



UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO DE JANEIRO
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Emma (1815) and Clueless (1995): adaptation as a tool for literary critics

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RIO DE JANEIRO

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado à Faculdade de Letras (FL) da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, como requisito parcial à obtenção do grau de licenciatura em Letras Português/Inglês

Orientador: Professor Dr. Thiago Rhys Bezerra Cass

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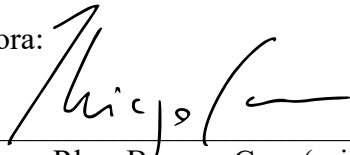
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RESUMO

Neste trabalho, analisaremos como o narrador no romance *Emma* (1815), de Jane Austen, e na produção cinematográfica *As Patricinhas de Beverly Hills* (1995), dirigida por Amy Heckerling, põe-se diante do ecossistema de personagens secundárias e adere à perspectiva da personagem principal. Em *Emma*, o discurso indireto livre, por fundir a voz do narrador com a da protagonista, achata as personagens secundárias, devido ao leitor não ter acesso às suas perspectivas e pensamentos. Pode-se observar algo semelhante em *As Patricinhas de Beverly Hills*, em que a escolha de Cher para narrar em primeira pessoa guia o público a apreender a narrativa por meio de sua perspectiva, desfrutando de seus preconceitos e equívocos. Todavia, pretende-se evidenciar como a transcrição da personagem secundária Harriet, no texto referente, para Tai, na adaptação, é trazida para o primeiro plano com a mudança de meio e a reconfiguração dos elementos para esse novo formato, o cinema. Para aprofundar a análise e alcançar uma compreensão mais abrangente dessas questões, recorreremos a autores como Greenberg (1940) e Bluestone (2003), que se dedicam à questão do meio e como suas particularidades moldam a forma de arte. Esses estudos serão fundamentais para compreender como a transição de meio não apenas impacta a narrativa, mas também recontextualiza personagens, temas e conflitos latentes. Dessa maneira, pretende-se demonstrar como a adaptação pode ser uma ferramenta eficaz para analisar criticamente a obra literária, revelando suas contradições, temas latentes e tensões que podem ser exploradas de maneira mais profunda e multidimensional.

Palavras-chave: Emma, As Patricinhas de Beverly Hills, adaptação, crítica literária.

ABSTRACT

In this final thesis, we will analyze how the narrator of the novel *Emma* (1815), by Jane Austen, and of the cinematographic production *Clueless* (1995), directed by Amy Heckerling, is constructed in the ecosystem of minor characters and how she merges into the protagonist's perspective. In *Emma*, Free Indirect Discourse (FID), for it fuses the narrator's with the protagonist's voice, flattens the minor characters, in view that the reader does not have access to these characters' perspectives and thoughts. Similarly, in *Clueless* the choice of Cher as the first person narrator guides the audience to comprehend the narrative through her own perspective, experiencing her prejudices and misconceptions. Nevertheless, we intend to illustrate how the transcreation of the minor character in the novel, Harriet, Tai, in the adaptation, is brought to the foreground due to the change of medium and the resetting of elements for this new format, cinema. To deepen the analysis and achieve a broader understanding of these issues, we will refer to authors such as Greenberg (1940) and Bluestone (2003), who delve into the question of medium and how its particularities shape the art form. These studies will be instrumental in understanding how the transition of medium not only impacts the narrative but also recontextualizes characters, themes, and latent conflicts. Therefore, we intend to demonstrate how adaptation can be an efficient tool of literary criticism, unveiling the work's contradictions, latent its themes and tensions, which can be explored in a more profound and multidimensional way.

Keywords: Emma; minor characters; free indirect discourse; Clueless; adaptation.

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1

Introduction

Since its earliest moments, the novel, as an art form, is employed to explore the human experience and externalize deepest thoughts and emotions of humankind. *Pamela* (1740), by Samuel Richardson, and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), by Daniel Defoe, two seminal novels of the 18th century, wielded a profound influence on the development of the novel as a genre. These two novels not only shaped the literary landscape of their time but also left a lasting legacy, inspiring countless authors, such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Walter Scott and Charlotte Brontë, to experiment with different narrative styles and thematic elements in their own works. Even with the advancement of technology, novel is still a vital art form, in view of the ability to settle an immersive experience for the reader:

I now begin to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstances I was reduced to; and I drew up the state of my affairs in writing; not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me, for I was like to have but few heirs, as to deliver my thoughts from daily pouring upon them, and afflicting my mind. (Defoe, 1719, p, 40).

Therefore, the critical fortune around the minor characters from such novels is relatively low: they are easily labeled as less important, either by common readers as well as specialized ones, due to the flattening by the protagonists (Woloch, 2009). This flattening might be spotted in *Emma* (1815) by Jane Austen. In *Emma*, an asymmetric narrative is constructed, because, even though the narrator is heavily critical towards the protagonist, the novel has the protagonist's name. The narrative is constructed by a blindness that makes Emma indifferent to the needs and desires of those who are around her. She manipulates her friends and family, especially Harriet, a poor young lady whose origins are in the dark. In view that the narrative does not access the interiority of the other characters, the reader can only trust in the distorted and limited perspective of the protagonist.

Ostensibly, the movie *Clueless* (1995), directed by Amy Heckerling, engenders similar hierarchical unbalance among the characters. The narrative is marked by *voice over*. The transcription of the protagonist of the Austenian novel begins with the following

sentence: “So, ok, you’re probably going: Is this a Noxzema commercial or what?”. Then adding: “But, seriously, I actually have a way of normal life for a teenage girl”. The cinematographic narrative invites the spectator to appreciate what would be an ordinary life of a billionaire young woman, who has good appearance, performs well at school, and, when she does not, persuades her teachers to improve her grades.

Since the beginning of Austen’s work, Emma is presented to us as someone that is keen to influence the minor characters’ relationships. She considers herself the only person capable of guiding her friend to find a pleasant and comfortable relationship. Harriet’s setting in the narrative is guided by the misconceptions of Emma, who considers her submissive and naive. Likewise, the transcreation of the character Tai (Brittany Murphy) seems mediated by the protagonist. As well as Emma, Cher (Alicia Silverstone) feels in the need of helping Tai by adopting and improving her. The protagonists not only control the narrative, but also the configuration of the minor characters. Both of them use social status as their gateway to influence others. Nevertheless, this hierarchy will be turned upside down.

This research is structured into three chapters with the primary objective of demonstrating how adaptations serve as a tool to uncover underlying elements from the source material. The first chapter delves into the novel, focusing on its narrative and the intricacies related to social class. The aim here is to explore how these elements are portrayed and their significance. The nuances unveiled in Jane Austen's *Emma* find illumination in Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Booth meticulously elucidates how Austen manipulates language and narrative technique to craft a story centered on the main protagonist. Through a fusion of the protagonist with the narrator, Austen skillfully exposes her flaws and subjectivity, thereby enabling readers to empathize with her mistakes.

Moving into the second chapter, the research aims to provide an understanding of the two media: novel and film. By analyzing both, it sheds light on the unique characteristics of the narrative forms presented in each. The goal is to understand how adaptations can be used to understand the source text. Chapter two will be bifurcated into the exploration of Clement Greenberg's studies, primarily focusing on his seminal work *Towards a Newer Laocoon* (1940). Greenberg's examination delves into the essence of medium and form, centering on the realm of painting. He posits the specificity of painting, emphasizing its unique qualities inherently tied to its medium. This investigation into medium specificity will further extend to George Bluestone's work in *Novels Into Film* (2003). Bluestone argues that artistic expressions vary significantly from one another due to elements that resist direct translation between different mediums.

The insights derived from Greenberg and Bluestone's studies will be pivotal in understanding the technical adaptations necessitated by different mediums. This comprehension will shed light on how these adaptations can uncover latent aspects within a novel understanding, effectively highlighting shifts in technique brought about by the medium itself.

The third and final chapter concentrates on the film adaptation, particularly in regard to the spatial dynamics between the main protagonist and the minor characters. In *Clueless*, an intriguing balance is established where it both emulates and disrupts the dominance of the protagonist-narrator seen in *Emma*. While in the novel, Harriet consistently complies with Emma's wishes, in *Clueless*, Tai, a character analogous to Harriet, eventually breaks away from Cher's manipulation and asserts her agency. This departure from the original text allows for a deeper understanding of the tensions existing between the source material and the adapted work, highlighting the emergence of a protagonist who actively involves the audience in her subjectivity.

2

Privilege

There is a correlation between thematics and point of view in Jane Austen's *Emma*. The first scene of the novel thrusts the protagonist upon the reader, describing how Emma perceives herself, as "[...] handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence [...]" (Austen, 2015, p.7). Through this vivid depiction, the reader is promptly acquainted with Emma's privileged figure and social position. The offspring of an aristocratic family, she enjoys substantial wealth, esteemed family connections, and an ample income that frees her from the need for financial dependence on labor.

The adjectives used to describe her are "intelligent" and "spoiled". Since her mother's death, Emma has been the mistress of her house and estate. Acutely aware of her elevated social standing, Emma wields her influence to her advantage and "she makes many mistakes because she believes she is always right" (Sadeq, 2017, p. 184). From the beginning, this trait becomes apparent, as she strikes a friendship with her governess, Miss Taylor, instead of complying to a subordinate role, resulting in "they had been living together as friends" and "Emma doing just what she liked" (Austen, 2015, p.7). Her vanity shields her from recognizing her own flaws, strengthened by the fact that, instead of her governess reprimanding her, she endorses Emma's behavior:

Even before Miss Taylor had ceased to hold the nominal office of governess, the mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint; and the shadow of authority being now long passed away [...] (Austen, 2015, p. 7).

Throughout the narrative, she skillfully exercises her power and exposes flaws in characters that do not belong to her social circle. The theme and narrative point of view converge towards this central character: "Thank you, thank you, my own sweet little friend. We will not be parted. A woman is not to marry a man merely because she is asked, or because he is attached to her, and can write a tolerable letter" (Austen, 2015, p. 53).

Emma embodies the characteristics of a spoiled and self-centered young woman, consistently seeking validation and prioritizing her own desires. Despite being the youngest

in her family, she exerts her authority as if she were the matriarch, often disrupting the delicate balance of the social ecosystem. Regrettably, Emma perceives herself as a benefactor, yet fails to exhibit the responsibility and kindness befitting that role when interacting with women from lower social classes (Tobin, 1988, p. 419). Instead of treating them with respect, she adopts inappropriate and condescending behavior:

“Oh! very well”, exclaimed Miss Bates, “then I need not be uneasy. ‘Three things very dull indeed.’ That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan’t I? — (looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body’s assent) — Do not you all think I shall?”

Emma could not resist.

“Ah! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me — but you will be limited as to number — only three at once.” (Austen, 2015, p. 347)

Her viewpoint is entrenched in a belief that others need improvement, perpetuating a mindset that prevents her from seeing them as equals. Emma's naiveté inadvertently reinforces a sense of superiority, causing her to disregard the feelings and preferences of those around her.

2.1. The use of the Free Indirect Discourse (FID) in *Emma*

Opening the story with Emma’s characterization eclipses the entire ecosystem of characters within the narrative. Emma's social standing is intricately woven into the fabric of the novel, aligning her social position with her leading role in the story. The reader experiences Emma’s trajectory through her point of view and perception, and this is effectively achieved through Free Indirect Discourse (FID). The use of this technique merges the narrator with the protagonist, providing the reader a partial and biased perspective. With FID, the features of a third-person narrative are not sacrificed, but the perspective is settled according to a specific character.

The significance of this approach is evident in the opening sentence, with the use of the verbs “seemed to unite”, which contrast with the blessings attributed to Emma, subtly introducing an element of contradiction in her characterization (Richter, 2017, p.184). Therefore, the reader is orientated to empathize and even endorse Emma’s flaws and mistakes (Booth, 1961, p. 245-6). This choice not only shapes the reader’s perspective, but also

deepens their understanding of Emma as a complex character, since the readers have access to her perspective. The main character and the narrator seamlessly blend together, forming a singular voice that wields control over the narrative, dictating the manner in which the story unfolds on every level.

From the very beginning of the novel, Emma is depicted as an independent individual with the power to shape not only the relationships among the secondary characters but also the entire social fabric. Emma exudes confidence in her ability to orchestrate a suitable marriage for her friend, Harriet Smith, despite the latter's disadvantaged background. This notion becomes evident as the narrator introduces Harriet with the sentence, "Harriet Smith was the natural daughter of somebody" (Austen, 2015, p. 23). However, this narrative choice emphasizes Harriet's background rather than her personal qualities, diverting attention away from Emma's remarkable influence.

Furthermore, after the character is described by the narrator, Emma's evaluation on Harriet is understood: "She was not struck by any thing remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation [...]" (Austen, 1815, p. 24). This passage highlights the exclusive, but also sophistic, access the reader has to Emma's perspective, whereas denying them insight into the thoughts and viewpoints of other characters. This narrative technique stems from the implied author, who consciously or unconsciously selects what the reader will encounter (Booth, 1961, p.74-5). The narrator extends her own perspective in a way that this peripheral character is flattened by her (Woloch, 2009, p. 149), as exemplified in the excerpt below:

She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers. (Austen, 2015, p. 24)

In the eighteenth century, the concept of improvement was linked with the idea of progress, meaning "[t]he belief in the movement over time of some aspect or aspects of human existence, within a social setting, towards a better condition" (Spadafora, 1990, p. 6). Moreover, "progress", in this century, was associated with "going forward", and "a course", "a passage" (p. 6). The second meaning of improvement arose in the 1750s, the idea of advancement (p.7), which shaped and oriented the European view towards a straight line that knew no going back, only the pursuit of a better version of humankind. Thus, in the context of the novel, Emma sees her friends as someone who needs fixing, and this task is considered a leisure for her, as Miss Smith is a person who needs constant support. Miss Woodhouse

takes it upon herself to assist Miss Smith, recognizing her as someone who is naive and submissive, reliant on Miss Woodhouse's guidance and refined manners in order to cultivate into a more desirable lady: “Harriet had no penetration. She had been satisfied to hear and believe just what Mrs. Goddard chose to tell her; and looked no farther” (Austen, 2015, p. 27). In a deceiving way, the narrator adds to her own opinion about Harriet that she does not have a deep understanding about the world and does not have strong opinions.

Consonant to Woloch (2009), minor characters are distinguished from the protagonist, because the latter flattens the former in a way that establishes a hierarchy among characters. Due to the flattening endured by the minor character Harriet, there is an unbalance between how Harriet is portrayed by the narrator, through the use of FID, and the setting of the character at the end of the novel, subsequently of the unfolding of the narrative. It is impossible to witness Miss Smith with another perspective except Emma's, also the narrator, who misguides the reader.

How could the reader ever know if Harriet is destined to sink herself forever (Austen, 2015, p. 28)? Can the author be objective? If so, should she? Booth (1961) addresses this matter, stating that when the narrator settles this detached tone, she can intrude the narrative deceiving the reader, letting him/her believe that the narrator is objective. Likewise, this is what happens in *Emma*: it is difficult to see the narrator as the character herself, since Jane Austen uses FID with mastery, letting the reader forget that the author does not disappear in the novel. And by understanding the third-person narrative technique, the reader can locate the boundary between narrator and character (Oberman, 2009, p. 1), especially because this technique affects the whole perception of minor characters, contaminated by a spoiled and selfish protagonist.

When Mr. Elton, the character who was the victim of Emma's matchmaking with Harriet, gets married, Emma wonders about letting her friend know about the marriage. Harriet comes into the scene and starts talking about what happened among her, Robert Martin, and his sister. In this same episode, it is possible to notice Emma's perspective masking Harriet's: “[...] what was the value of Harriet's description? — so easily pleased — so little discerning; what signified her praise?” (Austen, 2015, p. 169). Harriet's own judgment about the event does not come into the light, because the reader has only access to Emma's opinion about Harriet. And this position is not only based on opinion, but based on social class differences, as stated in the first section of this chapter. Harriet's praise is less valued, because the protagonist considers her friend as less capable of reasoning than her, a member of the upper-class sphere.

Another evidence of this fusion between narrator and character is that the reader discovers the facts alongside Emma herself. We realize that Emma's temptation to couple Harriet with Mr. Elton is unsuccessful in the scene in which Emma and Mr. Elton are alone and he declares his feelings: "Mr. Elton, the lover of Harriet, was professing himself *her* love" (Austen, 2015, p. 123). This passage illustrates how the reader is set up to make mistakes alongside Emma (Oberman, 2009, p. 10), as well as how clouded the narration is itself, inasmuch as it is beclouded by Emma's take on events.

Nevertheless, with the protagonist's growth, the narrator begins incorporating other characters' voices to the narration. One example of this is the following excerpt, by the end of the novel: "But the plan which had arisen on the sacrifice of this, he trusted his dearest Emma would not find in any respect objectionable; it was, that he should be received at Hartfield [...]" (Austen, 2015, p. 419). In this scene, Emma assimilates Mr. Knightley's thoughts towards their marriage. The narrative does not shift from Mr. Knightley's perspective itself, but it is a proof of the protagonist's self-development throughout the story. She assimilates Harriet's thoughts as well, when she claims that she had done nothing for her friend, but disservice (Austen, 2015, p. 377).

In the final scenes, Emma is conscious of the social distance between herself and Harriet. They belong to different social classes; thus, the only resolution was to keep a warm distance, due to social barriers. On the other hand, even though the main character assimilates and understands other points of view, the narrator's point of view is partial and based on social class:

The delightful family party which Emma was securing for herself, poor Harriet must, in mere charitable caution, be kept at a distance from. She would be a loser in every way. Emma could not deplore her future absence as any deduction from her own enjoyment. In such a party, Harriet would be rather a dead weight than otherwise; but for the poor girl herself, it seemed a peculiarly cruel necessity that was to be placing her in such a state of unmerited punishment. (Austen, 2015, p. 420-1)

The narrator still portrays Harriet as less superior than Emma, in view of expressions like "mere charitable caution", "poor" and "dead weight". It is clear that they do belong to worlds apart, but, by the description, it is also possible to see the hierarchy between the two characters. Emma, at first, believed that Harriet had aristocratic blood, but, when she discovers her heritage, a gap begins to be formed. Emma learns to respect Harriet despite their difference, but she is still heavily prejudiced by the social and historical values. Although her relationship with Harriet changes, she recognizes her mistakes and the

disservice she had made to her friend. In addition, social position takes a major role in their relationship and it is what, in the end, drifts them apart, into “a calmer sort of goodwill” (Austen, 2015, p. 450).

2.2. Social Status and hierarchy within the novel

In 19th-century England, social status was a result of family background, marital status, and reputation. There were not many ways in which women could raise their social status. Marriage was one of the few avenues for social mobility. The relevance of such avenue is manifest in the novel, for example in the scene when Emma and Harriet, a seventeen young girl, are talking about the letter Harriet received from Robert Martin. Emma utters the following sentence: “A woman is not to marry a man merely because she is asked, or because he is attached to her, and can write a tolerable letter” (Austen, 2015, p. 53). Here, the protagonist broadcasts her social position, that she can turn down any marriage proposal. Emma knows that she does not need the social contract, marriage, to rise in the social sphere. Her case is not the rule, nonetheless; not every woman can afford what she can, as it is Harriet’s case.

Within this matter, if Emma marries, she will lose her control over her own household and estate. In addition, if Emma were to marry, she would lose her power over her father, and would inevitably lack power in her marriage (Tobin, 1988, p. 418). She expresses this issue addressing Harriet why herself decided not to marry:

Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband’s house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man’s eyes as I am in my father’s. (Austen, 2015, p. 82).

In Harriet’s case, marrying a man from a well-to-do family was the only way to climb the social ladder. However, Emma, aware of her own influence over Harriet, which is derived from her birth, fortune, and social connections, persuades her friend in refusing Robert Martin’s proposal, believing that Harriet had noble blood. Emma completely dismisses the fact that Robert Martin has affection towards Harriet (Goodheart, 2008, p. 590), and does not seem to care about the consequences of a woman like Harriet refusing an economically advantageous marriage proposal. She acts selfishly, because she does the matchmaking out of her own leisure and pleasure, as if the whole situation was just a game.

She is heavily criticized by Mr. Knightley, the perceptive character who always spot flaws in her, who sees the relationship between Mr. Elton, a village vicar, and Harriet as impossible. Emma is more entertained in playing matchmaker than seeing the core of this machination, that a man in Mr. Elton's position would hardly ever condescend into marrying a lower-class bastard, like Harriet, instead of courting an aristocratic woman, like the protagonist herself. By that, Emma got herself into a distressing situation when Mr. Elton misinterpreted her behavior, thinking that she was open to marriage proposals. She thinks that Mr. Elton would be the only suitable option for Harriet, whereas Mr. Elton thought the opposite: that were he to marry, it would have to be Emma Woodhouse. This inconsistency illustrates that she is not aware of the consequences of her own attitudes.

In view of her social status, Emma believes that she is the only one capable of helping Harriet find a husband, even though her origins, until the end of the book, are somewhat obscure. She is heavily criticized by Mr. Knightley, a pragmatic and serious character, who points out her flaws throughout the entire novel. If her existence is a blessing, as narrated in the beginning, she is the best judge, the best matchmaker for her *little friend*. However, what indeed happens is a misjudgment, and Emma does not learn from her mistakes, as she tries to pair up Harriet with Frank Churchill, the child of Mr. Weston, her governess' husband. According to Sadeq (2017), a true member of the gentility is an individual who respects their position in society by acting in a superior way; and Austen brings this irony when Emma is brutally honest to Miss Bates, whom she considers inferior:

““Oh! very well,” exclaimed Miss Bates, “then I need not be uneasy. ‘Three things very dull indeed.’ That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan’t I? (looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body’s assent) – Do not you all think I shall?”

Emma could not resist.

‘Ah! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me – but you will be limited as to number – only three at once.’” (Austen, 2015, p.347)

Her behavior only happens because Emma is in the superior position, and, instead of being gentle and kind towards lower-class characters, she displays no mercy in her attitude. Miss Bates does not react, simply blushes, right after catching what Emma intended to say. Then, she claims that she must be really disagreeable for Emma to say what she did. Miss Bates acts submissively, in spite of her natural behavior and the asymmetrical relationship, in

view that she comes from a lower class. It is a moment when the protagonist's cleverness is not a quality, but a flaw, because of her cruelty towards a woman who she sees as her inferior. It is Mr. Knightley who calls her attention in the end, reminding her of Miss Bates' background and position in the society. It is when Emma starts to begin to open her mind to control her own behavior and be aware of the damage that she causes because of her selfishness and ego.

Hence, Emma's behavior and personality are intrinsically connected to the historic period in which the novel takes place. To marry well meant to be in a position that no part would suffer a loss, perpetuating a social inequality between partners. Towards the conclusion of the novel, when Harriet's humble origin as the daughter of a tradesman is revealed, Emma considers the union between Harriet and Robert Martin more suitable. Likewise, her match with Mr. Knightley is also considered suitable, due to their shared social class. This reflects the prevailing societal norms of the time, where compatibility and social standing played a significant role in determining the suitability of a marriage. Despite her growth as a character, the reader is still immersed in the story through the perspective of an aristocratic young woman, whose privileged social standing becomes a means to disregard the needs and desires of others. In the next chapter, we will analyze how the medium of the novel showcases the correlation between novel and narrative technique, departing from the notion that FID is a novelistic feature. In view that FID is a feature from novels, we will also analyze the particularities of the two different media and how the change of the medium underscores elements clouded in the novel, due to the prominence of the protagonist's take on events.

3

Media and Specificity

Novels and movies should not be viewed through the same lenses. The advent of movies allowed many literary works to be adapted into two-dimensional projects, attracting readers to the original source — the novel. This has led to a misconception that both arts can be equally compared. However, while novels and movies may share notable similarities, they also present significant differences and disagreements.

Greenberg, in *Towards a Newer Laocoon* (1940), approaches the topic of purity of art, particularly focusing on the medium of painting. He claims that painting is known for its two-dimensionality and flatness, thus a painter should not aim to create a three-dimensionality in his work. According to him, art should not strive to imitate the physical world, but, instead, should embrace its own inherent qualities and materials. This author suggests that the essence of painting lies in its flatness and two-dimensionality, and that artists should emphasize these characteristics over the pursuit of illusions of depth or three-dimensionality. This perspective can also be applied to the analysis of adaptations.

Although the notion of fidelity may seem straightforward, it is challenging to convert a written art to a visual art. It is impossible to transpose the same aspects of the novel to the cinema. Therefore, when the original work becomes an adaptation, it embodies new aspects, not included in the novel, and loses characteristics as well. Maintaining strict literal fidelity is undesirable, as the process of adaptation involves the transformation of a textual medium into an audiovisual one, such as the film (Stam, 2008, p. 20). Therefore, the point of the adaptation is not to be faithful to the original, since both texts inherently possess distinct qualities. As mentioned before, this chapter, namely the next section, will dive into an analysis of the two mediums, in a way that brings to light how adaptations can be used to understand hidden aspects of the original work.

3.1. Two different media, two different lenses

The groundbreaking work of J. H. Bluestone's book *Novels into Film* (1961) explores the fundamental differences between the media of literature and film, and how these differences shape the process of adaptation. Paraphrasing Bluestone, film and novel are two

distinct art forms; therefore, they should not be compared or judged under the same lens. Adaptation involves carefully considering how the original text will be transcreated into a different medium, taking into account both what might be lost and what can be gained in the process. It requires the ability to transform the original content to create a new version suitable for a different medium while respecting the unique characteristics of the new environment.

Both tell stories, but in distinct media and, by implication in distinct forms. Whereas novels rely on words, films display a combination of visual and audio elements to convey meaning. Filmmakers may use light and camera in order to carry on the story; on the other hand, novels use print as their medium. Bluestone affirms that understanding the peculiarities of both art forms is central to appreciate them. As previously discussed and analyzed, the chosen medium dictates the artistic methods employed. In fact, it is impossible to fully capture the vibrant visual essence of a painting, such as, within a written composition.

In addition, concerning psychological time, both art forms highly differ from each other. As reported by Bluestone, film can compress time, either slowing it down or speeding it up, by techniques such as slow-motion and speed-up. The passage of fifty years can be compressed into a mere fifty seconds on screen, as the character's age is accelerated through the use of different actors portraying the same role. The novel, on the other hand, is not guided by a camera, which may become part of the narrative, but by the chronological time of the reading. According to him, the spoken word and the visual are attached in the film, either in different levels or side by side, while in the novel the language relies on itself to execute meaning. Thus, the art forms diverge from one another when it comes to imagery and consciousness.

In this matter, reading a book and watching a movie engage different senses and offer distinct experiences. The act of reading involves using the eyes to visually perceive the written text, while watching a movie uses them to interpret the visual elements on the screen. The eyes can be deceived by illusions created by the lens of the camera, but, when it comes to the novel, the eyes can unravel the underlying truths and meanings conveyed through the written discourse. Additionally, Bluestone argued that literature enabled the reader to dive into the characters' minds and engage actively into the plot, which the cinema could not provide:

If the film has difficulty presenting streams of consciousness, it has even more difficulty presenting states of mind which are defined precisely by the absence in them of the visible world [...]. For the same reasons, dreams and memories, which

exist nowhere but in the individual consciousness, cannot be adequately represented in spatial terms. (Bluestone, 1961, p. 47)

This scenario is depicted in Jane Austen's novel *Emma*, in which Free Indirect Discourse (FID) is employed to drive the narrative, as discussed in the previous chapter. Austen skillfully crafts a complex plot that infuses consciousness into the narrative, blending the narrative voice with the narrator. Naturally, "changes are inevitable when it abandons the linguistic medium and goes for the visual" (Bluestone, 1961, p. 219). It would be impossible to transpose a complex environment of a narrative like *Emma* into the screen without sacrificing linguistic and stylistic features of Austen literature:

She soon believed herself to penetrate Mrs. Elton's thoughts, and understand why she was, like herself, in happy spirits; it was being in Miss Fairfax's confidence, and fancying herself acquainted with what was still a secret to other people. Emma saw symptoms of it immediately in the expression of her face; and while paying her own compliments to Mrs. Bates, and appearing to attend to the good old lady's replies, she saw her with a sort of anxious parade of mystery fold up a letter which she had apparently been reading aloud to Miss Fairfax [...]. (Austen, 2015, p. 424)

The employment of FID grants readers indirect access to *Emma*'s inner thoughts, a remarkable feature made possible by the power of language and the written word found within a novel. In contrast, cinematographic adaptations heavily rely on visual elements, making it impossible to translate Jane Austen's novel into an equivalent screen production that captures the same level of profound immersion in a character. However, despite this inequivalence, by the aid of cinematic techniques, such as acting and visual effects, filmmakers can delve into the depths of the narrative, capturing the essence of the characters, settings, and themes that pulsate through the pages of the novel. It is worth noting that, despite employing techniques to capture the essence, the cinematographic adaptation does not reach the same level as the original work. To replicate the techniques employed by Jane Austen and faithfully transpose her text, the only viable approach would entail producing an exact replica of the original book. Art, after all, when recreated, becomes a new one, in spite and despite its mediums.

Although the matters previously presented, as suggested by Bazin (1967), film serves as a simplified gateway to the plot of the original work. The medium of film can be particularly beneficial for those who are not yet acquainted with the literary source material. In the case of Jane Austen, like the author herself, spectators can derive value from this introduction, which may spark their interest in reading the novel. Moreover, adaptation relies

on what Bazin refers to as "digestion," filmmaker's ability to remain faithful to the source material while transforming it into something new and original. However, despite the originality, in matters of medium, they differ highly from each other, as before analyzed. Bazin's thought-provoking essay aligns with the discussion in this chapter, further reinforcing the argument that novels and adaptations, though both considered art forms, should not be analyzed through the same lens.

As a result, adaptation can be regarded as a crucial tool for analysing the original work. Instead of considering these art forms as adversaries, they can actually complement each other. Cinema has the ability to unveil underlying themes and aspects of the novel, enriching our understanding and appreciation of literary works. Through a thoughtful analysis of the choices made during the adaptation process, viewers can gain valuable insights into the novel's themes and aspects that may have been overlooked or interpreted differently in the original work. In the subsequent chapter, we will delve into a comprehensive analysis of this skill, aiming to understand how the study of *Clueless* enhances our understanding of *Emma*.

4

“A normal life” for a “virgin”**4.1. Setting the Context**

“But, seriously, I actually have a way of normal life for a teenage girl”, a teenage girl's voice-over declares, in the opening scene of *Clueless*. The movie's narrative is carried on through a dispute between voice-over and dialogue, whereby the latter achieves prominence to show tensions between Cher and other characters, especially Tai. Voice-over is a technique of narrating in which the characters' voices are recorded and played through the scenes of the movie. The narration and the events occur in different temporalities, since the narration takes place after events unfold. The initial words Cher speaks are quickly dismantled as viewers witness her selecting outfits via a computer screen. Irony is immediately introduced, highlighting the stark contrast between our expectations of an ordinary teenage girl's life and Cher's reliance on technology to curate her wardrobe. By using the technique, “[it] illustrates the disjunction between Cher's perceptions and reality, and her confidence in her own misguided views for it emphasizes her outspokenness” (Ferriss, 2001, p.124).

Clueless is a production by Amy Heckerling, which translated Jane Austen's nineteenth century into a California teenager culture of the 1990s decade (Ferriss, 2001, p. 122). Some elements are updated to fit into the new setting: expensive cars for the carriages, Valley parties for fancy balls; photography for painting. Moreover, some characters are changed, concerning sexual and racial aspects: Frank Churchill, Christian (Justin Walker) in the movie, is revealed to be gay, and Cher's best friend, Dionne (Stacey Dash), is African American. These changes date the time of the work, since it would be impossible to portray the 19th century in the same context as *Clueless* is set. Despite the shifts the world had faced, *Emma* and *Clueless* exhibit converging characteristics, in terms of main and minor characters. These resemblances will be analyzed and unraveled throughout the third and last chapter of this research.

4.2. One medium to *read* the other

Many movie critics, such as Kenneth Turan and Janet Maslin, saw *Clueless* as a gateway to the literary work (Lenos, 2014, p. 124). The playful and entertaining setting of the movie provides an outstanding environment for raising the spectator's desire for searching for the original work. The catchy expressions, such as "As if", "loadie" and "Monet" illustrate the modification of the society, bringing informality and irony to the narrative. Cher's attitudes may be selfish and self-centered, but the viewer cannot deny her charisma, due to her way of conducting her attitudes being humorous and embedded with irony:

So OK, I don't want to be a traitor to my generation and all, but I don't get how guys dress today. I mean, come on, it looks like they just fell out of bed and put on some baggy pants and take their greasy hair and cover it up with a backwards cap and like, we're expected to swoon? I don't think so. (*Clueless*, 1995)

Cher and Emma have similar traits concerning the sympathy they provoke in the spectator. Austen employs FID to immerse readers in Emma's subjectivity, thereby encouraging empathy for her foibles. Conversely, Heckerling utilizes voice-over to center the narrative on the playful character of Cher. The dominance they exert and the latitude they enjoy in their respective contexts can be attributed to their reliance on paternal wealth, a crucial element in bolstering their self-assurance and confidence (Ferris, 2001, p. 125).

In fact, Cher possesses the skill of crafting elaborate excuses to manipulate her teachers into improving her grades and to deceive both Tai and her teachers (O'Meara, 2014, p. 142). She convinces Tai that Elton (Jeremy Sisto) had mentioned her in a romantic context and her teachers that there was a mutual affection between them. Her wit is so effective that both Tai and the teachers are easily persuaded by her words. This manipulation allows her to exert control over those around her. When she receives her grades updated, her grades are higher, an outcome of her manipulation and her successful attempts to match her teachers. Despite her outspokenness and confidence, Cher remains oblivious to the underlying truths. She fails to realize that her love interest was actually homosexual, and that Elton had no interest in Tai, but rather had romantic feelings for Cher herself.

Therefore, Amy Heckerling's work and the novel present the resetting of some elements of the novel, due to the change of medium and context of production, especially in

how the protagonists conduct the “makeover” of Harriet, in the novel, and Tai, in the movie. As Cher makes the decision to transform Tai, the camera zooms in on Tai's shoes and baggy pants, gradually panning up to reveal her makeup-free, natural face. Cher confides in Dionne, who has no counterpart in *Emma*, expressing her commitment to the mission of transforming Tai. Her voice overlays the scene, declaring Tai to be “adorably clueless”. They invite the new student to have lunch with them and Dionne asks if Tai would accept Cher helping her with a makeover, since it gives “her [Cher] a sense of control in a world full of chaos”. Dionne not only acquiesces Cher’s projects, but also is used to her behavior and sense of superiority.

The camera shows Cher in the control of the makeover process, whereas, in Jane Austen’s work, is through Free Indirect Discourse, technique addressed and analyzed in the previous chapters. During the makeover, Cher is always portrayed as doing the actions: she tears Tai’s clothes, washes her hair, and removes the colorizer. The camera also plays a major role in conveying the meaning, since it tilts up to show Cher in control of the makeover (Leppert, 2014, p. 133). Tai is not portrayed as doing any of the actions, but passively accepting them:

Image 1: Cher tears Tai’s clothes in order to make her more ‘cool’ and ‘girly’.



Source: *Clueless*.

And the transformation is not only about appearance or fashion. Cher criticizes Tai’s vocabulary, by telling her that “We’ve got to work on your accent and vocabulary”. Even though the utterance sounds harsh, since Cher is minorizing her friend’s speech, Heckerling can turn the tables and transform the scene in a hilarious one, by making Cher recommend her friend books about getting fit and beautiful:

Image 2: Cher compiles a pile of books and movies about appearance and fashion to lend Tai.



Source: *Clueless*.

The attempt to make Tai a popular girl ends up mischaracterizing Tai herself. Displaying a more tomboyish style, she is introduced to makeup and clothes that are not part of her personal style. Even though she is being transformed into someone she is not, Cher sees the transformation as an act of generosity, shown when Josh (Paul Rudd) calls her to the kitchen and says he is amazed of what she has done, and Cher rhetorically asks, “That I’m devoting myself so generously to someone else?” She sees Tai merely as a project, a hobby.

In addition to her elevated social status, Cher deploys age as one of her arguments to assert her authority over Tai. Cher's early assertion of dominance occurs when she seeks to offer advice to Tai about a boy she's interested in, saying, "My birthday's in April, and as someone older, can I please give you some advice?" This statement simultaneously satirizes Cher's self-proclaimed authority, as noted by Leppert (2014, p. 133), while underscoring Cher's relentless efforts to establish dominance within her social circle.

Unlike Austen, who chose the protagonist name, Heckerling chose the title *Clueless* for her work. Critics have noted that the seemingly critical title refers to Cher at the start of the movie (DiPaolo, 2007, p. 131). Cher's cluelessness is closely tied to her attempts at matchmaking, particularly when she pairs Tai with Elton, unaware of the potential harm this causes Tai and even herself. Furthermore, her cluelessness is also intertwined with factors such as race, social background, and social status. Cher belongs to a privileged, wealthy, white American family, and she frequently adopts a condescending attitude towards individuals who do not meet her standards. She displays insensitivity not only towards Travis (Breckin Meyer) and the family's maid, Lucy (Aida Linares), but also towards Tai, who, although not explicitly mentioned, has a mixed heritage.

Cher's behavior is a direct result of her privileged position as the protagonist, much like Emma's role in the novel, as highlighted in the earlier parts of this research.

Consequently, both mediums underscore the dominance of the protagonists and how they influence and even overshadow other characters within the story's ecosystem.

4.3. Turning the Tables

Differently from Harriet, who is passive and accepts Emma's behavior, and Tai, aggressively, stands up against Cher. Guided by the protagonist, Tai becomes a popular girl at school, being courted by the boys and begins to fight for Josh's attention, who Cher was unconsciously in love with. When Cher fails the driving test and gets back home, Tai is waiting for her. She confesses to Cher that she was in love with Josh. Both young women argue, in a discussion that ends up making Tai utter that Cher is "a virgin who can't drive":

Images 3, 4 and 5: After implicitly saying to Tai that Josh is too intelligent for her, Tai gets upset with Cher and strikes back.



Source: *Clueless*.

This scene is a shifting point in the characters' setting: minor character Tai is brought to foreground and breaks with the social and narrative hypertrophy of the protagonist. Tai

refuses to condone Cher's behavior, especially when Cher subtly suggests that they aren't compatible due to Josh's superior intelligence. Rather than succumbing to Cher's influence and social status, Tai holds her ground, having carved out her own place as a popular girl. Such immersion allows us to seize more clearly the tensions of the source text and the adaptations, overshadowed by the rising of a protagonist that, either by FID, or by voiceover, persuades the audience to share her subjectivity.

In *Clueless*, the film's visual medium allows for the revelation of aspects that remain hidden in the novel. Unlike the novel, in which characters and events can be concealed through skillful narrative techniques, the film's specificity lies in its inability to obscure physical presence. It showcases a distinct dynamic by presenting characters and their actions, offering a different dimension compared to the nuanced subtlety achievable in the novel's narrative. In view that film has an unique spatial dynamics, in which all characters are corporified, it is unlikely that a protagonist conveys the same flattening as it is like in the novel.

Towards the conclusion of the movie, Cher and Tai mend their friendship. Cher becomes aware of the mutual affection between Tai and Travis during a skateboarding competition, where the couple exchange loving glances. Cher reflects on her mistakes and promises to be a more considerate friend and diligent student. Adding to the joyous occasions, Mrs. Geist and Mr. Hall decide to tie the knot, with the girls serving as their bridesmaids. As *Clueless* draws to a close, Cher and Tai engage in a friendly conversation about weddings, while their respective boyfriends sit at the nearby table. Unlike the situation in *Emma*, where Emma and Harriet grow apart after their marriages, *Clueless* showcases close relationships between individuals from different social classes.

Final Remarks

When we departed from the notion that adaptations can be used as a critical tool, we had to analyze specific features from *Emma* and *Clueless* in order to understand how the protagonist circumscribes and effects in the hierarchy of the characters. In view both novel and film have different particularities and are inscribed into different media, they require to be scrutinized under different lenses as well. In the realm of adaptations, the shift in medium brings about a dynamic interplay wherein certain elements are introduced while others are relinquished. This transcreation process serves as a nuanced tool, unveiling aspects that may be concealed within the confines of the original novel.

By analyzing *Emma* and *Clueless*, we could grasp how the protagonists flattens the characters around, and how this flattening influences the way that the readers perceive the characters' ecosystem. However, this flattening is not gratuitous, it delves into the narrative technique, FID in the novel, voice-over in the film, that overshadow others' perspectives, except from the protagonist's. As we saw in the previous chapters, the way the narrative is carried out, in both artworks, is based on the choice of a beautiful, young and wealthy woman and her misconceptions and prejudices towards the world that unfolds upon her. Being said that, adaptations can be used to contemplate critically and analytically a biased narrator that guides her reader throughout a biased discourse.

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