of the *Elegant Extracts*. He would probably dismantle the eloquent discourse of the novel entirely, transforming it into his own source of mockery, just as he does with the academic classroom speech.

Indeed, this is not the method of reading Austen would want us to adopt in reading her texts if we follow the method articulated in *Northanger Abbey's* defence of the novel form. She does praise low culture literature for its "wit and humour" (*Northanger Abbey* 44) and, therefore this is certainly a quality she would want us to recognise in her work. Yet, she would not want us to engage with this humour in an empty or dismissive way. To do so, as she indicates in *Northanger Abbey*, would be to devalue the "[great] powers" (44) of the novelist.

In contrast to Travis, Murray appears to exemplify a more complex method of reading. This is not initially obvious to us. The language Murray speaks is "Black Ghetto English" (Monaghan 216), implying that his experience as a reader is possibly as limited as Travis's. His vocabulary, for instance, does not appear to be particularly extensive. He uses words such as "jeepin" ('making out' at the back of a car) and phrases such as "it's the bomb!" (it's great!). Murray, however, takes us by surprise when in a brief moment he provides a well articulated critique of his own language. In response to Dionne's complaints that he consistently refers to her as "Woman" in a derogatory way, Murray states the following:

> Street slang is an increasingly valid form of expression. Most feminine pronouns do contain mocking but not necessarily misogynistic undertones. (40)

Murray's words here reveal that he is, in fact, a serious reader who is able to interpret low culture within a high culture framework. He is more successful at this endeavour than Cher is because, unlike her, he is actually well-versed in the social discourse he is deploying. Thus, he is able to link it effectively to his form of speech. Murray seems to be a reader who, unlike Travis, is not satisfied with seeing low culture as merely as a form of pleasure. For him, low culture has an academic subtext and this subtext needs to be addressed in order for us to truly engage with it.

Yet, in a later scene Murray acts against this 'wise' reader persona when he reveals to Cher that Christian is a homosexual. In this scene he refers to a number of different low culture media as he calls Christian a "disco-dancing, Oscar Wilde-reading, Streisand ticket-holding friend of Dorothy". Again, Murray 'reads' each of these media in relation to a particular social discourse, in this case, 'gay' popular culture. However, unlike his astute analysis of street slang, the form of "analysis" he applies to Christian's character is one that is merely based on stereotypes. Murray seems disinterested in examining 'gay' popular culture beyond his knowledge of its most stereotypical signifiers. In this case, though Murray is represented as a more intelligent character than Travis, his methods of reading are nonetheless similarly superficial.

Surprisingly, it is Josh's method of reading which comes closest to the method Austen's novels endorse and which would allow us to appreciate her work in its low culture modality. He is, perhaps, not the most obvious reader of low culture literature. He is very much immersed in high culture with his interest in current affairs and philosophical writing. His role as the "master reader" implies that he is antagonistic towards the low culture world which the other characters inhabit. The only moment where he shows any approval for low culture is when he tells Cher that former rapper and Calvin Klein underwear model Marky Mark may plant a tree for his charitable society. Other than this, his overall distaste in low culture makes him appear to be a reader who operates from the same position of 'privilege' and prejudice as we do.

However, as Josh's role in *Clueless* develops, his attitude (albeit subtly) begins to alter in favour of a more open relationship with low culture. In fact even when we are introduced to him, we see him secretly deriving pleasure from low culture language. In one scene, for instance, Josh and Cher debate over what to watch on television. Cher wants to watch MTV's adult cartoon *Beavis and Butthead*, while Josh wants to watch a CNN news report. Josh debates the merits of the news by stating "maybe not in contempo-casuals but in some parts of the world it's considered cool to know

what's going on in the world" (12). The term "contempo-casuals" (12) is one that we would ordinarily associate with Cher's "jargon" (Monaghan 216). Despite its status as a low culture colloquial term, if Cher were to use "contempo-casual" (12) in a sentence, it would most likely come across as a sophisticated term. The sarcastic manner in which Josh references this term here, however, strips it of any high culture credibility it may appear to possess. In this case, he is essentially parodying both its low culture form and Cher's high culture conception of it. Josh's method of dismantling both high culture and low culture in his dialogue, ironically, reminds us of Travis's classroom speech where the same form of ridicule is at play. Josh, however, is a more articulate, perceptive and intelligent character than Travis is. Therefore, the pleasure he has in using this language and enacting this parody is of a very different nature. Though, like Travis, he may enjoy using it for comedic effect, he in fact does not perceive it as meaningless.

In one of the film's later scenes, Josh once again mimics Cher's speech. In this scene, Cher and Josh are driving home after attending a party. When Cher states that it would be "dope" (88) if she and Josh brought home take-away food for her father and his staff who are working on legal depositions, Josh remarks: "Yes, that would be pretty *dope* of us". Here, of course, he is borrowing not just from Cher, but also from Murray's "Black Ghetto English" (Monaghan 216). He does not, however, ridicule it as Travis would. Unlike Murray and his 'reading' of Christian, Josh is also not content to dismiss this language and stereotype the social structure which it represents. Rather, he shows an interest in exploring its values and finding its substance. In this sense, we can picture Josh himself delivering a speech on how "street slang is an increasingly valid form of expression" (40).

In the end scene of *Clueless*, Josh once again references "Black Ghetto English" (Monaghan 216) as he sits with Cher and her friends (most notably Murray and Travis) at the wedding of their teachers, Miss Geist and Mr Hall. As the three men listen to their girlfriends discussing their visions for their own weddings, Murray

jokingly tells Josh "I'm buggin'" ("I'm scared"). Amused, Josh responds by stating "I'm buggin' too". On one hand, Josh's pleasure here arises from his amusement in using this low culture term as he indulges in its playfulness. On the other, he does not dismiss it and shows a willingness to find its relevance to relation to his own social discourse.

How, then, would Josh read an Austen text in its low culture form? As his engagement with Cher and Murray's language suggests, he would most likely read it as a work of pleasure but, simultaneously, as a work of sociological interest and academic substance. For me, as I previously indicated, this is indeed the most accurate perspective on the way that Austen would have wanted us to read her texts. This makes the intention behind her observations in *Northanger Abbey* two-fold. She wants us to enjoy her works for their "effusions of wit and humour" (*Northanger Abbey* 44). At the same time though, she wants us to give consideration to the greater complexities her world presents us with as we engage with her "thorough knowledge of human nature [...] in the best possible language" (*Northanger Abbey* 44).

If this is indeed Austen's notion of an ideal method of reading her texts, perhaps it is one that she would also want us to apply when we read other canonical texts in their low culture form. Yes, she is in favour of us disengaging from our 'privileged' reader positions and experiencing the unaffected pleasure of reading these texts as if we were "unknowing" viewers. However, she would not want us to completely neglect our thoughtful and analytical sensibilities as we undertake these readings. She would desire us to, like Josh, find purpose and significance in the novelist's words and, in doing so, allow these words to highlight new perspectives we can apply to our 'reading' of our own world.

2.5 Conclusion

Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* has often been dismissed as being a "lightweight" (Brown ctd. in Monaghan 215) mainstream, contemporary youth film adaptation of

Jane Austen's *Emma*. Yet, because the film pays specific attention to the role of popular culture and its effect on our role as readers, it has much to say about Austen's own perceptions of popular culture. The film, as I have argued, explores Austen's attitude towards the distinction between high culture and low culture texts and offers perceptions of how her how her own work should be read within a low culture framework.

In the first part of this chapter, I focused on the reading practices of the film's protagonist, Cher, as a means of exploring the prejudices Austen's work exposes in our own approaches to reading. I suggested that Cher's misguided knowledge of high culture parodies the values we attach to canonical texts. The film's transformation of "high culture into low" (Harris 65), I argued, brings both Austen's work and the canonical texts referenced in the film closer to the world of the "unknowing" viewer who is experiencing them for the first time. In doing so, it encourages us as "knowing" readers to adjust our attitudes towards these texts and enjoy them within the mode of low culture literature which they were born into when they were first published. As I demonstrated, this readerly message that *Clueless* provides us with maps itself onto Austen's own endorsement of low culture literature and her distaste towards high culture reading.

In the second part of this chapter, I evaluated three of the film's secondary characters as a means of determining how Austen might want her work to be read from a low culture perspective. I demonstrated that the characters of Travis and Murray present us with two methods of reading which, indirectly, demonstrate how an Austen text should not be read. Travis's method of reading, when related to Austen, disregards the significance of her words, transforming her work into empty parody. Murray's method of reading, on the other hand, highlights a problematic surface reading which pays little attention to her perceptive insights on human nature. I suggested that the character of Josh comes closest to representing the manner in which Austen would encourage us to read her texts. As this particular character demonstrates, we should

read Austen's work for pleasure. However, we should also read it from an informed perspective, observing what her novels have to say about our social world.

What I conclude from this analysis of *Clueless* is that, by completely reinventing Austen's world and placing it within a contemporary context, the film does not disrespect the pedigree of Austen's work. Rather, the adaptation process utilised throughout *Clueless* formulates a dialogic interaction between Austen's views of popular culture and those which we possess in our contemporary society. By adapting *Emma* to suit the demands of an "unknowing" youth audience, this film returns us to the version of Austen's world that she would have wanted us to experience, namely one which is free from the limiting status of canonical literature.

3. **"LOVERS' VOWS" AND THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION IN *MANSFIELD PARK***

As in *Emma*, the 'wisdom' and 'folly' of the characters in Austen's 1814 *Mansfield Park* are exposed through the accuracies or inaccuracies of their interpretations of literary texts. However, in this novel, Austen applies a moral framework which expands the carnivalesque tension between 'wisdom' and 'foolery' to incorporate the conflict between morality and social values. Lionel Trilling's famed 1954 essay on *Mansfield Park* stipulates that, within the context of the novel, this conflict is explored through the "question of literature" (132). The characters' virtues and vices parallel those of the characters in the literary text they are reading.

The novel unifies the characters' literary experiences through the theatrical arts as they decide to perform a production of German playwright August Von Kotzebue's play "Lovers' Vows".[5] In relating Kotzebue's work to Mary Wollstonecraft's societal philosophies, Kirkham stipulates that he wrote this particular play with the intent of attacking "unnatural distinctions in society" (110). These "unnatural distinctions" (Kirkham 110) pertained particularly to the state of class relations which Kotzebue believed needed to be reformed. Despite these good intentions, Kirkham observes that Kotzebue's contemporaries claimed that "Lovers' Vows", as well as his other work, "pandered to the public love of sensational plots, created characters who did not resemble human beings as we know them to be, and, through excesses of sentimentality, aroused disgust rather than compassion" (93). This distinction between Kotzebue's moral intention and the play's public reception make it an ideal performance piece for the characters of *Mansfield Park*, whose moral principles are under constant scrutiny throughout the novel. On another level, the play and the novel share a number of commonalities in their plots and characterisations, to the extent that many critics have labelled *Mansfield Park* as Austen's adaptation of "Lovers'

[5] For English audiences Elizabeth Inchbald's 1798 English translation of this text is more commonly known than Kotzebue's original play.

Vows". For instance, in her article " 'Mansfield Park' And Kotzebue's 'Lovers Vows' ", E.M. Butler endorses David Rhydderch who claims "you have only to read ["Lovers' Vows"] to find out how interwoven [...] its plot is with that of *Mansfield Park*" (ctd. in Butler 326). The most obvious indication of the overlap between Kotzebue's play and Austen's novel occurs in the sub-plot of "Lovers' Vows" which takes the form of the main plot in *Mansfield Park*.

The sub-plot of "Lovers' Vows" centres on Amelia, the seemingly naive daughter of a Baron who is engaged to be wed to the "foolish and rich" (Zelicovici 533) Count Cassell. Aware of the Count's deficiencies, Amelia's father places her under the tutelage of Anhalt, a young parson who acts as both her confidante and her advisor on "the nature of marriage" (Zelicovici 533). Through Anhalt's teachings Amelia comes to realise that a union with Count Cassel, based merely on his class status and financial position, would be detrimental because the basis of this union would be superficial. Instead she decides to marry for love, setting her sights on Anhalt himself. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price, the novel's quiet and timid heroine, is pursued by Henry Crawford, a wealthy young man who has "a good estate at Norfolk" (39). Yet, despite the privileges a marriage to Henry Crawford would afford her, Fanny chooses to marry her tutor, Edmund Bertram. Edmund, like Anhalt, is a clergyman who performs the function of the moral philosopher as he teaches Fanny about the nature of morality and the deficiencies of immoral social conduct.

3.1 Fanny Price, Mary Crawford and the Problem of Playing Amelia

From this perspective, *Mansfield Park* appears to be neatly mapped onto the narrative concerns of "Lovers' Vows". Yet, where the play text and novel differ significantly to one another is in their characterisation of their respective heroines. In considering this difference, it is useful to begin by examining our first introduction to Amelia in the play. In this passage the Baron speaks to her about her feelings towards Count Cassel:

> Baron: [...] Do you like to hear the Count spoken of?
> Amelia: Good, or bad?
> Baron: Good. Good.
> Amelia: Oh yes; I like to hear good of everybody.
> Baron: But do not you feel a little flustered when he is talked of?
> Amelia: (*shaking her head*) No.
> Baron: Don't you wish sometimes to speak to him, and have not the courage to begin?
> Amelia: No.
> Baron: Do not you wish to take his part when his companions laugh at him?
> Amelia: No— I love to laugh at him myself.
> Baron: (*aside*) Provoking! [*To Amelia*] Are not you afraid when he comes near you?
> Amelia: No, not at all.— (*Recollecting herself*) Oh yes— once.
> Baron: Ah! Now it comes!
> Amelia: Once at a ball he trod on my foot; and I was so afraid he should tread on me again. (204)

The feistiness Amelia shows as she jokes about the Count's foolishness and clumsiness makes her reminiscent of *Emma's* protagonist, Emma Woodhouse. As with Emma, Amelia is not particularly worldly but she disguises this shortcoming with humorous word-play, engaging with the dialogue of another character in a manner which displays her wit. In *Emma* this engagement is taken a step further because Emma not only interacts with the other characters in the novel but with the novel's narrator as well. Hence, if we are to read *Mansfield Park* as a novelistic variation on "Lovers' Vows", we expect Fanny to have a persona which is as sleek and animated as that of Amelia and, by extension, Emma. Furthermore we expect her to also engage in a lively and witty manner with the other characters in the novel and the narrator.

Yet, no such interaction informs Fanny's conceptualisation. Throughout the novel she shies away from any verbal engagement whatsoever. From the outset, she is described as "exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice" (13) and these traits barely alter as the novel's plot develops. Fanny frequently finds herself in situations where she is unable to articulate herself, a dilemma which the narrator attributes to her often being too emotionally overwhelmed to speak. Fanny's

complete distance from the novel's other characters and the narrator has proven to be problematic for readers who, because of the mysteriousness of her persona, have perceived her as merely performing the narrative function of the virtuous heroine. Interpreting *Mansfield Park* from the perspective of the 1950s reader, Trilling claims such a heroine is unlikable because "virtue is not interesting, even that it is not really virtue, unless it manifests itself as a product of 'grace' operating through a strong inclination to sin" (128). Readers, he continues, applaud a flawed protagonist whose efforts to succeed, despite his/ her failure, acts as a sign of his/her virtue. These readers are frustrated by the conclusion of *Mansfield Park* because Fanny is simply and handsomely rewarded for her 'static' virtue. Marvin Mudrick's chapter on *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen as Defense and Discovery* attempts to redeem this perception of Fanny by claiming that the virtue she exercises "form[s] the whole moral framework of the novel" (159), subsequently making her an "active and living presence" (159).

Mudrick's observations on Fanny's character make her affinity with Amelia in "Lovers' Vows" more conceivable. Amelia's virtue in itself is used as a means of forwarding the play's didactic agenda. Yet Fanny and Amelia still appear to be "living" (Mudrick 159) and "active" (Mudrick 159) in different ways. Amelia's verbal nature seems to be more fitting to that of Mary Crawford, Edmund's initial love interest. The commonalities between Amelia and Mary Crawford, in contrast to the differences between her and Fanny, are indicated in the following passage where Fanny, Mary Crawford and Edmund engage in a religious debate:

> "It is a pity," cried Fanny, "that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the prayer, is fine!"
> "Very fine indeed!" said Miss Crawford, laughing. "It must do the heads of the family a great deal of good to force all the poor housemaids and footmen to leave business and pleasure, and say their prayers here twice a day, while they are inventing excuses themselves for staying away."

> "That is hardly Fanny's idea of a family assembling," said Edmund. "If the master and mistress do *not* attend themselves, there must be more harm than good in the custom."
> "At any rate, it is safer to leave people to their own devices on such subjects. Every body likes to go their own way— to chuse their own time and manner of devotion. The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time— altogether it is a formidable thing and what nobody likes; and if the good people used to kneel and gape in that gallery could have foreseen that the time might come when men and women might lie another ten minutes in bed, when they woke with a head-ache, without danger of reprobation, because chapel was missed, they would have with joy and envy."
> [...]
> For a few moments she was unanswered. Fanny coloured and looked at Edmund, but felt too angry for speech; and *he* needed a little recollection before he could say "Your lively mind can hardly be serious even on serious subjects. [...]" (81-82)

Fanny's defence of church-going culture in this passage affirms her role as the "moral framework of the novel" (Mudrick 59). However, it gives us little reason to believe that she possesses character traits which make her anything more than this. She is given an opportunity to engage in a thoughtful discussion through a defence of her beliefs against Mary Crawford's. Yet she fails to do so because she relies on Edmund to articulate her concerns for her. Furthermore, her feelings are silenced and spoken for by the narrator who claims that Fanny "was too angry for speech" (82). When differentiated from her moral function, Fanny is merely a silent and weak character.

In contrast Mary Crawford's discourse is constantly "active" (Mudrick 59), playing off Fanny and Edmund's remarks with confidence and ease. Donald D. Stone links the verbal persona of Mary Crawford to Emma, identifying that "there is a [close] comparison between Mary Crawford and Emma in terms of the destructive power of wit" (43). Though this statement suggests that Mary Crawford's observations on the nature of religious devotion are misguided, it also implies that she too has the ability to 'play' with and manipulate words. For instance, like Amelia when she humorously gestures to Count Cassel's stupidity, Mary Crawford's discussion of the changing attitudes of chapel-goers is phrased in a manner which is carnivalesque in its

intentions. By stating the faithful chapel-goers of the past may have reconsidered their devout practices if they were aware that a "time might come when men and women might lie another ten minutes in bed" (82), she appears to target their 'foolery' with the 'wisdom' of her sarcasm. Her ability to use language in this way further implies that, unlike Fanny, Mary Crawford possesses the necessary skill to engage playfully with both the other characters in the novel and the narrator. Despite her misguided nature, Mary Crawford seems to be a far better fit for the Amelia role than Fanny is.

The similarities between Amelia and Mary Crawford do not go unnoticed in *Mansfield Park*. Tom Bertam suggests that Mary Crawford is suitable for the role of Amelia because both women are "small, light, girlish, skipping figure[s]" (127) and, after much debate, she is chosen to play the role in the production. As Dvora Zelicovici identifies in her essay "The Inefficacy of Lovers' Vows", many critics share the view that this casting decision is an appropriate one. For instance, in "Pulpit, Stage, and Novel: 'Mansfield Park' and Mrs Inchbald's 'Lovers' Vows' " Elaine Jordan points out that Amelia's "gaily independent and outspoken" (139) demeanour matches the nature of Mary Crawford's character. In contrast, Butler's essay provides a more complex analysis of the link between the discourses of Amelia and Mary Crawford. Within this analysis she identifies why it is, in fact, not possible for Mary Crawford to be the heroine of *Mansfield Park*. For Butler, Amelia and Mary Crawford are alike in the immodesty of their language. Butler notes that Austen considered Amelia's language "unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty" (331). Therefore, by adapting this characteristic to Mary Crawford's language, Butler suggests that the faults of Amelia's character are punished through Mary Crawford who fails to win the affections of Edmund because of her immodest nature.

Though Zelicovici's analysis of the parallels between *Mansfield Park* and "Lovers' Vows" is in agreement with Butler's claims concerning Mary Crawford's immodesty, she implies that to consider Amelia as possessing this same characteristic is a vital

misreading of her character. To substantiate this, Zelicovici draws a comparison between the values of the two women, identifying that Mary Crawford "lacks Amelia's sound values [and therefore] cannot think and judge correctly" (534). Amelia demonstrates these "sound values" (Zelicovici 534) when she chooses to marry for love rather than money. Though Anhalt guides her in making this decision, Amelia proves the strength of her own moral virtue when she defends her choice of suitor to the Baron who is dissatisfied with Anhalt's class rank. Undeterred by this obstacle, Amelia negotiates with her father, successfully leading to her union with Anhalt. Hence Amelia remains true to her moral judgements, despite the antagonistic attitudes of her social circle.

In opposition to this, Mary Crawford proves unable to make effective moral judgements because she is informed by what Vivienne Brown refers to as the "social gaze" (ctd. in Despotopulo 572). In her essay "Fanny's Gaze and the Construction of Feminine Space in 'Mansfield Park' ", Anne Despotopulo contextualises this gaze by referring to Brown's analysis of spectatorship[6] which demonstrates a tension between "the social gaze" and its antithesis, the "moral gaze" (572). Brown describes the "social gaze" as "a superficial gaze [which] represents an uncritical acceptance of the going point of view and [...] passively receives the glittering images of 'proud ambition and ostentatious avidity' that are forced upon it [...]" (ctd. in Despotopulo, 572). In contrast the "moral gaze", which Amelia clearly possesses, is "that of the studious and careful observer who can appreciate the 'the humble modesty and equitable justice' that attracts the attention of so few" (Brown ctd. in Despotopopulo 572). Mary Crawford's inability to exercise this "moral gaze" is clarified when she approaches Fanny for her assistance in interpreting Amelia's dialogue:

> "I have brought my book, and if you would but rehearse it with me, I should be *so* obliged! I came here to-day intending to rehearse it with Edmund—by

[6] Brown's analyses of spectatorship is formulated in relation Adam Smith's famed work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* which focuses on "our moral practices in terms of the qualities of human agency or character"(Haakonssen, 5).

> ourselves— against the evening, but he is not in the way; and if he *were*, I do not think I could go through it with *him*, till I have hardened myself a little, for really there *is* a speech or two— You will be so good, won't you?"
> [...]
> "Have you ever happened to look at the part I mean?" continued Miss Crawford, opening her book. "Here it is. I did not think much of it at first— but, upon my word—. There, look at *that* speech, and *that*, and *that*. How am I ever able to look him in the face and say such things?" (156)

Mary Crawford's anxiety about reciting Amelia's lines to Edmund is ironic since, up until this point in the novel, her feistiness and boldness have matched Amelia's. Yet Amelia's interactions with the characters of "Lovers' Vows" are richer in meaning than those between Mary Crawford and the other characters of *Mansfield Park*. What Amelia gleans from her conversations with the Baron, Count Cassel and Anhalt is knowledge of how to exercise her moral principles effectively. Hence Amelia's speech may appear "immodest" and, most often, a merely playful commentary on the 'wisdom' and 'foolery' of the characters in the play. However its carnivalesque nature implies that it is, in fact, an articulation of the moral lessons Amelia has learned. In contrast Mary Crawford's interactions in *Mansfield Park* are motivated by her desire to draw attention to herself and exercise the accepted social conduct. Unlike Amelia, she has no interest in gaining any moral knowledge. This particular flaw makes it impossible for Mary Crawford to accurately comprehend and interpret Amelia's speeches.

Mary Crawford's moral "blindness" (Zelicovici 533) and its impact on her interpretation of Amelia's character are reiterated by her need to "harden" herself in order to impress Edmund with her performance. In the production, Edmund is to play the role of Anhalt. The conversations which occur in his rehearsals with Mary Crawford should be based on a process of receptive learning on the part of both performers. Yet, because Mary Crawford is only concerned with saying her speeches in a way which pleases her audience and her suitor, she lacks the attentiveness and perceptiveness to participate in this process. By extension, her reluctance indicates that she is unable to interpret how this process prefigures the evolution of Amelia and

Anhalt's relationship. In this case, Despotupolo rightfully associates Mary Crawford with Wollstonecraft's unflattering attack on "those women who construct their outer and inner selves according to the male gaze, and who are preoccupied more with their social projection than their private education and improvement" (575). Despite the commonalities of Amelia and Mary Crawford's speech, the absence of Mary Crawford's morality clearly makes her the complete antithesis of Amelia (Zelicovici 535).

Subsequently, it is fitting that Mary Crawford approaches Fanny, Amelia's moral counterpart, for assistance in playing her role. This is particularly interesting because, as the novel develops, Fanny emerges as the only character who is able to accurately interpret both Amelia's character and the "Lovers' Vows" play itself. Fanny's interpretive skills are initially masked by her silences. Yet, when she timidly refuses to take part in the performance of the "Lovers' Vows" play, she demonstrates both the strength of these skills and a sense of moral independence which reflects strongly on Amelia's nature.

In the planning of the "Lovers' Vows" production, Fanny is offered the part of the cottager's wife, a role which, as Tom Bertram puts it, is "a mere nothing, not above half a dozen speeches altogether" (135-136). Despite this, Fanny rejects the role, claiming that it would be "absolutely impossible" (136) for her to perform and that her performance would only disappoint the other performers in the play. At first Fanny's reluctance to participate in the play reads as a mere affirmation of her shyness and timidity. However, when Fanny reacts to the Bertram's family friend Mrs Grant's decision to take on the role she declined, the true motivation behind her fear of participating in the "Lovers' Vows" play is revealed:

> Fanny was at first in some danger of envying her the character she had accepted. But reflection brought better feelings, and shewed her that Mrs. Grant was entitled to respect, which could never have belonged to *her*, and that had she received even the greatest, she could never have been easy in

> joining a scheme which, considering only her uncle, she must condemn altogether. (148)

The scheme which Fanny must "condemn altogether" (148) is the act of performance in itself. As Mary Crawford shows through her efforts to interpret Amelia's character, performance exemplifies the nature of the "social gaze". The appeal of a performance relies on a performer's success in imitating a character's speech and subsequently the success of their efforts to 'exist' within the imaginary social universe which this character inhabits. Thus, by choosing not to partake in the play, Fanny is protesting against the "social gaze" which is facilitated by an active engagement with a play text. The reason "Mrs Grant [is] entitled to respect which could never belong to [Fanny]" (148) is due to the fact that the strength of Fanny's moral convictions far outweigh her desire for attention and exposure. This indicates that she is incapable of performing.[7] Fanny's application of her moral principles, as well as her inability to perform, implies that her reading of "Lovers' Vows" shows a keen understanding of Kotzebue's intended message. By 'speaking' against the nature of performance, she is essentially addressing the "unnatural distinctions in society" (Kirkham 110). Fanny may not seem to be as effective at articulating this message as the intensely verbal Amelia is. Yet, within the context of *Mansfield Park*, language is the least accurate means through which to indicate an understanding of a moral message. As Stone observes, *Mansfield Park* "warns against the selfish appropriation of language and the selfishness of conduct" (43). Hence, if Fanny were to use language in the same way that Amelia does, it would inevitably integrate with the "selfish" language of the other characters in the novel. Her sense of morality would translate as being misguided and superficial. Fanny's interpretive and moral strengths are best emphasised through her silences and her unwillingness to engage in social

[7] An alternative argument to mine is presented in Joseph Litvak's essay "The Infection of Acting: Theatricals and Theatricality in Mansfield Park" which, as quoted by Syndy Mcmillen Conger, suggests that Fanny's refusal to act is in itself a form of performance (ctd. in Conger, 97). For me, this argument debases the significance of Fanny's function in the novel because, as Tony Tanner observes, throughout the theatricals that are staged at Mansfield Park, Fanny is the only character who is able to "uphold the claims of lucid moral consciousness" (458)

heteroglossia. These silences make her elusive to the other characters, the narrator and the reader. However, they allow Fanny to maintain ownership of her identity and facilitate readings of Amelia's character and "Lovers' Vows" from a perspective that is uncorrupted by the "social gaze". In light of this, Fanny is aligned more closely to the ideals expressed in Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* than both Mary Crawford and the strong-willed protagonist of *Emma* are. This is clarified when considering Wollstonecraft's following statement which draws on Rousseau's assessment of masculinity:

> The most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent. In fact, it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. (90)

Mary Crawford and Emma are alike in their "habits of virtue" (90). Emma does not appear to be as preoccupied with the "social gaze" as Mary Crawford. In truth, her matchmaking efforts are in themselves a medium of performance, a means through which to gain public approval for her "selfless" acts. Therefore her virtue and, by extension, her moral judgements are superficial up until the end of the novel. Fanny's ability to isolate herself from the "social gaze", on the other hand, shows that she (like Amelia) is capable of exercising her reason and virtue in a manner which is informed by independent thought and observation.

3.2 Performance or Education: Henry Crawford and Edmund Bertram

Because Fanny's choice in suitor cements her affinity with Amelia, it is necessary to consider how both Edmund and Henry Crawford engage with their "Lovers' Vows" counterparts, Anhalt and Count Cassel. The complexities that occur in Fanny and Mary Crawford's identification with the Amelia role are not particularly evident in Henry Crawford's 'mirroring' of Count Cassel. Yet, in the case of Edmund, a similar

problematic distinction occurs as he makes a crucial error in his interpretation of Anhalt.

Interestingly, in the casting of the "Lovers' Vows" play, Henry Crawford is given the role of Frederick. In the context of the play, Frederick is the banished illegitimate son of the Baron who, unaware of his paternity, re-enters the family fold when he approaches the Baron to assist him in curing his ailing mother. Such a role proves entirely unsuited to Henry Crawford who, like his sister, is merely preoccupied with impressing his audience. In his ignorance he believes himself to be capable of wearing the same "multiform mask" that *Emma*'s Frank Churchill wears throughout the novel. He claims that he is able "to undertake any character that ever was written, from Shylock or Richard III" (115) and that he can "rant and storm, or sigh, or cut capers in any tragedy or comedy in the English language" (115). Yet, as Tony Tanner observes, even if Henry Crawford is an esteemed performer, "his 'great turn for acting' reveals what is, in effect, his curse" (460). Elaborating on this, Tanner states the following:

> If you can play every part equally well, how can you know who you really are; and if you can simulate all moods and affections how can you know what you really feel? Henry Crawford is a man of whom we say 'puts his heart into his acting': unfortunately he cannot also put his acting into his heart. (460)

In "Lovers' Vows", this discrepancy in Henry Crawford's character is echoed in Count Cassel's efforts to appeal to Amelia's affections. In the following scene, he tries to impress her by alluding to his worldliness:

> Count: *(sitting down to breakfast)* You are beautiful, Miss Widenhaim.—Upon my honour, I think so. I have travelled, and seen much of the world, and yet I can positively admire you.
> Amelia: I am sorry I have not seen the world.
> Count: Wherefore?
> Amelia: Because I might then, perhaps, admire you.

> Count: True;— for I am an epitome of the world. In my travels I learnt delicacy in Italy— hauteur, in Spain— in France, enterprise— in Russia, prudence— in England, sincerity— in Scotland, frugality— and in the wilds of America, I learnt love.
> Amelia: Is there any country where love is taught?
> Count: In all barbarous countries. But the whole system is exploded in places that are civilized.
> Amelia: And what is substituted in its stead?
> Count: Intrigue.
> Amelia: What a poor, uncomfortable substitute. (205)

Henry Crawford's nature relates to that of Count Cassel's because Count Cassel himself believes that he wears a "multiform mask", though in this passage, acting substitutes for learning. Count Cassel speaks of the wide-ranging education he has gleaned from his travels in a manner which makes him appear esteemed and knowledgeable. However, he stumbles when he speaks of how he learnt about love "in the wilds of America" (205). As Amelia suggests, love cannot be taught and therefore the prestige of Count Cassel's education is a farce. As with Henry Crawford and his acting talent, Count Cassel may be impressive in his emulation of academic discourses. Nevertheless, because he is simply regurgitating what he has been taught, he lacks the interpretive skills to comprehend the moral values of a concept such as love.

By the same token Henry Crawford's lack of moral consciousness implies that, despite his talent, his interpretation of "Lovers' Vows" is inaccurate and misguided. The discrepancies of this interpretation are clearly implied by his own failed efforts to win Fanny's affections. In a scene which closely identifies with the aforementioned scene from "Lovers' Vows", he attempts to attract her interest through a discussion of the failed "Lovers' Vows" performance:

> "It is as a dream, a pleasant dream!" he exclaimed, breaking forth again after few minutes musing. "I shall always look back on our theatricals with exquisite pleasure. There was such an interest, such an animation, such a spirit diffused! Every body felt it. We were all alive. There was employment, hope, solicitude, bustle, for every hour of the day. Always some little

> objection, some little doubt, some little anxiety to be got over. I never was happier."
> With silent indignation, Fanny repeated to herself, "Never happier!—never happier than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly!—Oh! What a corrupted mind!"
> "We were unlucky, Miss Price," he continued in a lower tone [...] and not at all aware of her feelings, "we certainly were very unlucky. Another week, only one other week, would have been enough for us. I think if we had the disposal of events— if Mansfield Park had the government of the winds just for a week or two about the equinox, there would have been a difference. Not that we would have endangered his safety by any tremendous weather —but only by a steady contrary wind, or a calm. I think, Miss Price, we would have indulged ourselves with a week's calm in the Atlantic at that season."
> He seemed determined to be answered; and Fanny averting her face, said with a firmer tone than usual, "As far as *I* am concerned, sir, I would not have delayed [my uncle's] return for a day. My uncle disapproved it all so entirely when he did arrive, that in my opinion, every thing had gone quite far enough."
> She had never spoken so much at once to him in her life before, and never so angrily to any one; and when her speech was over, she trembled and blushed at her own daring. He was surprised; but after a few moments silent consideration of her, replied in a calmer graver tone, and as if the candid result of conviction, "I believe you are right. It was more pleasant than prudent. We were getting too noisy." And then turning the conversation, he would have engaged her on some other subject, but her answers were so shy and reluctant that he could not advance in any. (208-209)

Echoing Count Cassel's bid to demonstrate his "impressive" education, Henry Crawford showcases the extent of his performance skills by attempting to play a number of different roles to complement (what he believes to be) Fanny's character. On one hand, he tries to be whimsical and sentimental as he romanticises the Mansfield Park theatricals, emphasising how the liveliness of these theatricals brought about "hope, solicitude [and] bustle for every hour of the day"(208). On the other, he tries to be rational and perceptive by suggesting that the theatricals were "more pleasant than prudent" (209). Yet Henry Crawford is only successful in his performances when he converses with another character, using their responses to assist in shaping the role he is playing. Fanny's silences imply that engaging in such a conversation with her is impossible. Because of this, Henry Crawford has little success with either role as his efforts are met with shyness and reluctance on Fanny's part.

Henry Crawford's misreading of Fanny, the true Amelia of *Mansfield Park*, implies that his interpretation of Amelia's character is equally abysmal. Much like Count Cassel who underestimates Amelia's perceptiveness when he boasts about his worldliness, Henry Crawford fails to observe her intelligence and moral strengths when he notes that the actress who plays Amelia "requires great powers, great nicety, to give her playfulness and simplicity without extravagance" (126). Naturally, he transfers these qualities to Fanny, believing that her quiet nature conceals a similar demeanour to Amelia. The fact that neither his interpretations of Fanny or Amelia are accurate implies that both he and Count Cassel fail at wearing the "multiform mask". Frank Churchill's success in wearing this mask is attributed to his success at being a "master reader" of the other characters in *Emma*. "Master read[ing]" is clearly a skill that Henry Crawford and Count Cassel lack. This flaw attests to the fallibility of sentimentalised manhood that Wollstonecraft addresses in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. In keeping with the characteristics Wollstonecraft attaches to this figure, Henry Crawford and Count Cassel excel at making grand and dramatic gestures. Yet, neither man has the ability to exercise any intellectual skills that go beyond these gestures. The absence of such skills is testament to their superficiality, a quality which both their respective love interests recognise and avoid.

As opposed to Henry Crawford and Count Cassel, Edmund at first appears to be successful at assuming the role of the "master reader". He demonstrates this skill in a later scene in the novel where he chastises Fanny for not pursuing an interrogation of Sir Tom Bertram after she questions his involvement in the slave trade:

> "Your uncle is disposed to be pleased with you in every respect; and I only wish you would talk to him more.— You are one of those who are too silent in the evening circle."
> "But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did you not hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?"
> "I did— and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther."
> "And I longed to do it— but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested

> in the subject, I did not like —I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel."
> "Miss Crawford was very right in what she said of you the other day— that you seemed almost as fearful of notice and praise as other women were of neglect." (184)

In the context of "Lovers' Vows", this scene parallels an encounter between Anhalt and Amelia where he lectures her on the nature of matrimony:

> Anhalt: [...] I am sent to you to explain the good and bad of which matrimony is composed.
> Amelia: Then I beg to be acquainted with the good.
> Anhalt: When two sympathetic hearts meet in the marriage state, matrimony may be called a happy life. When such a wedded pair find thorns in their path, each will be eager, for the sake of the other, to tear them from the root. Where they have to mount hills, or wind a labyrinth, the most experienced will lead the way, and be a guide to his companion. Patience and love will accompany them in their journey, while melancholy and discord they leave far behind.—Hand in hand they pass on from morning till evening, through their summer's day, till the night of age draws on, and sleep of death overtakes the one. The other, weeping and mourning, yet looks forward to the bright region where he shall meet his still surviving partner, among trees and flowers which themselves have planted, in fields of eternal verdure.
> Amelia: You may tell my father —I'll marry. *(Rises)*
> Anhalt: *(rising)* This picture is pleasing; but I must beg you not to forget that there is another on the same subject.— When convenience, and fair appearance joined to folly and ill-humour, forge the fetters of matrimony, they gall with their weight the married pair. Discontented with each other — at variance in opinions —their mutual aversion increases with the years they live together. They contend most, where they should most unite; torment, where they should most soothe. In this rugged way, choked with the weeds of suspicion, jealousy, anger, and hatred, they take their daily journey, till one of these *also* sleep in death. The other then lifts up his dejected head, and calls out in acclamations of joy-'Oh, liberty! Dear liberty!'
> Amelia: I will not marry. (212)

In both these scenes, Edmund and Anhalt prove to be observant and accurate in their interpretations of Fanny and Amelia. By understanding what Amelia desires from a marriage and illuminating this desire for her, Anhalt proves to be successful in both the roles of a "master reader" and an educator. Edmund's efforts to encourage Fanny to further her discussion with Sir Thomas Bertram on the issue of the slave trade

work to the same effect. On one hand, he indicates his awareness of Fanny's intelligence. On the other, he shows insight into how Fanny can better herself. When Edmund states that Mary Crawford is accurate in deducing that Fanny is "as fearful of notice and praise as other women are of neglect" (184), he does so in a way which inspires her to speak and react to him. Though Fanny's strength lies in her silences, here her interaction with Edmund works to her benefit. This is because, as a "master reader" and her educator, Edmund guides Fanny in speaking and seeking notice in a manner which does not compromise her moral consciousness. The intent behind these teachings indicates that Edmund not only identifies with Anhalt but also that he appears capable of comprehending the moral subtext of "Lovers' Vows".

Though the role of Anhalt is clearly tailor-made for Edmund, he (like Fanny) initially refuses to partake in the "Lovers' Vows" production. When Mary Crawford attempts to persuade him to take on this role, she remarks that he and Anhalt are alike in that they are both clergymen. In response to this Edmund states the following:

> "[...]I should be sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting. It must be very difficult to keep Anhalt from appearing a formal, solemn lecturer, and the man who chuses the profession itself, is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on the stage." (135)

In stating his reservations about playing Anhalt, Edmund puts Fanny's hidden moral grievances towards participating in the play into words. He observes that, by performing Anhalt's role, he would be presenting an inauthentic version of himself. Unlike Henry Crawford, he realises that he "cannot put acting into his heart"(Tanner 460) and that if he were to attempt to do so, his moral virtue would be compromised, both as a person and in his capacity as a clergyman. Later in the novel, however, he contradicts his moral convictions and the values of Anhalt's character by deciding to take on Anhalt's role in order to assist in curing Mary Crawford's anxieties about playing Amelia. The implications of this error on both Edmund's character and his

affinity with Anhalt are made evident when he attempts to justify his decision to Fanny:

> "There is but *one* thing to be done, Fanny. I must take Anhalt myself"[...].
> Fanny could not answer him.
> "It is not at all what I like," he continued."No man can like being driven into the *appearance* of such inconsistency. After being known to oppose the scheme from the beginning, there is absurdity in the face of my joining them *now*, when they are exceeding their first plan in every respect; but I can think of no other alternative. Can you, Fanny!" (142-143)

As I stipulated in my chapter on *Emma*, the exclamation mark in Austen's work is used as a means of applying intensity to what is, in fact, a direct statement that does not require an answer (Stovel 29). Edmund's use of it in this passage as he "asks" for Fanny's advice indicates that he is now wearing his own "multiform mask" as he transforms from Anhalt to Count Cassel. Though he does seek guidance from Fanny in the same way Anhalt would from Amelia, he shows no real interest in hearing her answer. He is more concerned with his performance of this appeal, unintentionally gesturing to Count Cassel's arrogant and dramatic attempt to win Amelia's affections. Unlike Count Cassel and Henry Crawford, Edmund is not boastful in his efforts. Yet, like them, he is nevertheless still acting; a fact which is made evident when he speaks of how "no man can like being driven into the *appearance* of such inconsistency" (142). The emphasis on the word *appearance* in this statement signifies Edmund's need to portray his dilemma in this scene accurately and convincingly. Essentially, he is playing Anhalt but not being Anhalt. The irony of Edmund portraying Anhalt in the way Henry Crawford would play him is that, by doing so, he is also presenting a distorted variation on his own character and values.

Despite the extent of Edmund's misstep, he is able to redeem himself and reinstate his affinity with Anhalt at the end of *Mansfield Park*. This redemption is prompted when he realises his true feelings for Fanny and proposes to her. The proposal scene itself is not presented verbally but rather through the narrator's discourse:

> Having once set out, and felt that he had done so, on this road to happiness, there was nothing on the side of prudence to stop him or make his progress slow; no doubts of her deserving, no fears from opposition of taste; no need of drawing new hopes of happiness from dissimilarity of temper. Her mind, disposition, opinions, and habits wanted no half concealment, no self deception on the present, no reliance on future improvement.
>
> [...]
>
> She was of course only too good for him; but as nobody minds having what is too good for them, he was very steadily earnest in the pursuit of the blessing, and it was not possible that encouragement from her should be long wanting.
>
> [...]
>
> His happiness in knowing himself to have been so long the beloved of such a heart, must have been great enough to warrant any strength of language in which he could cloathe it to her or to himself; it must have been a delightful happiness! But there was happiness elsewhere which no description can reach. Let no one presume to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she had scarcely allowed her to entertain a hope. (437)

In these passages there are two key references which solidify the dialogic intersections between Fanny and Amelia and Edmund and Anhalt. The narrator's emphasis on the absence of "self concealment" (437) and "self deception" (437) on Fanny's part, speaks to Amelia's self-assured and head-strong nature which she demonstrates most noticeably when she defends her desire to marry Anhalt to the Baron:

> Amelia: [Anhalt] said —he would not marry me without your consent for the world.
> Baron: *[starting from his chair]* And pray, how came this subject of your conversation?
> Amelia: *[rising]* I brought it up.
> Baron: And what did you say?
> Amelia: I said that birth and fortune were such old-fashioned things to me, I cared nothing about either: and that I once heard my father declare, he should consult my happiness in marrying me, beyond any other consideration.
> [...]
> Would it not be noble to make the daughter of [Mr Anhalt's] benefactor happy?
> Baron: But when the daughter is a child, and thinks like a child—

> Amelia: No, indeed, papa, I begin to think very like a woman. [...] (228)

Though the bold sentiment which informs Amelia's words here is only expressed internally by Fanny, she too has begun to think "very [much] like a woman" ("Lovers' Vows" 228). Fanny does not always appear to stay true to her own moral principles as impressively as Amelia does. Though her error is not as great as Edmund's, she too almost falls prey to the "social gaze" when, as Edmund notes, she briefly indulges in Sir Thomas Bertram's compliments to her which are based primarily on her physical appearance and improvements in her conduct. At one point she even succumbs to the pressure placed on her by the "Lovers' Vows" players when she agrees to read the part of the Cottager's Wife when Mrs Grant fails to attend the play's rehearsal. Yet, despite these missteps, Fanny's expression of her selfhood shows that she has not only maintained her moral virtue throughout the novel, but also that this virtue has grown as has her confidence in it. She may remain silent but the honesty, independence and maturity of these silences 'speak' directly to the nature of Amelia's words to the Baron.

Fanny is not the only character in *Mansfield Park* who experiences moral and personal growth. When the narrator speaks of Edmund's happiness being so great that "no description can reach [it]" (437), she suggests that Edmund the educator has himself become a student to Fanny. To put this into perspective, it is useful to highlight how a similar role reversal occurs in the relationship between Amelia and Anhalt. In "Lovers' Vows" this particular occurrence takes place when Amelia tries to encourage Anhalt to admit his feelings for her:

> Amelia: [...] As you have for a long time instructed me, why should I now not begin to teach you?
> Anhalt: Teach me what?
> Amelia: Whatever I know, and you don't.
> Anhalt: There are some things I had rather never know.
> Amelia: So you may remember I said when you began to teach me mathematics. I said I had rather not know it— But now I have learnt it gives me a great deal of pleasure— and *[hesitating]* perhaps, who can tell, but that

> I might teach something as pleasant to you, as resolving a problem is to me. (213)

The lesson Anhalt gleans from his interaction with Amelia in this scene pertains to the importance of being honest about his feelings. Just as Amelia gains pleasure from mathematics, her teachings allow Anhalt to experience the pleasure of openly expressing his love for her. The lesson which Edmund learns from Fanny is of a similar nature. He too learns about the importance of self-expression and honesty. However, Edmund's lesson is more complex in that it involves understanding the limitations of language and the significance of silence and modesty as a means of expressing himself.

Prior to this scene the error of Edmund's decision to play Anhalt in "Lovers' Vows" was not only that it conflicted with his teachings, but also that it caused him to fall prey to "the selfish appropriation of language"(Stone 43). In the above passage, the "appropriation" (Stone 43) of this language shifts significantly in that it is now the narrator who speaks for Edmund. Yet the narrator cannot truly translate Edmund's thoughts because his silences disrupt the engagement between their two discourses. As with Fanny, this disengagement indicates that Edmund is taking ownership of his identity and regaining his moral centre. By doing so, he becomes Anhalt again, as opposed to merely acting this role. Furthermore, he reaffirms his understanding of the moral subtext of "Lovers' Vows".

Hence, through the teachings he has gleaned from his interactions with Fanny, Edmund learns a lesson that Stone observes as being critical to Austen's message about the discrepancies of language: "not everything [...] *can* be put into thought or word-and where language is lacking in such cases [...] silence is preferable to indulgence in jargon" (34). By putting this lesson into practice and using these silences to access his "inner Anhalt" again, he shows a further affinity with the principles of reason and rationality which Wollstonecraft writes of in *A Vindication of*

the Rights of Men. This is because, as with Fanny, his silences afford him the opportunity to carefully contemplate, negotiate and consider the ways in which to efficiently and effectively develop his moral agency. In so doing, he (like Anhalt) exercises a skill that allows him to see beyond the "pure foppery" (Johnson 4) associated with sentimentalised manhood.

3.3 Conclusion

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen maps the narrative of August Von Kotzebue's "Lovers' Vows" onto that of her novel. Through this process of mapping, *Mansfield Park* utilises Kotzebue's play in two ways. On one hand, it comments on the play itself through the manner in which the characters interpret its value as a performance piece. On the other, Austen's use of "Lovers' Vows" comments on the subtext of *Mansfield Park* as the social and moral values of the characters in the novel are aligned and contrasted with those of the characters in the play.

The manner in which Austen approaches her adaptation of "Lovers' Vows" from these two vantage points makes *Mansfield Park* a novel which does not merely reproduce its source material in an overt and linear fashion. Rather, it dialogically interacts and intersects with Kotzebue's play. It addresses both the way we as readers interpret "Lovers' Vows" and the morally conscious perspective Austen intends for us to take in our reading of *Mansfield Park*. The double-layered critique which is at work in the novel subsequently allows us to experience Kotzebue's play in a new modality which redeems it and gives it a newfound moral significance, particularly within Austen's world.

4. RENEGOTIATING THE AUSTEN READER IN *METROPOLITAN*

In a 1991 interview with *Bomb* magazine, screenwriter/ director Whit Stillman claims that his 1990 film *Metropolitan* parallels Jane Austen's 1814 novel *Mansfield Park* in certain instances. For Stillman these parallels are located in particular plot points which are shared between the novel and film, as well as the economic statuses of their respective protagonists. Indeed *Metropolitan,* which deals with the exploits of a group of elite students during their college debutante season, appears to bear no similarities to Austen's text beyond these surface details. Critics, however, have identified the film as an adaptation, recognising that it is faithful "to the spirit, tone, values[…] and rhythm [of *Mansfield Park*]" (Andrew ctd. in Caroll 171).

On closer inspection, however, we realise that *Metropolitan* takes an approach to the novel which subtly parallels the method at work in *Mansfield Park*'s adaptation of August Von Kotzebue's "Lovers' Vows". As I discussed in my previous chapter, *Mansfield Park,* at certain points, maps itself onto the narrative of "Lovers' Vows" but the allusions to this narrative are discreet to the extent that we do not immediately recognise it as an adaptation of the play text. The key to decoding the adaptation process at work in *Mansfield Park* relies on reading it as a novel which facilitates a dialogic interaction with "Lovers' Vows", as opposed to a conventionally linear and faithful one. As I stipulated, the interplay between these texts creates a relationship where "Lovers' Vows" comments on the characters' readerly and moral strengths, while the novel comments on the way we read and interpret the play.

In *Metropolitan* we find a similar dialogic process at play. *Mansfield Park* is not frequently referenced throughout the film. However, the brief scenes where the novel is integrated into the characters' conversations provide us with insight into their readerly strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, *Metropolitan* also calls our interpretation of its source material into question. In this case though, the film extends beyond the novel to consider the way we approach and interpret Austen's

other texts in a contemporary context. Tom Milne observes that *Metropolitan* "pit[s] [the themes of Austen's novels] against each other in 'curious cross-hatchings' " (ctd. in Caroll 172). Adding to this, Claudia L. Johnson claims that the film gestures towards a game played by readers of Austen's fiction which involves "imagin[ing] how a character in one novel might behave towards a character in another" (ctd. in Caroll 172). As I will elaborate on later, John Wiltshire looks at *Metropolitan*'s interaction with Austen's novels more broadly by claiming that the film questions the way we read and interpret this canonical work from a contemporary perspective.

My analysis of *Metropolitan* will consider the "ongoing dialogical process" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 21) that occurs between the film and Austen's work on a dual basis. I will firstly suggest that, in exploring the parallels between the film and *Mansfield Park*, we find ourselves involved in a character game where we attempt to identify which characters in *Metropolitan* are counterparts for those in the novel. This same game is played in *Mansfield Park* where we attempt to link each of the novel's characters to particular counterparts from "Lovers' Vows". The novel's character game allows us to interrogate the characters' moral and readerly sensibilities. In the film, this game parallels the way *Mansfield Park*'s game illuminates the moral values of "Lovers' Vows". In this case, however, I will argue that *Metropolitan* exposes how the novel interrogates our own approaches to reading literature. Developing from this, I will secondly assess how the film applies the readerly concerns it identifies in *Mansfield Park* to its examination of the ways in which we approach our interpretations of Austen's work from a contemporary perspective.

4.1 Establishing the Character Games of *Metropolitan*

The two particular characters from *Metropolitan* which I will be focusing on in this chapter are the film's protagonists, Tom Townsend and Audrey Rouget. Critics such as Wiltshire have most commonly referred to Tom and Audrey in their analyses of the film because they appear to be the characters that are most easily associated with

particular *Mansfield Park* counterparts. Tom is a middle-class student who resides on the Upper West Side of New York. He becomes involved in the world of debutante culture after he is initiated into the Upper East Side lifestyle of the Sally Fowler Rat Pack, the debutante group which is at the centre of the film. Audrey is a shy and mild-mannered young woman who is entering the debutante environment for the first time. For Wiltshire, these characters are clearly counterparts for Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price. He justifies this by referring to the following scene where Tom and Audrey debate the merits of *Mansfield Park* as a literary text:

> Tom: [*Mansfield Park* is] a notoriously bad book. Even Lionel Trilling, one of her greatest admirers, thought that.
> Audrey: If Lionel Trilling thought that, he's an idiot.
> Tom :*(Incredulous)* Uh! The whole story revolves around —what —the "immorality" of a group of young people putting on a play.
> Audrey: In the context of the novel it makes perfect sense.
> Tom: Yeah, the context and nearly everything Jane Austen wrote seems ridiculous from today's perspective.
> Audrey: Has it ever occurred to you that today, looked at from Jane Austen's perspective, would look much worse than ridiculous? (177)

Wiltshire observes that the set-up of this scene itself is a subtle (albeit coincidental) gesture to the plot elements in *Mansfield Park*. For example, Tom and Audrey have their first conversation with one another while sitting at the foot of a staircase amidst the bustle of a debutante party. Wiltshire identifies that Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price's first meeting occurs in a similar fashion. If we are to consider the manner in which Audrey and Tom interpret the novel, Wiltshire appears to be correct in associating them with these specific *Mansfield Park* counterparts. Tom's assertion that "nearly everything that Jane Austen wrote seems ridiculous from today's perspective" (177) could very well have been spoken by Edmund in relation to Kotzebue's work. Edmund, after all, is the only character in the novel to protest against the performance of "Lovers' Vows" when he proclaims it "exceedingly unfit for private representation" (130). Though Fanny never expresses her opinion of "Lovers' Vows" overtly, Audrey's defence of Austen addresses the moral

consciousness Fanny applies to her interpretation of the play text and the Mansfield Park theatricals as a whole. Audrey's belief that that the modern era is "ridiculous" (177) is, in the context of *Mansfield Park*, a sentiment which is shared by Fanny as she quietly observes the folly which occurs during the rehearsals for "Lovers' Vows" as the performers debate petty issues such as the lengths of one another's parts and the appropriate stage directions. Furthermore, Audrey's implication that Austen is correct in her depiction of moral and social values is indicative of Fanny's belief in the values Kotzebue endorses in "Lovers' Vows" which she demonstrates through her affinity with Amelia. Certainly for the viewer of *Metropolitan*, Tom and Audrey appear to be suitably orientated towards Edmund and Fanny and their respective readings of "Lovers' Vows". Yet as the plot of *Metropolitan* develops, both Tom and Audrey experience significant shifts in their readerly engagement. As with *Mansfield Park*'s interaction with "Lovers' Vows", these shifts bring their commonalities with their counterparts into question as their interpretive skills begin to overlap with those of the other characters in the novel.

4.2 Tom Townsend and the Problem of Interpretation

Of these two characters in *Metropolitan*, Tom provides the most useful starting point for this analysis. This is because as the film progresses, it becomes clear that his antagonistic reading of *Mansfield Park* is based on certain discrepancies in his interpretive skills. These discrepancies are ones which both the characters in the novel and we as readers share.

Tom's social background is at odds with the way in which he interprets the novel. If Tom is indeed Edmund's counterpart, we would expect that he would have an insider status within the Sally Fowler Rat Pack. Edmund, after all, is an accepted insider in *Mansfield Park* by virtue of his ties to the Bertram family. However, in the film, Tom's middle-class background distances him from the wealthy and privileged one of the Sally Fowler Rat Pack. He addresses this distance from the start when Nick,

one of the principal Rat Pack members, invites Tom to share a taxi ride with him and his friends. Tom's response to this is that he "never takes a cab" (155), indicating a preference for walking and public transport. Later, when attending his first debutante party, he reveals that he bears a great dislike for debutante culture and, as Audrey puts it, "'Conventional Society' in general" (161). He justifies his presence at the Rat Pack's parties by claiming that "it is justifiable to go once, to know at first hand what it is [he] is [opposing]" (162).

In both of these cases, Tom 'protests' against debutante culture by asserting his need to observe and experience the social realities which exist around him. This need gestures towards the characteristics associated with the figure of the fláneur. According to Keith Tester, Claude Baudelaire describes this figure as a streetwalker "who can reap aesthetic meaning and an individual kind of existential security from the spectacle of the teeming crowds—the visible public—of the metropolitan environment of the city [...]" (2). Baudelaire claims that by being a societal observer, the fláneur experiences "feverish delights that the egoist locked up in himself as in a box, and the slothful man like a mollusk in his shell, will be eternally deprived of" (ctd. in Tester 2).

Tom's fláneurie is a characteristic we do not naturally associate with Edmund. Yet there are certain elements of this activity that we can relate to Fanny's character. This may not be clear at first glance. Trilling's essay observes that Fanny "cannot cut a basket of roses without fatigue and headache" (128), indicating she has little chance of possessing the adventurous, outgoing sensibilities of the fláneur. Yet like the fláneur, Fanny is an observer who recognises social truths which the inhabitants of Mansfield Park, in their ignorance, are unable to comprehend. This also makes her the only character that is capable of interpreting the moral subtext of "Lovers' Vows" accurately. Because Tom, in his capacity as a fláneur, believes himself to be an observer, we expect his interpretation of *Mansfield Park* to closely parallel Fanny's reading of the play text. We expect him to have sensitivity towards Fanny's moral

values, particularly because his outsider status amongst the Rat Pack relates to the isolation she feels while living at Mansfield Park. We also presume that he should have an understanding of the moral subtext of the novel.

However, as the plot of *Metropolitan* develops, it becomes clear that Tom's interpretive skills are more closely aligned to Henry Crawford than they are to Fanny. This is indicated in the following scene where Tom and Audrey debate further about the merits of *Mansfield Park*. As this debate escalates, Tom makes an unexpected confession:

> Audrey: I read that Lionel Trilling essay you mentioned. You really like Trilling?
> Tom: Yes.
> Audrey: I think he's very strange. He says that "nobody" could like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*. I like her. Then he goes on and on about how "we" modern people, today, with "our" modern attitudes "bitterly resent" *Mansfield Park* because its heroine is virtuous. *(A puzzled look.)* What's wrong with a novel having a virtuous heroine? Finally, it turns out that he really likes *Mansfield Park*, so what's the point?
> Tom: His point is that the novel's premise —that there's something immoral in a group of young people putting on a play —is simply absurd.
> Audrey: *(Challenging him)* You found Fanny Price unlikeable?
> Tom: She sounds pretty unbearable, but I haven't read the book.
> Audrey: What?
> Tom: You don't have to read a book to have an opinion on it. I haven't read the Bible either.
> Audrey: What Jane Austen novels have you read?
> Tom: None. I don't read novels. I prefer good literary criticism —that way you get both the novelists' ideas and the critics' thinking. With fiction I can never forget that none of it really happened —that it's all just made up by the author. (192-193)

The link between Tom and Henry Crawford's interpretive skills is implied in Tom's choice to base his interpretations of literary texts entirely on the opinions of literary critics as opposed to his own independent readings of these texts. By merely repeating what he has read in Trilling's essay on *Mansfield Park* and essentially claiming his opinions as his own, Tom is himself submitting to a form of 'play acting', just as Henry Crawford does.

What is interesting about *Metropolitan*'s use of literary criticism as a signifier for Henry Crawford's interpretive skills is that it forges a subtle link to the critical reception of "Lovers' Vows" when it was first performed. As I mentioned in my chapter on *Mansfield Park*, critics' responses to "Lovers' Vows" suggested that the play is sensationalist and excessively sentimental in nature. In the preface to her popular 1798 English translation of the play, Elizabeth Inchbald reiterates this interpretation by claiming that Amelia's dialogue, in its original form, "would have been revolting to an English audience" (Inchbald 187) because of its coarseness and vulgarity. In the novel the impact of these critical interpretations of the play is subtly suggested by the characters' remarks on Amelia's character. For instance, Julia Bertram deems Amelia an "odious, little, pert, unnatural, impudent girl" (127) and Henry Crawford identifies Amelia as being "playful and simple" (126). Austen plays with the irony that the flaws which the characters collectively find in "Lovers' Vows" are ones that they themselves possess.

Just as Fanny is the only character in *Mansfield Park* who appears to be able to interpret "Lovers' Vows" from her own, uninfluenced moral perspective, Audrey is the only character in *Metropolitan* who is able to interpret *Mansfield Park* from her own independent vantage point. She demonstrates this ability through the manner in which she structures her opinion of the novel as a response which both complements and contradicts the content of Trilling's essay. This indicates that Audrey is multi-faceted in her method of reading. Certainly then Fanny and her assumed counterpart Audrey seem to represent the kind of reader that Tom desires to be. Perhaps this is a desire that readers of *Mansfield Park* share with Tom. These readers may believe that they read as Fanny and Audrey do. Yet maybe they, like Tom, unknowingly submit to Henry Crawford's reading practices as they voice an opinion of a text which may not truly be their own. In this instance, if we consider Tom as a signifier for this particular method of reading then there is a distinctly carnivalesque dynamic at play whereby the reader desires to 'be' Fanny but instead finds herself 'playing' Henry Crawford.

Inevitably, at the end of *Metropolitan*, Tom achieves his desire to read as Fanny and Audrey do and, in doing so, enacts this desire for us. He does this by stepping into Edmund's role. Like Edmund, Tom learns an important readerly moral lesson. In the novel Edmund's wish to read as Fanny does is granted after he comes to recognise, through Fanny's influence, the significance of silence as a means of demonstrating his moral independence. As I clarified in my previous chapter, this independence implies both that his understanding of "Lovers' Vows" is redeemed and that he has regained his affinity with Anhalt, his counterpart in the play. Similarly in *Metropolitan* Tom gains, through Audrey's influence, an affinity with the reader he wishes to be. Furthermore, he gains an independent understanding of *Mansfield Park*. In this case Tom's moral lesson is supplemented with another game. The film echoes Hutcheon's claim that we experience adaptation "as palimpsests through our memory of other works" (*Adaptation* 8) as it incorporates a crucial reference to another Austen text. The text in question is *Persuasion*, Austen's last completed novel, which Audrey deems one of her favourite literary works alongside *Mansfield Park* and Leon Tolstoy's epic *War and Peace*. Drawing on this knowledge, Tom approaches Audrey after reading the novel and informs her that he found it "quite [...]funny" (224). The choice of *Persuasion* as an intertext here is an intriguing one in that, as E.M. Butler identifies, there are close parallels between this novel and *Mansfield Park*:

> *Persuasion* […] is based on the scheme of *Mansfield Park* in much the same manner in which the latter is based on *Lovers' Vows*. […]. The rightful hero, *Frederick* Wentworth, will cause no lasting suffering to anyone for Henry Crawford has been divided into two: the gallant naval captain, and the dissolute Mr Elliot […]. (337)

In a footnote Butler expands on this observation by stating the following:

> Henry Crawford once fervently wished that he had entered the navy. Miss Austen fulfils this wish in *Persuasion*, another sign that she relents towards him. (337)

In motivating the purpose of this interrelation between *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, Butler stresses her belief that the latter novel is Austen's atonement for the severity of the moral judgements she places on her characters in *Mansfield Park*. This severity, she claims, is attributed to Austen's need to correct the moral wrongs of "Lovers' Vows" through her writing of *Mansfield Park*. She clarifies this when she concludes that "Miss Austen actively regretted her ferocity in *Mansfield Park*; [...] attributing it (as she had every right to do) to the malignant influence of Kotzebue" (Butler 337). In terms of the line of argument I adopt in this chapter, it would be interesting to suggest that, though Austen appears more sympathetic to the intentions of "Lovers' Vows" than most critics, perhaps she herself recognised that there were certain inaccuracies in her interpretation of the play. These errors were then wrongfully punished through the characters of *Mansfield Park*. Hence in this context *Persuasion* would act an apology to both *Mansfield Park* and Kotzebue.

If this is the case Tom's reading of *Persuasion* could itself be read as a response to the severity of his judgement of *Mansfield Park*. Trilling takes the form of the "malignant influence" (Butler 337) while Tom's approval of *Persuasion* marks his redemption. Through his interaction with Audrey here, he allows readers to experience the joy of independent, uncorrupted or unaffected reading. Most intriguingly, this is done through an Austen text which is (if we adopt Butler's line of argument) in itself an apology. If readers approach the film having read *Persuasion* and possessing some awareness of its discreet apology to *Mansfield Park*, then maybe their readerly faults are redeemed too.

4.3 Audrey and the Cult of the Austenite

As her defence of *Mansfield Park* indicates, Audrey is what is popularly known as an 'Austenite'. As the name suggests, an Austenite is a keen follower of Austen's work. However, because of Austen's status within twentieth century popular culture, this term becomes symbolic of two contrasting modes of reading. Each of those modes requires a reader to pursue a particular kind of reader identity. An Austenite can be a reader who engages with Austen as a high culture canonical figure. This particular reader takes an academic interest in Austen's work. The Austenite who reads Jane Austen as (to use Wiltshire's emphasis) 'Jane Austen' is one who interacts with her work from the perspective of contemporary culture. This means that the reader in question responds to Austen's work through its popularisation in mainstream media and culture. Such readers take a playful low culture approach to Austen's work which is most often initiated by an interest and curiosity in the novels' characters and central romance plots. I gestured towards the characteristics of this form of Austenite at the beginning of this chapter when I mentioned Claudia L. Johnson's discussion of the popular intertextual character game played by readers of Austen's fiction. Games are indeed a central preoccupation for the popular culture-orientated Austenite. Most commonly, these games are rooted in a desire to 'live' Austen's fiction. The reader sees in Austen's work an ideal literary fantasy which she desires to enact in the real world. Hence she chooses to identify vicariously with the romantic illusion which she believes the text to represent.

Our knowledge of these two streams of Austen readership extends *Metropolitan*'s interrogation of the process of reading to how we, as readers, engage with Jane Austen. The two forms of Austenite are contrasted through Audrey's development throughout the film. From this perspective, classifying Audrey as a mere counterpart for Fanny is too simplistic. Audrey, in fact, is a character who wears a "multiform mask". As she undergoes her Austenite 'evolution' she adopts the interpretive skills of a number of different characters in *Mansfield Park.* As with Tom, the different

Mansfield Park characters Audrey relates to shed light on our ways and experiences of reading Austen's work.

Wiltshire details two particular scenes which suggest how Audrey reads Jane Austen as 'Jane Austen'. In one scene, he observes, we see Audrey "out sadly Christmas shopping, [being] drawn irresistibly towards a Fifth Avenue bookshop window in which a set of Jane Austen's novels is displayed, alongside a toy signifying their suitability as a gift" (Wiltshire 50). In a later scene in the film, Audrey disappears, leading to fears that she has run off to a beach house with Rick Von Sleneker, a promiscuous playboy who has an unfavourable reputation amongst the members of the Rat Pack. In an effort to ease his and Tom's anxieties about Audrey's whereabouts, Charlie, a Rat Pack member who is in love with Audrey, briefly refers to Audrey's moral values. In a slightly mocking tone he states "Audrey has very clear views about these things—you know she's a big admirer of Jane Austen. She's probably at home asleep right now, with the pink coverlet tucked in tight and her stuffed animals looking over her" (*Metropolitan* ctd. in Wiltshire 51). In considering both these scenes, Wiltshire deduces that perhaps "Audrey's love of Jane Austen (or is it 'Jane Austen'?) is juvenile and nostalgic" (Wiltshire 50).

Developing from this specific claim, it is evident that Audrey's method of reading differs greatly to that of Fanny's in these scenes. As she glances at the child-like presentation of Austen's novels in the shop window, she does not read from a sensible and morally-informed perspective. Her engagement here is purely based on Austen's value as a commodity of popular culture. This method of reading brings her closer to Mary Crawford's method of reading which operates in a similar manner. For instance, in her approach to playing Amelia in "Lovers' Vows", Mary Crawford's interest has little to do with interpreting and decoding the subtext of the play. Her main concern is with performing and 'living' the role of Kotzebue's heroine in a way which is befitting to the "social gaze". In the same way, Audrey indicates in these scenes that her interest in Austen's work involves immersing herself in a socially

conceived fantasy that 'Jane Austen', the popular culture figure, fosters. Audrey's reading practices have turned from being insightful and nuanced to being vulgar and sentimental. Yet this particular 'transformation' is not as simple as it appears because, despite possessing the characteristics of the popular culture-defined Austenite, Audrey still expresses the views of the intellectual Austenite. Echoing the manner in which Amelia balances the morally sound Fanny and the verbally forward Mary Crawford, Audrey continuously wrestles between her Fanny and Mary Crawford personas. She wants to 'live' Austen's fiction, just as Mary Crawford wants to 'live' Amelia's role in "Lovers' Vows". At the same time, however, she wants to distance herself from this fiction and engage with it from an informed, academic perspective.

What then does Audrey's balancing between Fanny and Mary Crawford's reader roles tell us about our own identities as readers of Austen's work? Perhaps it tells us that a reader cannot ever completely distance herself from assuming a particular Austenite identity. Maybe the two versions of Austenite are, in fact, involved in an "ongoing dialogical process" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 21) with one another. One Austenite identity cannot exist unless it is complemented by the opposing Austenite identity. This answer is not at first made explicit because Audrey herself tends to stumble while enacting the contrasting roles of the two Austenites. This is made evident in a scene where the Rat Pack decide to play a game of "Truth". After Sally Fowler, the principal member of the group, explains the rules of the game, Audrey reacts in a manner which echoes one of the most famous scenes in *Mansfield Park*. In re-enacting this scene, she comes into conflict with Cynthia, one of the more promiscuous members of the group:

> Sally: It's called "Truth". You stretch a Kleenex over the mouth of a highball glass and place a dime on it, then we take turns burning a hole in it with a cigarette; if the dime falls in on your turn you lose and have to answer with absolute honesty whatever question you're asked, no matter how embarrassing.
> Cynthia: Yes, the more embarrassing the better.
> [...]

> Cynthia: (*Excited*) [Sometimes you find out the] most amazing things. It can be really incredible.
> Audrey: I don't think we should play this.
> Sally: Why not?
> Audrey: There are good reasons why people don't go about telling each other their most intimate thoughts.
> Cynthia: What do you have to hide?
> Audrey: No, I just know that games like this can be really dangerous.
> [...]
> Sally: I don't see what's "dangerous" about it.
> Audrey: You don't have to. Other people have. That's how it became a convention—people saw the harm excessive candor could do. That's why there are conventions, so people don't have to go around repeating the same mistakes over and over again.
> Sally: *(To Audrey*) What you say might be true among people who don't know each other well, but surely not with us.
> Audrey: Then it's even worse.
> Cynthia: Let's discuss this. Basically what this game requires is complete candor—which means openness, honesty. I don't see how that can be bad.
> Audrey: Well, it can.
> Cynthia: Then don't play—but don't wreck it for everyone else.
> [...]
> *There's a long pause during which nearly everyone looks at Audrey for some response; she looks down, pondering the situation.*
> [...]
> Audrey: No. Go ahead. I'll play. (231-232)

Stillman has stipulated that "Audrey's opposition to the truth game and Fanny's opposition to the group performing […] "Lovers' Vows" in *Mansfield Park* [parallel] each other" (Sussler n.p.). Indeed this scene reflects on the conflict that surrounds the "Lovers' Vows" play so precisely that it provides Audrey with the perfect opportunity to 'be' Fanny, her ideal literary heroine. However, she approaches this opportunity by 'speaking' the themes of the novel, employing her analytical Austenite voice as she addresses the importance of social conventions. In this sense she is accurately channeling Fanny's opinion on the dangers of performance. Yet, the dialogue she speaks creates an analytical distance between herself and *Mansfield Park* as opposed to allowing her to 'live' Fanny's meditative silences. The uneasy intersection between these two Austenite voices causes Audrey to fail at effectively enacting either one of them. Subsequently, her reluctant decision to participate in the "Truth" game implies that she has betrayed both her literary role and her analytical

one. Perhaps then, for the reader of Austen's novels, this implies a somewhat limited variation on my original assumption. The perspective which appears to be suggested here indicates that to partake in both Austenite reader roles is impossible. The reader must either choose to read Jane Austen or 'Jane Austen'. To use a more casual phrase, she cannot 'have it both ways'.

Audrey's failure to negotiate between both Austenite reader roles in the "Truth" game scene leads her to realise that she will have to choose between them. Subsequently, she decides to embark on a reading of Jane Austen in the mode of 'Jane Austen'. This implies that, in the context of *Mansfield Park*, she has chosen to 'be' Mary Crawford, not Fanny. However, the way in which she decides to enact this role for us differs significantly to the way she attempted to play it at the beginning of the film. Audrey's 'metamorphosis' here occurs after Tom admits, while playing the "Truth" game, that he has romantic feelings for Serena Slocum, a socialite who attends college with Audrey. When mapped onto the plot of *Mansfield Park*, as Wiltshire identifies, the Audrey/ Tom/ Serena triangle parallels the Fanny/ Edmund/ Mary Crawford triangle of the novel. Henry Crawford too has his counterpart in the form of Charlie who secretly pines for Audrey's affections. In keeping with the motivations of the Fanny role, Audrey rejects him. Yet, as a result of this, Audrey does not find refuge in silence as Fanny does. Nor does she continue her efforts to engage Tom's affections as Fanny does with Edmund. Instead she chooses to digress from the novel's plot and reinvents Fanny's literary role. This is established in the following scene where Audrey, in comparing herself to Cynthia, questions her values while in conversation with Jane, one of her closest friends in the Rat Pack:

> Audrey: Maybe Cynthia's right.
> Jane: That's impossible.
> Audrey: Her essential view is that experience is good, and she's set out to acquire it. I've been just the opposite. Everything's been in my imagination— all the romance imaginary, nothing real. (237)

When Audrey speaks of "experience" (237), she refers to an 'adventure' of a sexual nature, as opposed to the romantic one which she has attempted to 'live' out up until this point. If Audrey is to set out to acquire this "experience" (237) then she is playing against Fanny's values. By the same token, such behaviour is somewhat at odds with Mary Crawford's persona because, despite her forwardness, she does not engage in any inappropriate or transgressive actions. The Austenite that Audrey asks us to experience is one that is most certainly at odds with the version of 'Jane Austen' which promotes her as "code for gentility and 'old-fashioned' virtues" (Wiltshire 51). Somehow Audrey seems to have heeded Tom's words. It seems as if she now believes that, within our contemporary period, the values Austen's work signifies are "ridiculous" (177). Yet she is not completely prepared to depart from Austen's world. Rather she seems to want to revise her literary fantasy so that it remains Austenian but in a manner in which is compatible with the values of contemporary society. In doing so, the dilemma of the Austen reader becomes even greater as she is not only asked to negotiate between her allegiance to Jane Austen or 'Jane Austen', but also how she acquaints Austen's values with her contemporary ones.

The manner in which Audrey demonstrates her handling of this dilemma is an unusual one because it is completely at odds with the actions Austen would wish Fanny (or any of her other heroines) to take. In fact, Audrey appears to reject the moral lessons she has gleaned from her reading of *Mansfield Park* almost completely. In enacting her revised modern plot, she decides to accompany Cynthia on her visit to the wealthy Rick Von Sloneker's beach house. Von Sloneker is a promiscuous playboy who is disliked by the majority of the Rat Pack members. This action leads Tom to believe that Audrey's motivation for this visit is to lose her virginity to Von Sloneker. He has a dream where Audrey is stripped down to her underwear and held captive in Von Sloneker's arms. Preoccupied with proving herself sexually, she utters: "I want to be a real woman" (269). If gaining sexual experience is the motivation for Audrey's visit, then her role in the character game changes significantly. It implies that she is now neither Fanny nor Mary Crawford but rather

one of *Mansfield Park*'s 'fallen women'. These 'fallen women' are Maria and Julia Bertram, each of whom escapes their circumstances by taking similarly transgressive physical journeys. Of the two women, Maria commits the greatest sin by abandoning her loveless marriage to Mr. Rushworth and escaping to Twickenham where she engages in a love affair with Henry Crawford. Julia, on the other hand, secretly elopes with Mr. Yates in London and then escapes with him to Scotland. These transgressions are punished accordingly by Austen, specifically in the case of Maria who, after shaming her family with her actions and failing to acquire a promise of marriage from Henry Crawford, is sent off to live in isolation with her aunt Mrs Norris in "another country" (432).

The question raised here is a troubling one. If Austen perceives Julia and, particularly, Maria's behaviour with such disdain, how are we to acquaint them with the modern Fanny that Audrey is attempting to represent? Perhaps the answer lies in considering Maria Bertram's "Lovers' Vows" counterpart, Agatha Friburg. In the play Agatha is a sickly and poverty-stricken woman who, in her youth, engaged in a love affair with Baron Wildenhaim, the son of her patroness. The play reveals that this affair resulted in a pregnancy which caused Agatha to be banished from her village. On the advice of her clergyman, she moved to a town where she gave birth to a son out of wedlock. Though Agatha's transgression causes her to suffer for many years, she is 'rewarded' when her son makes contact with the Baron who then decides to marry her to make up for the faults of the past. Butler suggests that Austen was so disgusted by this rewarding of Agatha's actions that she chose to punish it through the fate that befalls Maria in *Mansfield Park*.

Ironically modern readers would not judge Agatha as harshly as Austen does. From this perspective, it is interesting to consider that the values which are established in "Lovers' Vows" are possibly more modern than those expressed in *Mansfield Park*. Perhaps then, if we are to attempt to apply contemporary values to this novel in particular, we should adopt the moral perspectives of the play. In doing so, we should

hold *Mansfield Park* under the same scrutiny that most of the novel's characters apply to their reading of "Lovers' Vows". If this is the case, then *Metropolitan*'s adaptation of *Mansfield Park* once again causes us to experience "palimpsests through our memories of other works" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 21). Essentially the film itself takes on the contemporary reading of the novel which I have suggested here. By making Audrey a 'fallen woman' who adheres to the values that Maria, Julia and, more specifically, "Lovers' Vows" Agatha follow, the film counteracts the appeal of the virtuous heroine. Instead it places Fanny/ Audrey in the role of the 'fallen' heroine which, in line with Trilling's argument, will be rewarded because she is considered more acceptable to modern readers' tastes. If this is indeed the contemporary approach that the film is taking to the novel, then it works to a similar effect as the apology Austen offers to the characters of *Mansfield Park* and Kotzebue through her writing of *Persuasion*. In this case the film could be our own apology as contemporary readers for applauding the "'old fashioned' values" (Wiltshire 51) presented in the novel when, from a modern perspective, we should be interpreting them in a more critical manner.

Yet the ending of *Metropolitan* revises its alleged variation on a contemporary reading of *Mansfield Park* entirely. In so doing, it provides the answers to all the questions we have been seeking throughout the film. In this ending Tom and Charlie come searching for Audrey at the beach house, afraid that she has sacrificed her virtue to please Von Sloneker. After 'rescuing' Audrey from Von Sloneker who refers to her as a "flat-chested, goody-goody" (279), Tom inquires as to whether any form of sexual activity transpired between the two of them:

> Tom: Did anything happen?
> Audrey: Of course not.
> Tom: You mean you were never interested in Von Sloneker at all?
> *Audrey silent for a long while, teasingly implying ambivalence, but then an expression indicating "of course not, you fool."*
> Then why did you come out?

> Audrey: To get a suntan…And the whole thing with the Rat Pack was getting claustrophobic. And Cynthia insisted I come —she's terribly impressed with Rick.
> Tom: It's not something Jane Austen would have done.
> Audrey: No. (280)

Tom's observation that Audrey's actions were not ones that Jane Austen would have undertaken is an interesting point of departure here. In applying our Austenite knowledge here we can deduce that Tom is partly right in making this observation. Escaping from a 'high society' city environment to a beach house in the Hamptons is certainly not an action that Austen would wish any one of her heroines to participate in, least of all Fanny. Yet, in committing this action, Audrey does not sacrifice her values, nor does she attempt to. This behaviour is in fact an attribute of which Austen would greatly approve. In all of Austen's novels the one moral message that remains constant pertains to the importance of staying true to one's values, no matter what obstacles or temptations may prevent this from occurring. However, to fully understand what these values are, as the subtext of these novels rightfully suggests, one must experience the nature of alternative values.

This experience is essentially what Audrey reflects on and puts into practice here as she plays the roles of the virtuous and 'fallen' heroine against one another. Ultimately her choice to stay true to Fanny's values (as she has in fact done throughout the film) implies that she will continue to 'live' the role of Fanny. Hence, she will continue to enact the values of the Austenite who reads 'Jane Austen' by attempting to recreate the romantic fantasies of the literature she reads. She will then perform a function that is not completely far removed from Mary Crawford's. Simultaneously, the manner in which she allows herself to perform the roles of other characters in *Mansfield Park* as a means of negotiating her true counterpart, suggests that she maintains an analytical engagement with the text. From this perspective, she is indeed the Austenite who reads Jane Austen as opposed to 'Jane Austen'. Therefore the lesson which Audrey has learned here is two-fold. On one level, she learns that the values she applauds in Austen's work and the figure of the virtuous heroine still have relevance in the

modern world. This is an observation she addresses directly through her decision to inhabit the role of Fanny. On another level, she realises that her readings of Jane Austen and 'Jane Austen' are not as far removed from one another as they first appear to be. In fact it is only through her subtle yet consistent engagement between these two Austenite identities that she is able to find affinity with her desired reader identity in the context of *Mansfield Park*.

For us, the implications of this ending work to a similar effect. We too come to realise as modern readers of Austen's fiction that the "'old fashioned' values" (Wiltshire 51) she addresses still have value in contemporary society. They also remain valuable to contemporary readings of her novels. In this case, though we may still admire the 'fallen' heroine that Trilling advocates for, the virtuous heroine that Austen endorses, specifically in *Mansfield Park*, can still be admired from a modern reader's perspective. Through Audrey, *Metropolitan* also observes that facilitating an engagement between both Austenite identities is crucial to our reading of Austen's work. It is only through this constant engagement that we are truly able to understand Austen's value from both high culture and low culture perspectives.

4.4 Conclusion

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, Whit Stillman does not consider *Metropolitan* to be a filmic adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, citing the plot and character links between the film and Austen's text as being purely coincidental. Yet, as I have shown, this film in fact aligns itself with an adaptation process which maps itself onto the one we find occurring in the novel's adaptation of "Lovers' Vows".

In utilising this process, *Metropolitan* illuminates Austen's critique of our readerly values which underlies the subtext of *Mansfield Park*. The film's protagonists each hold a specific view of how a text should be read and, as I have argued, their particular methods of reading parallel the ones the characters in the novel employ in

their readings of "Lovers' Vows". By creating this parallel, *Metropolitan* highlights how Austen problematises her readers' own methods of reading. The film suggests, as Austen does, that though some readers claim to be independent in their analysis of a text, their interpretations of this text are not always truly their own. The protagonists' discussions about the status and merits of Austen's work allow us to experience the conflicts which are inherent in these methods of reading. In doing so, they emphasise the readerly lessons which subtly inform the discussions held by the characters of *Mansfield Park* on the attributes of "Lovers' Vows".

In the second part of my argument, I assessed how *Metropolitan*'s use of the adaptation process at work in *Mansfield Park* comments on the way Austen is read in a contemporary context. I suggested that the film recognises that, in order to engage successfully in a contemporary reading of Austen's work, we should be able to read her in the modalities of both Jane Austen and 'Jane Austen'. While Jane Austen signifies Austen's status as a canonical novelist, 'Jane Austen' is a figure who conceptualises romantic fantasies for her female readers. The film recognises that an understanding of how Austen's work operates in both these modalities allows us to configure our contemporary readerly values in a manner which complements those we find in the texts.

By using *Mansfield Park* as the source text from which it departs into its interrogation of readers' identities and attitudes towards Austen's work, *Metropolitan* also borrows from the novel's approach to the adaptation process. It does so by recognising that, in its capacity as an "ongoing dialogical process" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 21), adaptation provides us with a means through which to assess our own relationship to the novelist and, in doing so, finds new methods through which to engage with her in our contemporary world.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have used two contemporary film adaptations of Jane Austen's novels to make two particular claims about the process of adaptation. The first of these is that, despite the fact that it involves an elimination of the prose in a text, a film adaptation does not necessarily diminish the value of a literary text. Rather, it opens up new ways of interpreting the text which a reader may not have identified on an initial reading. The second claim is that a film adaptation does not have to be completely faithful to a literary work in order to access the voice of the author and the intensions of the text. To return to Linda Hutcheon's claim, "Adaptation is repetition but repetition without replication […]. The urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is likely as a desire to pay tribute [to it] by copying" (*Adaptation* 7).

I have argued in favour of Hutcheon's claim that adaptation is an "ongoing dialogical process" (*Adaptation* 21). In my close reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism which he develops in his essay "Discourse in the Novel", I demonstrated that this dialogic process operates on the basis of formulating a dialogue between the literary and the filmic text. This dialogue involves the active role of the reader who uses the literary text to construct the meaning of the filmic text and simultaneously uses the filmic text to negotiate meaning within the literary text.

The two Austen film adaptations which I have used to explore this "ongoing dialogical process" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 21) within film adaptation are Amy Heckerling's 1995 mainstream youth film *Clueless* which is an adaptation of *Emma*, and Whit Stillman's 1990 art-house film *Metropolitan*, which is an adaptation of *Mansfield Park*. Both films are contemporary 're-imaginings' of their source material and both take extensive liberties as they remap Austen's narratives to appeal to the sensibilities of modern audiences. Neither of these films were expressly marketed as film adaptations of Austen's novels. They assumed their identities as adaptations

because audiences identified Austen's voice within their narratives and therefore employed her work as a medium through which to engage with these films. Simultaneously, as I have shown, the contemporary modalities of *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* assist us in formulating, evaluating and negotiating our reading of Austen's texts.

In contextualising my analysis of the films in relation to Austen's work, I focused on Austen's preoccupation with literary culture. In each of Austen's texts, she explores the roles of the reader, narrator and author by using her characters and the narrator's role as a means through which to examine the identities of her readers. The stylistic methods in which she constructs this assessment of readerly values are unavailable to the film adapter. Because film is a visual medium, the adapter can only accurately construct details such as the text's historical setting, characters and plot details. The novelist's voice and prose are potentially lost within this visual process.

However, as I have argued, *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* are able to capture Austen's voice and engage with her literary concerns precisely because they take Austen out of her world and into our own. The adaptation processes at work in the films imply a dismantling of Austen's historical context. This releases Austen from the interpretive restrictions imposed by this context. This release allows Austen to 'speak' through these films, emphasising how her observations on the nature of reading are relevant to our contemporary readerly attitudes. Moreover, they allow us to question Austen's own status within contemporary culture.

I constructed my analyses of *Clueless* and *Metropolitan* by firstly evaluating *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* in relation to how these novels position Austen's critique of our readerly values. I then followed this with an assessment of *Clueless* and *Metropolitan*, demonstrating how each film maps itself on to this critique and allows Austen's voice to interact with us in a contemporary modality.

In my first chapter I examined *Emma*. My focus in this chapter was on how the readerly strengths and weaknesses of the characters in this novel relate to the theories of eighteenth-century social theorist Mary Wollstonecraft, a contemporary of Austen's. Wollstonecraft's theories deal with the problem of class relations in her era, particularly in relation to the different educational opportunities offered to men and women. In *Emma,* there are consistent echoes of the theories Wollstonecraft presents in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* and I used these texts as a basis on which to develop my analysis of the reading practices of the novel's protagonist Emma Woodhouse and its secondary characters.

Another concern of mine in this chapter was the role of the narrator in the novel. The narrator of *Emma* has a complex relationship with the novel's protagonist. She (the narrator) constantly undermines Emma when she speaks, mocking her as she tries, in a misguided manner, to assert her skills as an accomplished reader. In turn, Emma herself attempts to assume control of the narrative in an effort to transform it into one which emulates the conventions of the romantic fiction which she avidly reads. Emma's triumph as a reader, as I suggested, emerges when she realises her interpretive errors which the narrator has made us aware of throughout the text. In doing so, she echoes Wollstonecraft's sentiments as she transforms from a reader who possesses the "artificial" (Kirkham 41) sensibilities of a rich woman to one who reads and acts in her "most natural state" (Kirkham 41). Austen believes that this is the type of reader we ourselves should aspire to be and subsequently she encourages us to make Emma's readerly values our own.

In my second chapter, I broadened my analysis of the readerly values Austen presents us with in *Emma* to encompass the one which emerges in our viewing of *Clueless*. I established that "knowing" viewers who approach *Clueless* as Austen purists tend to dismiss it as a vulgar and disrespectful modernisation of *Emma* which 'dumbs down' Austen's text to suit the demands of "unknowing" contemporary youth audiences. The film, which deals with the matchmaking exploits of a rich and frivolous teenage

girl, makes its affinity with this "unknowing" youth viewer known by constructing a filmic universe which is saturated with contemporary popular culture signifiers.

On a surface level, its emphasis on popular culture appears to distance *Clueless* from Austen's world completely. Yet, as I indicated, Austen's work itself was part of the popular culture of her period. Furthermore, Austen herself was a lover of popular culture and her novels offer subtle critiques of readers' attitudes towards the popular literature of her day. *Clueless,* I suggested, takes Austen's critique and reconceptualises it within a contemporary modality. It merges the popular culture of the nineties era with those of the past, most notably literature which we now classify as canonical. By bringing this literature into the present, *Clueless* allows us to experience it (as well as Austen's work) in its original pop-cultural modality. By doing this, I suggested that the film (like Austen) challenges our conception of high culture and low culture.

Clueless formulates its Austenian critique of this high culture/ low culture dichotomy on two levels. Firstly, as in *Emma*, The role of readers is parodied through the film's protagonist, Cher. Our amusement in viewing *Clueless* stems from watching Cher make continuous errors as she attempts to assert her literary "knowledge". The irony of this amusement, as I argued, is that we also tend to misjudge and misinterpret canonical texts as we attach a status to them which they did not initially possess in their inception. I indicated that Cher's "cluelessness" matches our own literary "cluelessness" as we (like her) wrongfully define our relationship to canonical and popular texts through, what I termed, a low culture hierarchy. On the second level, *Clueless* also utilises the reading practices employed by its secondary characters to propose methods through which we can read Austen's work in a low culture modality. The film suggests that we should read Austen's work for pleasure and enjoyment. However, *Clueless* also recognises that we should not limit ourselves to a surface reading of her novels. Rather, we should actively examine the complexities of the social worlds she presents to us.

In my analysis of *Mansfield Park* in my third chapter, I suggested that Austen's critique of literary culture in this particular novel is two-fold. Firstly, it highlights the readerly values and attitudes of its characters through the manner in which they interpret August Von Kotzebue's "Lovers' Vows", the play which they decide to perform. Secondly, the characters' interpretations of the play are used to comment on the play itself. When it was first performed, "Lovers' Vows" was met with scepticism by critics who, as I indicated, claimed that it "pandered to the public love of sensational plots" (Kirkham 95). Through the differing opinions each character has of the play, Austen explores the validity of these critics' claims. She highlights the social and moral concerns of the play, either rewarding or punishing her own characters for the way in which they act on (or do not act on) the values which the play promotes.

Austen's critique of "Lovers' Vows" in *Mansfield Park* is complicated by the statements of critics such as E.M. Butler, who claim that the novel is itself an adaptation of the play. Indeed *Mansfield Park* shares a number of narrative details with "Lovers' Vows". The novel's protagonists, for instance, behave and act in ways that align them with specific counterparts from the play. Yet, throughout *Mansfield Park*, these protagonists make vital errors in their moral (and readerly) judgements which contradict the nature of the characters they are meant to represent. The characters' success or failure in portraying their "Lovers' Vows" counterparts invites us to revise the values we attach to the characters in the play and, subsequently, assess our own interpretive skills.

Austen's dialogic approach to adapting "Lovers' Vows" into the narrative of *Mansfield Park* is recognised and emulated in *Metropolitan*. The novel and Austen's work in general form part of the characters' conversations in the film. As the narrative of *Metropolitan* develops, the film replicates specific plot points from *Mansfield Park*. We recognise that the protagonists in the film also share commonalities with those in the novel. Like the novel's protagonists, the characters in

Metropolitan frequently find themselves acting against the reading practices of their counterparts in the novel through their responses to Austen's work.

The textual readings and misreadings that the protagonists of *Metropolitan* encounter in interpreting Austen's work impact on our own engagement with her texts from two particular vantage points. The film, firstly, highlights the readerly values Austen presents us with in *Mansfield Park*. As I argued, the manner in which the reading practices of *Metropolitan's* protagonists consistently alter to accommodate those of a range of characters in the novel sets up a tension between independent and superficial reading. Independent reading occurs when a reader formulates her own, unaided interpretation of a literary text. In contrast, superficial reading occurs when a reader voices an opinion of a text which is not her own. This opinion is one that is either shaped by her social world or the influence of other texts she has read. *Mansfield Park*, as *Metropolitan* indicates, encourages its viewers to pursue the former method of reading as we watch Tom, the film's protagonist, emerge from a superficial reader to an independent one. Secondly, *Metropolitan* leads us to question the attitudes we adopt in reading Austen's work in the mode of 'Jane Austen' as opposed to Jane Austen. 'Jane Austen' refers to Austen in her capacity as a pop-cultural literary icon. In contrast Jane Austen represents Austen's value as a canonical literary figure. In exploring the way in which the film's heroine Audrey alternates between these two Austenites, I suggested that a reader needs to be able to adopt both Austen reader roles in order to effectively engage with her work.

In my assessment of the adaptation strategies at play in both *Clueless* and *Metropolitan*, I have demonstrated that the adaptation process involves a consistent dialogic interaction between the adapted text and the film adaptation. Though both the filmic texts I have chosen for this study appear to be far removed from their source material, they in fact bring us closer to Austen's world. In doing this they call into question both our own values as readers and Austen's critique of these values.

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