

Free Indirect Filmmaking

Jane Austen and the Renditions (On Emma among Its Others)

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Jane Austen was and is a phenom. One might like to have said Jane Austen's *writing* was and is that phenom, but in some respects her writing—so brilliant, so exacting—has been displaced in the popular cultural imagination by the proper name that stands in for or is associated with all the writing, the films, the made-for-TV renditions of her novels, spinoffs of many sorts, all of which are caught up in the huge network of more or less institutionalized devotion to her, from “societies” to websites to blogs to conferences where amateurs (in the original and latter-day senses) rub shoulders with scholars, and vice versa. Not many other authors, much less ones from centuries ago, have board games created in their name or for their individual works.¹ Austen's devotees are tellingly known as Janeites, an indication of the first-name basis on which so many of her admirers wish or pathologically imagine they were.² One can't quite imagine Shakespeareans being identified or identifying themselves as “Willies” or something along those lines.

Why consider Austen in a context such as this, a multipronged analysis of Romanticism and culture roughly contemporary with us around the end of twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first? It was not so long ago that, in institutions of higher learning, Austen would rarely have been grouped among the Romantics for purposes of teaching literature of the period.³ Instead, she would more likely have been tacked on to the itinerary of the eighteenth-century novel, despite coming squarely in the nineteenth, or introduced to inaugurate a different trajectory for the nineteenth century, though she scarcely fit the dominant mode of realism that would follow in her train. The academic study and especially the teaching of Romanticism was so thoroughly dominated by a half-dozen male poets (the “Big Six”) that Austen was usually the odd woman out, despite being born the same year as Charles Lamb and coming halfway between Coleridge and Hazlitt, as exact a contemporary of some Romantic-era writers as could be.⁴ That Austen wrote some of the best novels of the period—and of all time—was somehow not enough for those (for a long time, men, overwhelmingly) committed to an ethos of more or less politically progressive, male lyric poetry and an idea of Romanticism that so pervasively informed and organized the teaching of literature from the period. Moreover, when periodized, Austen was and still is usually classed as a *Regency* writer, even though it would make just as much sense to describe Byron, in chronological-historical terms, as just that. This chapter is undertaken with the understanding that Romanticism is an appropriately neutral rubric for literary and cultural production between roughly 1790 and 1830 in Britain (and, unevenly, beyond) and should be applicable to all genres, both sexes, and all political tendencies, even if one might well follow Raymond Williams in deeming some things dominant, residual, or emergent, according to his suggestive scheme.

Though the grand lines and some smaller protocols of Austen's novels bear affinities with a good many predecessors in the somewhat chaotic tradition of the British novel from Defoe through Richardson to Burney, in other ways she wrote like no one else.⁵ The term "unique" is tossed around too readily, but the word seems apt for Austen. She develops a signature style: one should be able to recognize the mature forms of it from a considerable distance, even if one is not a computer, much less a well-equipped literary lab.⁶ The most distinctive aspect of that style is her complicated and sometimes hard-to-pin-down use of free indirect discourse, a mode of writing that keeps the reader precariously on her or his toes. It is perhaps the most permanently provocative vein of her work and one that the film versions of her novels seem hard-pressed to render in even vaguely corresponding fashion. Yet once in a while they come close to doing so or else fail in interesting, revelatory ways, with the results telling us something about the possibilities and pitfalls of adaptation and medium specificity. And, perhaps to boot, we recognize something about the relation of a thoroughly modern medium to an apparently not so modern one.

I would contend that the principal interest of Austen and the principal difficulty posed for film renditions lies at the level of the sentences (or phrases or words), not at the level of plot or character, the dynamics of which may all, of course, be altered for the worse by the general reduction in adaptation of almost everything, given the familiar constraints of time for feature films or even lengthy, multipart adaptations for TV. Some of Austen's detractors, it seems, can't even see those trees—the sentences—for the forest of content, chiefly the morals, manners, and machinations of what's come to be known as "the marriage plot." Though Austen has enjoyed enormous, widespread critical and popular acclaim, she is not without her detractors, and they can be extreme: purveyors of all-or-nothing choices, not least when they miss what I take to be essential to the texture of Austen's work. As one blogger on the *Huffington Post* opined not long ago:

After about two decades of being a voracious reader—the kind that consumes books more than merely reads them—I'm still at a loss as to why so many people have elevated Jane Austen to the level of literary hero. To put it bluntly, I just don't understand the seemingly female-gender-wide obsession with Ms. Austen.⁷

The author of the post is able to draw on a considerable and usually venerable authority, no less than Emerson (not, we note, of the female gender), to bolster her claim and prove she's in good company. She continues: "Ralph Waldo Emerson said it best in his scathing review of Austen's literary portfolio," and proceeds to quote the transcendentalist sage thus:

I am at a loss to understand why people hold Miss Austen's novels at so high a rate, which seem to me vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in their wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit, or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow. . . . All that interests in any character [is this]: has he (or she) the money to marry with? . . . Suicide is more respectable.

She finishes her piece with a flourish that reduces Austen's possible interest being for people bent on or fascinated by getting married. But *anyone* can write a novel that revolves around whether the heroine gets married. For the *Huffington Post* blogger, it's as if Austen's novels were somehow, impossibly, all *content*—and bad—hackneyed, trivial—content at that.⁸

Very few people can write on the order of or at the level of Jane Austen, much less sustain such achievements over hundreds of pages, again and again. This would include her mastery of relations of plot and character, on the successful articulation of which so much in the nineteenth-century novel depends. But it has mainly to do, I think, with her formidable wielding of language, from the smallest units to larger ones: with nuances, precise observations, fine discriminations, and modulations of tone and idiom; with different styles of speaking for different characters; with layerings of thought and sentiment—indeed, even a complexity of thinking worthy in its way of a Hegel or an Adorno—and all of it rendered in commensurate phrasing. Such language-based complexities and nuances of mind are rather hard to film. And yet. . . .

Hollywood and to a lesser extent Bollywood and the occasional indie studio have been gaga about Austen, directly and indirectly,⁹ for the past few decades, finding a lot in Austen to mine other than sentences (some of which, of course, are preserved in filmic dialogue and even occasionally in narration of some sort). No other British writer of the Romantic period has garnered so much retroactive attention in the domain of film, television, and popular culture more generally. There's no glut of film renderings of the novels of Sir Walter Scott (there was a little flurry in the 1950s), and none for Radcliffe; and there are not many major pop-cultural engagements with any one of the Big Six male poets to speak of.¹⁰ One might be startled and pleased to hear Ian Curtis, in a film rendition of the career of Joy Division, recite a Wordsworth lyric from memory, but such direct invocations or reworkings of Romantic-period writers in works that reach large audiences are relatively few and far between.¹¹

The reasons for Austenmania are many and various, and not all of them are necessarily good. Is it not a little suspicious that certain moviegoing audiences (American and worldwide, mainly Anglophone) clamor to steep themselves for a few hours in visions of grand country houses filled with exclusively white people who, by and large, don't have to work for a living?¹² Of course, a good many of the novels are broadly comic, in tone and even more in structure (an unrealistic strain that coexists in powerful fashion with a certain realism), and a comic modality lifts a little of the burden for a fiction to be representational and plausible. There can be no absolute demand that a work of fiction, even a serious one, should reproduce a version of a population that is statistically accurate in its display of ethnic and racial diversity, though Hollywood will often run far in the opposite direction from that representational ideal. There are no people of color in *The Wizard of Oz* (some green-faced ones aside) or in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, but Hollywood more or less got away (and still gets away, though less absolutely) with such outrageous if unsurprising things.¹³ In the case of representations of Austen's era, the statistically miniscule percentage of people of color in (especially nonurban) Regency or Romantic-era England "relieves" any such latter-day fiction of the task of presenting and representing a variegated society, but it is suspicious that such representations seem to many so comforting, so easily embraced. The strongest intervention against this strain—the complacency of white-on-whiteness—is to be found in Patricia Rozema's rendition of *Mansfield Park* (1999), which breaks the politic, well-wrought veil of decorum pervading Austen's fiction by forcing a subtext to the surface, thematically

and visually: first, by having the opening scene feature Fanny Price getting a glimpse of a slave ship, peopled, she's told, with "darkies," and second, by conjuring up drawings of brutal antislave activity in Antigua, the colonial enterprise so often invoked in Austen's novel without being explored in anything approaching graphic detail. Rozema's point, however one feels about it, is to lay bare the politically repressed existence and modalities of slavery as the driver of the colonial power's wealth, a simple fact of Regency (and Romantic) England, even as Rozema's violent representation of violence underscores it as an intervention of "our" time in relation to Austen's.¹⁴ It's perhaps the most extreme version of the "presentism" of a good many of the adaptations, one tendency of which is to pump up the proto-feminism of the novels and their heroines (Anne Elliott, Fanny Price, Emma) at the risk or price of some anachronism.¹⁵

That Austen's writing, in its film renderings, has been taken up also in the traditions of "heritage" and period "classics" (a word smartly deployed in *Clueless*)¹⁶ and as forerunners of "rom-com" and "chick lit" is, in itself, not all that lamentable: aspects of these traditions do touch base with things in Austen that are real and powerful. Yet so many of these films flatten what is crucial in her writing—language, sentences—that they almost constitute nonengagements with the originals, or decidedly partial ones. What's often left, on one construal of the surface, is the scaffolding, the outlines of the plot, and some approximation of the imagined world. To be sure, a fair bit of dialogue survives, which many adaptors are inclined to repeat, either out of a sense to fidelity to Austen or simply from a recognition that Austen is indeed very good at such sentences. It would be insane not to draw on the latter when possible.

The most distinctive hallmark of Austen's style is surely her genial use of free indirect discourse, and that, on the face of it, has to be one of the hardest, probably *the* hardest, thing to render on film. It's the general tendency of filmic adaptation to turn the narrative elements of the source into drama: as a rule, very little narration survives as such. Hollywood also tends to shy away from much voice-over, except in the now almost extinct or once-in-a-blue-moon-revived genre of *film noir*, rehearsed more often in the mode of quotation or echo rather than as the thing itself. The odd Austen adaptation—and more so of late—has a narrator, usually in voice-over mode, issuing a more or less precise repetition of words from the text. It is meaningful and charged when an adaptation of an Austen novel does so, as in Douglas McGrath's *Emma*, Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, and Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*. Each of these adaptations adopts the striking strategy of having the protagonist become a part-time narrator.¹⁷ This gesture constitutes, in the first instance, a swerve from Austen's texts since the narrator of the novels is not a character in the fiction, even if she, he, or it sometimes sounds like a person.¹⁸ But the filmic invention of having the protagonist become, among other things, an off-screen narrator, or sometimes even an on-screen narrator, touches Austen's storytelling procedures at least at one point: where the narrator is sometimes complicit, literally, with the protagonist.¹⁹

It's by now a familiar paradox that *Clueless* is arguably the best adaptation of an Austen novel for the silver screen.²⁰ Aside from its general excellence as a film, it would be chary of

anyone, given the transposition of the time and place of *Emma* from Regency England to '90s L.A., to fault *Clueless* for not rendering this or that aspect of the novel in its radically altered format. So *Clueless* can't really fail at the task of adaptation the way BBC or A&E renditions can, since the latter are expected to respect at least the surface texture of the originals. Yet *Clueless* is widely held to capture a good deal of the spirit of *Emma* in restaging so many of the essential dynamics and in mimicking its tonalities, even capturing something of its complexities. Moreover, it's remarkable that, as far as I can tell, Heckerling's *Clueless* is the Austen adaptation that comes closest to providing a plausible analogue for Austenian free indirect discourse, which blends, spectacularly or inconspicuously, third-person and first-person perspectives in a single sentence, improbably conjoining more or less objective and more or less subjective elements in one and the same "utterance."²¹

A simple example from *Emma* comes from the episode in which the titular heroine is trying to make a match between her protégé or "project," Harriet, and the eligible Mr. Elton. The narrator informs us, at the start of a paragraph (and thus with no immediate introduction): "The lovers were standing together at one of the windows."²² In light of the overwhelming tendency in reading narrative to trust the veracity of a third-person sentence unless its authority has somehow been undermined or qualified, the reader can be forgiven for thinking that Mr. Elton and Harriet are the lovers the text or narrator has proclaimed them to be ("lovers" understood in the old-fashioned, old-school sense.) But it is not long before we learn that it is only in Emma's wishful thinking that the two in question are lovers: no one else on the planet would have described them as such, not even Harriet at this point, under the sway of Emma's meddling. "Lovers" turns out to be a misleading error, a subjective, "first-person" fantasy embedded in a third-person pronouncement that has, at first, all the appearance of truth. It is a sentence that we are implicitly forced to reread in retrospect with the knowledge gained after the fact of its first appearance.²³ Such temporary uncertainty pervades all kinds of Austen's sentences, nor is it done away with the longer we read, though extended reading helps.²⁴

The unusual renderings of subjectivity that come with free indirect discourse are only superficially in tension with the well-testified sense of Austen's impersonal narration, so finely characterized by D. A. Miller. Here Miller recounts a kind of postulated shared reading/fantasy on discovering, early in life, the almost otherworldly character of Austen's narrator:

Here was a truly out-of-body voice, so stirringly free of what it abhorred as "particularity" or "singularity" that it seemed to come from no enunciator at all. It scanted person even in the linguistic sense, rarely acknowledging, by saying *I*, its origination in an authoring self, or, by saying *you*, its reception by any other. We rapt, admiring readers might feel we were only eavesdropping on delightful productions intended for nobody in particular. And in the other constituents of person—not just body, but psyche, history, social position—the voice was also deficient, so much so that its overall impersonality determined a narrative authority and a beauty of expression without equal.²⁵

Miller concludes: "It was Style itself." This rapturous account of an early experience of Austen is supplemented by a later, somewhat more standard literary-critical sense that the Austenian narrative force "splits into two mutually exclusive and definitive, states of being:

(godlike) narration and (all-too-human) character” (42). All of this points to aspects of Austen potentially hard to register on film: the two, copresent or oscillating registers of impersonality and “personality” in narration.

It may be, however, that the medium of film is not entirely disadvantaged when taking on the task of adapting novels along these lines, including the most complex ones of Austen. Most camerawork comes across, from moment to moment, as “objective”: it displays what is the case, what is before the camera, what is actually—in the fiction—happening. It registers things from one point and one perspective at any given time. If not somehow indicated as identifiable as given from a particular person’s point of view, what is seen is understood to be objective or virtually so. Handheld camerawork consistent with the position of a person in the scene or an over-the-shoulder view aligned with one person’s line of sight constitute important exceptions, crucial to the presentation of subjectivities. Yet films, or perhaps rather film audiences, effectively demand a rather rapid alteration of shots and in effect points of view, with the result that the camera’s perspective can hardly be identified with that of a human being, much less of a single one. Some camerawork can be more “humanized” than others, as, say, in Howard Hawks’s predilection for the eye-level shot and the fairly strict avoidance of low- or high-angled ones. In general, the BBC versions adopt this sort of “everyman” or “bourgeois” camerawork, eschewing high angles and low, except for some particular purposes, some instances of which we shall see shortly.

As one version of the layering or commingling of third and first person, objective and subjective, as presented on the screen, we need only consider this brief sequence from *Clueless*: around the ten-minute mark of the film, the camera, together with Cher’s voice-over, introduces us to her school and some of the cast of characters, principally the teachers. Early in the multipart sequence we see Cher arguing with her teacher, Mr. Hall, about a grade, and we hear her, within that scene, speaking about it, with what amounts to about one-third of the total volume. At the same time, we hear a different voice of one and the same Cher (but is it the same?) in voice-over, talking from the outside the visual, diegetic space about the incident that we are witnessing and faintly hearing. Cher’s voice-over accounts for about the other two-thirds of the decibel level, and so her narration dominates what is being acted out and spoken in the scene. Cher is a split subject, or better a subject-object, with two voices and one visible body. (Cher and Cher alike, as it were.) The discussion in which she argues with Mr. Hall about her grades gives way to a thumbnail sketch of her teacher: “Here’s the 411 on Mr. Hall: he’s. . . .” In this Cher is about as close to a novelistic narrator as can be, giving a little “characterization” of a character in the manner of exposition, and in seemingly objective fashion. With the camera rock steady, Mr. Hall is viewed in a long shot through the rectangular frame of a window, echoed within by the framing of symmetrical trees on either side, as he approaches the school. That short take is followed by Cher visiting, in disembodied fashion, the teachers’ lounge/cafeteria, where she proceeds to describe in a phrase or two various of the teachers. The camera, soon to be identified with Cher’s eye, suddenly gets shaky and thus counts as “handheld”—held by *Cher’s* hand—even though Cher could not possibly be physically present in the scene. (The

teachers a few feet away from Cher's camera are oblivious to its presence and so she cannot be understood to be physically present.) As she points out the "evil troll" math teachers who are married (and of the same sex), the camera swerves brusquely on noticing a Snickers bar on the table, and we hear Cher blurt out, "Ooh! Snickers!" Then she resumes her account of the teaching staff. It could hardly be more of an ultrapersonal moment, as she abandons in a flash her appointed narratorial task of introducing us to the teachers in the lounge and focuses instead on the candy (eye candy, as it were) appealing to her.

Thus, in this one sequence of only several minutes, Cher as subject and object, viewing and viewed, is alternately and repeatedly posed as an objective narrator and a subjective judge of the goings-on at her school. When chastised about her grades by Mr. Hall in a little intervening scene of frustration, Cher laments that she feels "impotent" and "not in control," for which the remedy will be mall shopping. But she is remarkably in control of things in the surrounding sequence, fully in command of the voice-over, the narration, and sometimes the camera. In the larger sequence she is partly the "omniscient narrator" and partly the subject who is Cher acting out her life.²⁶ As both character and narrator, Cher's split subject-object persona (*personae*, really) has an affinity with the odd constellation proposed by Austen's intermittent use of free indirect discourse, with its frequent complicity, its folding in, of narrator and protagonist. Does the situation in *Clueless* sketched here not come close to a good deal of what is at work in Austen's fiction, as summarized expertly by Thomas Keymer: "By merging the idiolect of a character with a narrator's syntax, by darting from viewpoint to viewpoint in adjacent sentences, and by studding passages of objective description with clause-length fragments of FID [free indirect discourse], Austen constantly problematizes the origin and authority of her narrative statements"?²⁷

The analogue of free indirect discourse, as I've charted it in these scenes from *Clueless*, tends to be somewhat more distended or extended than the prototypical instances in Austen's sentences, where subjective and objective can be separated by just a word or two or commingled even in a single one. The simultaneous configuration of one Cher on screen and another, narrating Cher speaking off-camera comes close to the Austenian paradigm, even if it lacks the sometime inscrutability of the novelistic instances. But if one takes together the conjunction of all the configurations in even just a sequence of three or four minutes of *Clueless*, then something of the Austenian complexity is reproduced, about as far as is possible in the medium, including in a specifically visual way, or more precisely, a fashion that deftly articulates the verbal and visual.²⁸ Moreover, the less crafty, less subtle adaptations also can manage fainter approximations of this effect, even just by the *de rigueur* alteration of perspective brought about by the perceived audience demand for variation of shots, though one understands well Kathryn Sutherland's rather typical assessment that the great majority of Austen adaptations also leave something to be desired on this and related scores.²⁹

Austen's "invention" of free indirect discourse—not really an invention but an intensification and multiplication of its possibilities broached by some immediate predecessors—occurs at not just any point in the history of modern Western discourse. Gary Kelley goes so far as to understand it specifically as a formation pertinent to and made possible by the era

of the French Revolution, without simply claiming it as a revolutionary gesture. Whereas the link to the French Revolution proper could well seem a stretch, we can see the affinities of Austen's hybrid formations of first and third persons, subject and object, in a single sentence with any number of the grand philosophical projects that tried to articulate, and in most cases balance, in this age of the ascendant bourgeoisie—Marx thought of it as “heroic”—the competing claims of subject and object, or simply to give a good account of their interrelations. Here I do not mean just the thoroughgoing systematics of Kant and the post-Kantians (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Vischer) but also philosophical programs closer to Austen's home, as, say, in Adam Smith or Jeremy Bentham or William Godwin, even if the political thinking of these philosophers would have been at odds with what we imagine Austen's to be.³⁰ The conjunction of subject and object remains, in Austen, intact, even if trembling, thanks not least to the precarity of free indirect discourse. The “subjective” terms seem at least partly interpellated or infused somehow with something not entirely subjective, much as the putatively “objective” (universal) seems to be, because it must contain so many not-quite-identical subjectivities, as well as the occasional puncturing of the artifice of omniscience, exposing it as less than fully objective. The subjective-objective totality is best understood as a posited rather than an actual one, a grand fiction, even if one with ramifications in the world writ small and large.

It is, after all, *worlds*—for all of Jane Austen's notorious verbal painting on and in miniatures—that the novels conjure up. We can, of course, think of adaptations as trying to render not texts as such (to the extent that were possible) but what the texts are trying to represent: worlds, and something of what is in them and what happens in them. Whereas usually in considering adaptations we focus on what films cannot do in reproducing the texture of texts, we might remind ourselves of the limits of novelistic discourse, that novels can aspire to represent scenes, indeed, any number of visual things or configurations, that defy or are at odds with their means of representation. Hence Tolstoy's supposed envy of early film's ability to do things with image sequences for which words and sentences would fail him or any other novelist.³¹ The opening sequence of Douglas McGrath's plays with the trope of the novelist's and the filmmaker's “world” as the opening credits feature homespun painted versions of characters and settings, all of which are set, from a distance, spinning, as if on a planet revolving at high speed, and this little fictitious globe then resolves into an actual tiny hand-painted globe created by Emma and presented as a little wedding gift. This is one of many gestures in the adaptations that points back to the novel's implicit characterization of Emma as a kind of writer. I mean not the few instances in which Emma actually is known to be writing or have written something but in her capacity as plotter, matchmaker, and even painter. As a painter, she is shown producing the likeness of a person in art, which is rather close to one of the main functions of a novelist: making up people. She is also conspicuous for plotting out what others are to do, by themselves and in relation to each other, exactly what novelists in general do and—as far the marriage plot is concerned—what Austen herself, at a certain level of abstraction, does. Thus the adaptations, in sometimes linking the protagonist with an Austen-figure, if not with Austen herself, an author rather than just a narrator, are not

necessarily making an elementary literary critical mistake but are responding to an allegorical strain in the novel itself.

But back to the world. The Austen films revel in presenting the highly circumscribed social formations and their concomitant dynamics. If in *Persuasion* the Musgrove girls are “wild for dancing,”³² the studios and the cinematographers filming Austen’s novels are equally if not more so. The scopophilic camera can display movements, interpersonal relations, actions and reactions, in very short order. Reactions such as smiles, frowns, displays of indifference—visual emoticons—can all be shown in an instant and, crucially, the camera can show two or more characters at once in a way that literature can scarcely rival. Body language can speak more quickly, more economically than language proper. And some bodies speak very quickly indeed.

In this light, let us consider the celebrated Box Hill episode from *Emma* as adapted variously for film and television.³³ The specifically cinematic potential of the scene is considerable. There is a lot at stake in the group psychology and analysis of egos, with Emma at the center of a party that includes the grandstanding Frank Churchill, Miss Bates, Knightley, Jane Fairfax, Harriet, the Westons, and the Eltons. (Austen’s narrator stresses at the outset the tendency of the picnickers to separate into pairings and even “parties,” at the same time as she explicitly draws attention to the lack of “union.”)³⁴ The episode is the crux of the novel, a moment in which Emma makes a serious moral error, very different from her mistakes in trying to match Harriet with this, that, or the other person or in blocking her union with Robert Martin. However much damage she had done, one could construe her earlier actions as well-meaning. It’s curious that *Clueless*, in so many ways a rigorous adaptation of *Emma*, omits an extended scene analogous to Box Hill, though there is admittedly no character in *Clueless* who corresponds to Miss Bates. Heckerling’s film contents itself with a brief gesture along the lines of the Box Hill debacle when Cher chastises her family’s house servant (shades of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and genteel classes) for no good reason, and then sounds borderline racist or just obtuse in not knowing that a woman from El Salvador would not speak “Mexican,” as if that were even a language. The absence in *Clueless* is still a little strange, especially given the manifold possibilities for group shaming built into high school cliques. No other adaptation, no matter how short, forgoes this scene.

The episode, as laid out in volume 3, chapter 7, of *Emma*, is strikingly *about* language and judgment long before the narrator chooses to record any words, though there has indeed been some talking:

When they all sat down it was better; to her taste a great deal better, for Frank Churchill grew talkative and gay, making her his first object. Every distinguishing attention that could be paid, was paid to her. To amuse her, and be agreeable in her eyes, seemed all that he cared for—and Emma, glad to be enlivened, not sorry to be flattered, was gay and easy too, and gave him all the friendly encouragement, the admission to be gallant, which she had ever given in the first and most animating period of their acquaintance; but which now, in her own estimation, meant nothing, though in the judgment of most people looking on it must have had such an appearance as no English word but flirtation could very well describe. “Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse flirted together excessively.” They were laying themselves open to that very phrase—and to having it sent off in a letter to Maple Grove by one lady, to Ireland by another. (400)

The very action of the scene solicits language from those merely looking on. The narrator is precise as to what the only proper English word would and should be used to describe it. The scene prompts an almost universally speakable sentence that is nonetheless not spoken (as far as we know) by anyone: “Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse flirted together excessively.” Virtually everyone should be able to make this judgment, say this sentence, and in principle be able to send it off in the post. It has something of the structure of the Kantian “as if” (a phrase strategically invoked by Cher in *Clueless*), a singular judgment that is imputed to everyone *as if* it were a universal (logical, objective) judgment. The whole scene, focusing first on the public relations of Frank Churchill and Emma, is framed as one of judgment before we know of any of the participants’ actual judgments of this or that in particular. It is a charged instance of the novel’s preoccupation with what “every body” should think, feel, or do.³⁵

It seems in keeping with this key scene as one of judgments by and of a group and some of its members that almost every film and made-for-TV rendition of the Box Hill episode features an establishing shot from on high, sometimes from a well-nigh Olympian height. The BBC version from 1972 takes the most extreme tack, with the camera (after the climb of the picnicgoers to the top of the hill) set at a remote distance and very high up. The party in the distance is miniscule, with the figures so tiny as scarcely to be identifiable except as being people. The camera position is, in visual terms, about as close as you can get to one (clichéd) version or position of the Austenian narrator: omniscient, objective, and potentially ironic.³⁶ The McGrath version too has a similar establishing shot from on high that frames a scene about to unfold, rife with dramatic ironies. Only the 2009 BBC version of *Emma* eschews the dramatically high shot, but it has the camera creep up on the party from below the crest of a hill to meet it and then offers a vista of the vast valley beyond the party, making any problems the group might have seem rather small and possibly first-world ones.

Boredom, too, solicits language, as if one could not tolerate “dead air.” Silence, in this party of divided parties, is awkward. To get people talking, Frank Churchill falsely conveys a “command” by Emma that she “desires to know what you are all thinking of” (401). The command is rebuffed and quickly passed over, but it is telling that the demand should have assumed just this content, for the discrepancy between what people are thinking and what people say is a hugely important preoccupation of the novel. So much depends on people *not* saying what they are thinking, not least about the secret engagement of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, which must have been on their minds more or less constantly while in public. And the climactic moment of the novel entails Emma’s saying something—her perhaps unthinking insult to Miss Bates, that she would be limited to saying only three very dull things—that would have far better been left as an unspoken thought. The films and TV versions all present a number of reactions, with attention to the faces of the picnicgoers, much as one would expect, though the text passes over any and all such reactions, waiting instead for Mr. Knightley’s reproach to Emma in the aftermath of the festivities.

In the final section of Kant’s *Anthropology* the philosopher (but here in his guise as observer of human history, as anthropologist) muses about a planet where “there might be rational

beings who could not think in any other way but aloud; that is, they could not have any thoughts that they did not at the same time *utter*, whether awake or dreaming, in the company of other or alone.”³⁷ Kant, being a genius, realizes that a society couldn’t very well function this way, which leads him to the conclusion: “So it already belongs to the original composition of a human creature and the concept of his species to explore the thoughts of others but to withhold one’s own; a neat quality which then does not fail to progress gradually from *dissimulation* to *intentional deception* and finally to *lying*” (428). This is only the penultimate note of Kant’s *Anthropology*, a few lines before the more upbeat peroration of a vision of species “cosmopolitically united” (429). Still, it is a grim realization that the definition of the species lies in the possibility and even tendency to lie.³⁸ It is just this tendency that makes humans human and allows for the plausibly smooth functioning of societies.

The subsequent revelation of Frank (a person who is decidedly not “frank”) Churchill’s secret engagement to Jane Fairfax shows him to have been living a lie, to have flirted in bad faith, if one can phrase it that way. It’s ironic that it is Frank who dreams up and enunciates the command that everyone was to say what was on her or his mind. No one but Emma does. And all hell breaks loose, or what counts as all hell in Emma’s and Austen’s world: Knightley will reproach Emma for her behavior.

Integral to the meaning of the action of the picnic is the coda of Knightley’s confrontation of Emma, chastising her for the cruel rebuke of Miss Bates. Among the adaptations, McGrath’s rendition of this mini-scene offers the most economical but in some ways the most compelling of the versions. As a feature film, McGrath’s rendition is far more constrained by time than the televisual series, and perhaps as a genial result McGrath opts, unlike the often clunky shot-reverse-shot mode that dominates most other versions, for a two-shot format. First, after Knightley ascertains they are alone, they face each other in profile. Then, as Emma feels ashamed, she walks away, her face turned from Knightley as he follows. Thus we almost always see both faces at once, even as Emma can’t “face” Knightley. There is considerable variety of movement as Knightley tries to get Emma to listen to him, first close up, then backing away and looking forward to some future when Emma will deserve more his faith in her. McGrath takes full advantage of displaying Emma and Knightley simultaneously in a way that no novelist, no matter how great a genius, could possibly do. McGrath’s solution of the two-shot, I think we can say, is in the elusive “spirit” of the novel’s scene, despite the structural differences.³⁹

In the coda, Emma’s first line of defense against Knightley’s accusation for her unfeeling rebuke of Miss Bates, exacerbated by her position of class privilege, as Knightley makes clear, is, after blushing and feeling sorry, to invoke her necessary participation in a posited universal reaction: “Nay, how could I help saying what I did?—Nobody could have helped it.” “Nobody” is the flip side of “everybody,” but Emma is once again alone in the singularity of her shame, and she was alone in speaking her mind at a party where no one else would. It is not the big lie that holds society together but the innumerable small ones. Austen’s novel can demonstrate that, but so can in general the film adaptations of *Emma*, through supplementing

Austen's dialogue with a display of action and reaction not always spelled out as such in the novel.

Beginning with the signature mechanism of free indirect discourse we saw a definitive aspect of Austen's novelistic practice that, on the face of it, should have proved difficult to register or reproduce on film. After all, it was a matter of a complex narrative sentences not usually reproduced in Austen adaptations, which tend to rehearse her dialogue, consigning the work of what in novels is narrative to camerawork and *mise-en-scène*. But the unusual commingling of third-person and first-person perspectives in single sentences found a somewhat improbably good host in the medium of film, whose protocols dictate rapid shifting of perspectives not identifiable with a single person or even a person at all, and thus are strangely hospitable to Austen's narratorial machine, which oscillates between inhuman impersonality and its opinionated opposite. Indeed, even humdrum adaptations are not so badly poised to reproduce a medium-specific analogue for Austen's signature practice. And in the best of the adaptations, as in *Clueless*, one witnesses a complexity and subtlety worthy of Austen on a good day. Free indirect discourse might seem merely a formal mechanism, but it in fact performs the articulation of subjects with forces above and beyond the subject, what Galperin has called "the adjustment of self and society,"⁴⁰ moving from "some body" to, at the extreme, "every body," with the individual shadowed by a world that exceeds him or her, even or especially a world of judgments. This movement from language to world is all the more pronounced in the Austen adaptations' predilection for the presentation of group scenes, which respond to charged events (a picnic can be "huge") in the fictional worlds with the added visual resources that film affords. The adaptations exceed the letter of Austen's texts in various ways but often, with or even without the best intentions, in a way that does what the text can be thought to have aspired to. Once one gets past the familiar, and somewhat understandable, complaints that the adaptations can't come close to the splendors of the Austen originals, one can see that some of them nonetheless produce and reproduce something of the power and complexity of her writing, forming perhaps the most pronounced shadow of the Romantic period in our time.

Notes

1. The *ne plus ultra* of this devotion is perhaps the rose-flavored "Jane Austen" toothpaste.
2. The term originates with Rudyard Kipling and is not honorific, but it does get at the texture of some relations to Austen. Readers interested in the range of interest in Austen, from devotion to fanaticism, are fortunate to be able to learn from several fine studies, especially Deirdre Lynch's edited collection, *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), and Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
3. For an illuminating analysis of the changing ways of periodizing Austen, see Mary D. Favret. "Jane Austen's Periods," in *A Jane Austen Companion*, ed. Claudia Johnson and Clara Tuite (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 402–12.
4. One index of the change, which took a long time to take hold, was an issue of *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1976). It now all but goes without saying that one can address Austen in any configuration of Romanticism that is not hopelessly narrow.
5. In her survey of secondary literature devoted to the Restoration and the eighteenth century for the year 2013, Frances Ferguson notes the tendency of recent criticism to highlight the multiplicity of novelistic modes in the long century, as well as their place alongside a panoply of prose forms (satire, etc.) that are not simply distinct from the novel. See her "Recent Studies in Restoration and Eighteenth Century," *SEL (Studies in English Literature) 1500–1900* 54, no. 3 (2014): 717–58.

6. Austen is not the outright “inventor” of free indirect discourse or style: Burney precedes her, and there are important instances of it in *Godwin*. Yet Austen’s use of it is distinctive and complex, and there seems to be more at stake (for the reader) in her use of it than, say, in Burney’s. Among the many good discussions of free indirect discourse, I am indebted to Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (Boston: Routledge, 1982); D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978); Casey Finch and Peter Bowen, “‘The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury’: Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*,” *Representations* 31 (Summer 1990): 1–18; Louise Flavin, “Free Indirect Discourse and the Clever Heroine of *Emma*,” *Persuasions* 13 (1991): 50–57; Daniel P. Gunn, “Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in *Emma*,” *Narrative* 12, no. 1 (2004): 35–54; and Kathy Mezei, “Who Is Speaking Here? Free Indirect Discourse, Gender, and Authority in *Emma*, *Howard’s End*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*,” in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 66–92.

7. See the website http://www.huffingtonpost.com/abby-rogers/why-i-hate-jane-austen_b_2526492.html (accessed March 25, 2013).

8. One might say that Austen dramatizes or allegorizes in advance the difficulty of separating form from content. In *Emma*, a good deal of the confusion in Emma’s plot to match Harriet with Mr. Elton turns on the difficulty of knowing whether Elton’s praise of Emma’s portrait of Harriet refers in the first instance to the attraction of the subject matter (Harriet) or the painter of the portrait (Emma). On the force of form in the novel, see the valuable essay by Frances Ferguson, “Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2000): 157–80.

9. Whit Stillman’s *Metropolitan* (1990) would be an instance of an indirect adaptation.

10. Patti Smith’s homages to and rewritings of Blake constitute a remarkable exception. There are a good many not so popular (in terms of reception, understood numerically) reworkings and invocations of the major poets but nothing constituting anything like the success of any of the major Austen films or likely even any of the BBC versions of the novels. For a fine collection addressing latter-day creative responses to and transpositions of Blake’s work, see *Blake 2.0: William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music, and Culture*, ed. Jason Whittaker, Tristanne Connolly, and Steven Clark (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

11. The present volume, however, calls our attention to an array of any number of the most compelling ones.

12. The houses, as William Galperin and others have noted, tend to be rather grander in the films than in the novels. Historical accuracy, in this respect, largely goes out the window.

13. So unbearably white was the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz* that it prompted a counterversion in the form of the all-black *The Wiz*.

14. Many analyses have drawn attention to Rozema’s having done her homework in reading Edward Said, Claudia Johnson, and a good many other critics attentive to the ideological forces at work in the production of Austen’s discursive world. It is a self-consciously modernizing work, though trying to get at what was unspoken in the decorous world Austen conjures up.

15. The BBC versions by and large avoid this temptation. For what I take is the best analysis of the matter of feminism in Austen and the adaptations, see Devoney Looser, “Feminist Implications of the Silver Screen Austen,” in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 159–76.

16. On the implicit and explicit historical vision of *Clueless*, see the rich, perspicacious essay by Deidre Lynch, “*Clueless*: About History,” in *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 71–92. Lynch has also provided the best synthetic account of the various film, television, and Internet versions of *Emma* in “Screen Adaptations,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Emma*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). See also the helpful general account by David Monahan, “*Emma* and the Art of Adaptation,” in *Jane Austen on Screen*, ed. Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 197–227.

17. For a very fine discussion of this in Douglas McGrath’s film of *Emma*, see Hilary Schor, “Emma Interrupted,” in *Jane Austen on Screen*, ed. Gina MacDonald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 144–74. On related matters in the novel proper, see John Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 123–46.

18. See D. A. Miller on impersonality, quoted below. The elusive Austen narrators in fact occupy quite a number of different positions across a spectrum from impersonal to personal, including one and the same narrator being in the course of a novel variously impersonal, personal, neutral, or something hard to fix between those positions. Patricia Rozema’s provocative choice to have Fanny Price read from Austen’s letters and journals as if they were her own is startling, and one

might react almost viscerally to her bold identification of character and author. Yet it does point to a sense that is hard to avoid, that there is very likely some intermittent identification between the author, real or especially imagined, and her protagonist. Moreover, Rozema by no means portrays the identification as total or ongoing.

19. It is hard to provide a summary judgment of the relation of narrator and protagonist in *Emma* since it is not constant or stable, but I think we should resist a formulation like this in an otherwise sensible essay by Suzanne Ferris: “While written in the third person, the novel is told from Emma’s point of view.” See her “Emma Becomes Clueless,” in *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, 123. One might argue that this is not true from the opening sentence of the novel, even though Emma is overwhelmingly the most privileged consciousness and character in the novel, and even a “center of consciousness.”

20. And this is the case for many critics, despite the complete absence of verbatim dialogue from the novel. For a good case made for the general paradox, see William Galperin, “Adapting Jane Austen: The Surprising Fidelity of *Clueless*,” *Wordsworth Circle* 42, no. 3 (2011): 187–93.

21. Ann Banfield famously characterizes such sentences as “unspeakable” because, unlike the almost universal sorts of more familiar and common sentences, these cannot be understood to issue from a single speaker, whether in speech or in writing. (Group or communal writing exists, of course, but it too is generally thought of as unified in or by a group agent, not internally divided or layered.) Although virtually everyone agrees on the structure of free indirect discourse, critics vary considerably in promoting one aspect or another as the paradigm or model of its function (the expression of interiority, etc.).

22. Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 96. All further references to *Emma* are given by page number in the body of the text.

23. On the peculiar imperative for rereading in and of *Emma* (commented on by numerous critics from Reginald Farrer on), see William Galperin’s nuanced account of this aspect of the novel in *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), esp. 182–89.

24. Most passages exhibited as exemplary of free indirect discourse highlight a word or phrase registering a feeling of a character embedded in a third-person, “objective” utterance. My chosen example here is representative of how even sentences purporting in the first instance to be states of affairs in the world (they are lovers or they are not) can be rendered in free indirect discourse style (though feelings too could be construed as state of affairs).

25. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, 1. The following sentence comes from p. 2.

26. Jonathan Culler has written about as definitive a debunking of the notion of the omniscient narrator as can be, an argument to which I subscribe completely. I invoke it here, deliberately in scare quotes, because it corresponds to a common way of describing such a formation. See Jonathan D. Culler, “Omniscience,” *Narrative* 12, no. 1 (2004): 22–34.

27. Thomas Keymer, “Narrative,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 14.

28. Gilles Deleuze follows Jean Mitry’s notion of the “semi-subjective image” but even more Pasolini’s proposal of free indirect discourse as a model for certain filmic modalities, though I find Deleuze’s pages on the topic (*Cinema 1*, 72–76) move rather quickly away from a neutral description of its structure to a rather fanciful sense of how it functions. For a more illuminating discussion, one that also goes back to Pasolini, see Louis-George Schwartz, “Typewriter: *Free Indirect Discourse* in Deleuze’s Cinema,” *SubStance* 34, no. 3 (2005): 107–35.

29. See her excellent summary account of how “a film is unlike a[n Austen] novel” in *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 341 and surrounding passages.

30. It is not always so easy to decipher the politics of a writer of fiction from her or his fiction.

31. For the perhaps apocryphal story of Tolstoy’s (understandable) interest in film, see Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 410.

32. Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 51. (The passage is from volume 1, chapter 6.)

33. Here I provide only a partial reading of the episode, with an eye to the adaptations. For a first-rate collection of essays focused on the scene in and for the novel, see “Re-Reading Box Hill: Reading the Practice of Reading Everyday Life,” ed. William Galperin, *Romantic Circles*, Special Issue, April 2000 (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/boxhill/index.html>). It includes essays by Galperin, George Levine, Michael Gamer, Deidre Lynch, Susan Wolfson, Adam Potkay, and William Walling.

34. This is one thing that prompts Deidre Lynch’s provocative reading of a scene as a kind of national allegory. See her essay “Social Theory at Box Hill: Acts of Union,” in the issue of *Romantic Circles* cited in the previous note.

35. Adela Pinch helpfully highlights this strain of the novel in the introduction to the Oxford edition of the novel. She offers numerous examples of rather different invocations of “every body,” which is itself on one end of a spectrum with “any body” and with “no body” on the other and “some body” in between. See her introduction to *Emma*, by Jane Austen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. xvff. Karen Valihora’s *Austen’s Oughts* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010) offers a subtle, extended reading of the spectrum of judgments, mainly moral and aesthetic, in Austen’s fiction, considered in the frame of a tradition of British thinking on epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics.

36. Each of these predicates names possibilities of the narrator’s position: no narrator of Austen’s is all of these consistently. Most interestingly, narrators in given novels sound omniscient for a good deal—almost all—of the time and then suddenly come across as *not*, thus retroactively casting the former omniscience in doubt.

37. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Robert Louden, trans. Robert Louden and Günter Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 427–28. Further references are by page number in the body of the text.

38. For a searching analysis of Kant’s remarks on the extraterrestrials and the manifold related matters (nothing less than the definition of the human), see David L. Clark, “Kant’s *Aliens*: The Anthropology and Its Others,” *New Centennial Review* 1, no. 2 (2001): 201–89. Of interest too is the short, incisive book by Peter Szendy, *Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials*, trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

39. The letter versus spirit distinction is a (discontinuous) preoccupation of adaptation studies, prominent at first, say from André Bazin to Jean Mitry, then falling out of favor, and now apparently back in again, not least in the impressive collection, *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, ed. Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray, and Rick Warner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The distinction can’t really go away, owing to the difference in media and the simple ontological and historical status of the films as films of literary works. The point is to negotiate it with some care and attention to medium specificity, as well as other pertinent factors (e.g., genre; historical, geographic, and linguistic differences). I discuss the general problem of adaptation in a forum devoted to the future study of literature in “Adapting to the Image and Resisting It: One Future for Literary Studies,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA)* 125, no. 4 (2010): 968–79.

40. William Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 181.