

RIVERRUN

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*Collana di letteratura e cultura inglese diretta da*  
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## RIVERRUN

*Collana di letteratura e cultura inglese*

La collana intende promuovere lo studio della letteratura e della cultura inglese, rivolgendo un'attenzione particolare alle letterature e alle culture anglofone nella loro dimensione innovativa, intese cioè come produzione di testi che parlano di altri mondi, di altre sensibilità artistiche, di altre modalità espressive e conoscitive. Da questo punto di vista, rimane la centralità della lingua e della letteratura inglese *tout court* che si pongono quali termini imprescindibili di un confronto con la tradizione. Mentre la lingua inglese allarga sempre più lo spazio della sua funzionalità nella comunicazione e impone la sua egemonia linguistico-culturale, nel panorama globalizzato del terzo millennio nulla è immobile in un processo in cui non è sempre facile distinguere chi influenza da chi è influenzato – anche in termini culturologici. Di qui il ruolo assunto dal concetto di attraversamento che implica anche fluidità e permeabilità degli spazi culturali. Un *riverrun* che si sostituisce alla dialettica centro/periferia o, se si vuole, alla coppia oppositiva continuità/discontinuità, configurando in tal modo un territorio nuovo per gli studi di anglistica, anche sul piano della ricerca comparativa e interculturale.

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Questo volume è stato pubblicato con il contributo  
del Dipartimento di Studi Classici  
dall'Antico al Contemporaneo  
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI "GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO"  
DI CHIETI-PESCARA

**Jane Austen's *Emma***  
Revisitations and Critical Contexts

*edited by*  
Francesco Marroni  
Gloria Lauri-Lucente



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via Raffaele Garofalo, 133/A-B  
00173 Roma  
(06) 93781065

ISBN 978-88-548-4282-3

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I edizione: ottobre 2011

# Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Introduction   | 7   |
| Francesco Marroni<br>Jane Austen's Textualization of a Delusional World:<br>Rhetorical Epistolarity and Verbal Miscalculation in <i>Emma</i> | 13  |
| Gloria Lauri-Lucente<br>Pride and Prejudice in Fidelity Criticism:<br>The Case of Jane Austen's <i>Emma</i>                                  | 37  |
| Valerie Wainwright<br>"A disposition to think a little too well of herself":<br>A Psychological Approach to <i>Emma</i>                      | 65  |
| Francesca Saggini<br>"A smile at something unseen":<br>The Structuring Principle in <i>Emma</i>  | 93  |
| Ivan Callus<br>Jane and Jacques: Matchmaking, Telepathy and<br>Deconstruction in Jane Austen's <i>Emma</i>                                   | 133 |
| Marianna D'Ezio<br>"Musing on the difference of woman's destiny":<br>Reconsidering <i>Emma</i> 's "Happy" Ending                             | 169 |
| Mary Patricia Kane<br>Self-definition and the Law of Property in <i>Emma</i>   | 185 |
| Silvia Antosa<br>Sexing <i>Emma</i> : Stable and Unstable Bodies in<br>Jane Austen's Fictional World   | 205 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Massimo Verzella  |     |
| A Matter of <i>Degree</i> :                               |     |
| First Steps in a Corpus Stylistic Approach to <i>Emma</i> | 231 |
| Luigina Castorani   |     |
| Fashionable <i>Emma</i>                                   | 245 |
| Eleonora Sasso  |     |
| <i>Emma</i> 's Afterlives: Austen, Atwood and McCullough  | 263 |
| Michele Russo   |     |
| Echoes of <i>Emma</i> 's Voice in America:                |     |
| M. Fuller and L. M. Alcott                                | 279 |
| Notes on Contributors                                     | 301 |



## Introduction

[...] not the style of a woman; no, certainly, it is too strong and too concise; not diffuse enough for a woman.

– Jane Austen, *Emma*

[...] I am, as it were, sleeping with Jane Austen! (Although our relationship, of necessity, is strictly platonic).

– David Aitken, *Sleeping with Jane Austen*

Jane Austen's work can essentially be considered as an elaborate description of the ravelling and unravelling of human relations in a world in which feelings are allowed to take shape swiftly and in an unbridled fashion, on condition that they are protected by the reassuring haven of propriety, wealth and, more importantly, the certainty of a bank account. All of Austen's novels, to a lesser or greater extent, narrate the story of a process of change that seems to involve almost exclusively its characters, while the transformations and revolutions that are taking place against a barely visible background seem to only slightly affect every now and then society and its institutions. But in reality things are much more complicated. To put it succinctly, Austen's novels depict a reluctant social structure that is more willing to accept immobility rather than movement. As we shall see in the essays which are contained in this volume, the *novum* is actually not so distant from the Austenian narrative, but it is the actors on her stage who *want* it to stay away as far as possible, and who keep pushing it back. In this respect, the father of *Emma's* eponymic heroine, Mr. Woodhouse, is the perfect example of a character who

incarnates such an idea of immobility – for Mr. Woodhouse, even moving just a couple of miles from Hartfield signifies the loss of control over a space which represents the only certainty in his life in terms of social protection against the unpredictable onslaughts of the external world. We are not overstating the ideological content of Austen’s novels by saying that the writer establishes a deep-seated link between the desire of immobility and the artistic text in which everything remains eternally immobile, or philologically tied to its own artistic truth, and institutionally forced to live within its own imprisoned space, with respect to the fluidity and porousness of cultural systems. The primary immobility of every classic is, in essence, the matrix of a textual proliferation which extends into infinity and determines the eternal hermeneutic race. Clearly, only masterpieces, or those works which every important library in the world should own, enjoy the privilege of being endowed with this type of immobility which is to be construed as the perfect expression of a desire of certainty. In such instances, the text becomes the one and only originating source which gives rise to multiplicity; it is the immobile centre that irradiates countless possible discourses.

It is this textual fixity that nurtures the wonderful fictional mechanism of Jane Austen’s novels. A writer who, with her extraordinary ability to capture the most imperceptible vibrations in the air, with her incredible linguistic skill, has constructed – alongside the immobility just referred to – a series of novels that are always in flux, always ready to reveal new paths to be followed, and always paligenetically willing to conjure up a sort of divine order for the benefit of the readers’ mind. It is therefore no coincidence that books always play a part in Austen’s novels, since the process of doubling (the citation of a novel within a novel, or the reference to living one’s life as if it were a novel), produces an effect that is also an invitation to go beyond the limits of the textual perimeter. If it is true that a heroine like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* declares: “O! Mr. Tilney, how frightful! – This is just like a book!”, it is then equally true that these words not only

highlight the literary sophistication and ironic play in Austen, but also thematise the character's desire to interpret his or her role in fictional terms, or in terms of a metanarrativity which signals a vision of the world in which truth and fiction become an integral part of the process of ravelling and unravelling of human relations referred to earlier on.

Within this context, *Emma* becomes a model that has been and will continue to be unsurpassable; a narrative mechanism that turns its oscillations between truth and falsehood, artifice and lies, mystery and revelation, into the creative palimpsest of a novel that opens itself up to an interminable succession of interpretative methods, schools of thought, and textual proliferations. Despite the fact that the bibliography on Jane Austen is endless, and that *Emma* in particular has been the object of such a large number of critical and metacritical readings which have scrutinized every single aspect of the novel, the editors of this volume have chosen to focus on *Emma* in an attempt to take up the writer's tantalizing challenge: that of following the "movement" of the novel as it makes its way into the third millennium, and of observing from an axiological point of view which separates us from Austen's world by two centuries, *Emma*'s trajectory and the fundamental moments in the novel's reception. To this effect, in his *Genius. A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (2002), Harold Bloom places Jane Austen alongside those writers whose genius goes beyond that of a mere *ironist*; he identifies as the most salient aspect of her art the secularization of her protestant formation, thus ascribing to her the role reserved to only two other great writers of literature: Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. But apart from Bloom's stimulating observations, we believe that a novel like *Emma* continues to speak to us, and continues to do so in that peculiar tone that pertains only to masterpieces as they relentlessly strive to reinscribe themselves anew in the mind of each reader.

It is in open polemics with the idea that everything has been said on *Emma* that we have tried to destabilize the novel to show the extent to which this text, which is itself continuously "in motion", tends to set in motion our own ideas, thus turning what has already been thought into what is being thought. Whereas

Valerie Wainwright (“‘A disposition to think a little too well of herself’: A Psychological Approach to *Emma*”) investigates the behavioural subtleties and psychological ramifications of the protagonist as she embarks on the road to maturity and wisdom through a greater sense of self-knowledge, Francesco Marroni (“Jane Austen’s Textualization of a Delusional World: Rhetorical Epistolarity and Verbal Miscalculation in *Emma*”) concentrates primarily on the theme of interpersonal communication which seems to lead to the semiotic zeroing of the word in favour of silence. With the specific and openly declared objective of offering a deconstructionist reading of *Emma*, Ivan Callus explores a more strictly hermeneutic question by focusing on the possible textual and metatextual encounters and correspondences between Jane Austen and Jacques Derrida. Hence the suggestive title – “Jane and Jacques: Matchmaking, Telepathy and Deconstruction in Jane Austen’s *Emma*” – which invites a critical reading of the “strange attractions” between the literary text and the critical text. The essay by Gloria Lauri-Lucente (“Pride and Prejudice in Fidelity Criticism: The Case of Jane Austen’s *Emma*”) goes beyond issues of filmic transpositions by placing *Emma* in a sort of interpretative crossroads, in which the discourse on fidelity criticism intersects with both the analysis of the ideological motivations underlying such a methodological stance and also the need to review and update certain approaches adopted by Austenian criticism vis-à-vis the practice of adaptation. From a different angle, Francesca Saggini (“‘A smile at something unseen’: the Structuring Principle in *Emma*”) productively engages with a firmly established critical genealogy by examining the dichotomy between fixity and movement through a textual approach which privileges the epistemic framework – a framework within which Saggini, with verve and originality, construes wordplay and dance as the elements on which *Emma*’s shifting harmonies are founded. Marianna D’Ezio (“‘Musing on the difference of woman’s destiny’: reconsidering *Emma*’s ‘happy’ ending”) examines with critical acumen the search for a harmonious balance between the theme of power and authority as elements which belong exclusively to the male

domain, and the theme of self-affirmation in a society in which change can be a useful and promising opportunity for a female world. Hence the idea of a conclusion culminating in a marriage in which happiness is placed within quotes: in fact, it is a sort of happiness resulting from a compromise which is both individual and social. In her analysis of *Emma* filtered through a reading of its legal ramifications, Mary Patricia Kane (“Self-definition and the Law of Property in *Emma*”) shows how in reality the novel, by raising a series of questions on the laws regulating the handing down of property from one generation to another, powerfully portrays a profoundly unjust society towards women; even the Frank Churchill-Jane Fairfax subplot constitutes a cue for further reflection on the limits imposed on self-realization in the society of early nineteenth-century England.

By adopting a fresh approach towards a series of aspects which as yet have not been studied in great depth by Austenian critics, the young scholars of the “Centro Studi Vittoriani e Edoardiani” (Università “G. D’Annunzio”, Pescara), – Silvia Antosa, Massimo Verzella, Luigina Castorani, Eleonora Sasso and Michele Russo –, have managed to attune *Emma* to the tastes of the readers of our own era in which globalization and social networks, contemporaneity and the immediate availability of information and knowledge, constitute a dominant epistemic factor that simply cannot be overlooked. Silvia Antosa (“Sexing *Emma*: Stable and Unstable Bodies in Austen’s Fictional World”), in particular, takes her cue from *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) and formulates an entirely original reading on the function of sexuality in *Emma*: the novel becomes the space in which Austen proposes – albeit in an indirect manner that always ends up by reaffirming the primacy of marriage – friendship and intimacy between women as a creative element which sexually liberates and opens up their imaginary world. In a somewhat different vein, in his brilliant essay entitled “A Matter of *Degree*: First Steps in a Corpus Stylistic Approach to *Emma*”, Massimo Verzella skilfully adopts the tools of corpus analysis to explore the stylistic peculiarities of *Emma*. The application of computational analysis allows Verzella

to shed light on Austen's ability to shape idiolects and to represent "mind styles" – all of which is achieved through a wonderfully calibrated interplay of linguistic effects and rhetorical figures. Luigina Castorani ("Fashionable *Emma*") perceptively links the concept of fashion to that of elegance, and establishes a series of cultural paradigms that galvanise around the notion that elegance brings with it personalities that are morally and culturally inscribed within the overarching moral order that governs the customs and attitudes of the community in Highbury. And finally, Eleonora Sasso ("*Emma's* Afterlives: Austen, Atwood and McCullough") and Michele Russo ("Echoes of *Emma's* Voice in America: M. Fuller and L. M. Alcott") turn their attention to Austen's afterlives. Sasso studies Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) and Colleen McCullough's *The Ladies of Missalonghi* (1987) primarily in the light of Barthesian methodology with the intent of demonstrating the way in which the presence of Austenian intertextual elements produces in both writers a desire for *imitatio*, which then turns into *aemulatio*, in a sort of dialectical tension between two simultaneous but antithetical drives: the drive which makes the authors follow *Emma's* footsteps and, at the same time, the antithetical drive which makes them want to distance themselves from such a perfect model, or at least to conceal any traces of Austenian elements. From intertextuality we then move into the field of allusive networks and cultural models which enables Russo to draw parallels between *Emma* and two important works of nineteenth-century American literature: *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) by Margaret Fuller and, in particular, *Little Women* (1868) by L. M. Alcott, two works in which the question of how cultural attitudes towards women and their contribution to the progress of society forcefully establishes itself.

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April 2011

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**Jane Austen's Textualization of  
a Delusional World: Rhetorical Epistolarity and  
Verbal Miscalculation in *Emma***

1. It is only when we have in mind the significance of Jane Austen's discourse on language that we can profitably turn to *Emma* and see the profound novelistic innovations she aimed, consciously and wisely, to effect. In fact, more than in any of her other works, in *Emma* Austen seems to be acutely committed to achieving a higher degree of realistic textualization of the world in which she lived, and from which she received imaginative stimulus and inspiration for her characters, social contexts and plots. Fully aware that the success of a literary text depends on the fact that it is organized as a meaning-generating mechanism, Austen adopted a metalinguistic approach to the genre and was prepared to manifest her own linguistic consciousness whenever she found the right moment in the diegetic structure of her novels. Thus, it is in an oft-quoted passage from *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) that she expresses most explicitly her conception of words as living unities whose meaning should be preserved in their dynamic ramifications, without transforming language into a mere stultifying jargon in our daily experience:

"It is very true", said Marianne, "that admiration of landscape scenery is become a mere jargon. Every body pretends to feel and tries to describe with the taste and elegance of him who first defined what picturesque beauty was. I detest jargon of every kind, and sometimes I have kept my feelings to myself, because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. James Kinsley, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 83. All subsequent quotations are from this edition with the page number following SS.

The exchange of opinions on the picturesque between Marianne and her sister Elinor, on the one hand, and Edward Ferrars, on the other, is more than a simple debate on how our response to a beautiful landscape is overdetermined by our cultural codes as well as our frame of mind. Thus, when Edward claims that he “like[s] a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles”, he is ironically positing a non-cultural and pre-verbal attitude towards the country and its objects: “[...] the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug – with rich meadows, and several neat farm houses scattered here and there. It exactly answers my idea of a fine country” (*SS*, p. 83). Behind Edward’s utilitarian conception of landscape lies an anti-Romantic stance which entails a rejection of the pleasure deriving from the capacity to articulate one’s emotions before a scenery. In his practical view of the world, what he is refusing is language as an instrument of poetic evocativeness.

On the contrary, Marianne is anxious to express her emotions despite the fact that their articulation is negatively conditioned and also impeded by a linguistic barrier made up of debased phrases, trivialising images and hackneyed words. As opposed to these clichéd views of the picturesque, she wishes to find the right words and, consequently, the right expression to give full meaning to an inspiring scenery and to raise it to the level of an aesthetic phenomenon. If the unimaginative and timeworn jargonistic code has deprived the picturesque of a stimulating and morally ennobling meaning, another code – one linguistically renewed and heightened – may be able to reconquer the aesthetic territory which has been worn out and lost by a trite usage of words. This is the code which Marianne would like to possess in order to voice her feelings. But, being unable to find fresh and original phrases, she prefers silence to jargon, no expression at all to a dead body of verbal clichés.

Admittedly, Austen’s narrative discourse places a peculiar emphasis on language. While her characters are dancing or eating or walking, their parallel speeches are very often imbued with reflections on the linguistic codes they are using in their



conversation. In many respects, metalanguage is the very essence of Austen's inventiveness. But metalanguage implies also a meditation on the meaning of silence. Needless to say, there are different kinds of silence and different ways of interpreting it: "My dear Anne, – I make no apology for my silence, because I know how little people think of letters in such a place as Bath. You must be a great deal too happy to care for Uppercross, which, as you well know, affords little to write about"<sup>2</sup>. Mary, the sister of the heroine of *Persuasion* (1818), Anne Elliot, is writing to the latter and, rhetorically, in her letter she is intent on proving that life in Uppercross is dull and uneventful (i.e., meaningless) – which should justify her epistolary silence until that moment. In her simplistic view, the same does not apply to the place where Anne is staying: Bath's lifestyle is so exciting and busy as to distract people from even a bare minimum of interest in letters. No matter whether letter-writing or letter-reading is involved in Mary's self-justificatory words, what clearly matters is her conviction that Bath is configured as a pleasingly active town where any activity connected with letters appears to be only a waste of time.

Another telling exemplification comes from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). In fact, in line with Austen's investigation into the area which lies beyond commonplace language (i.e., beyond trite modes of conversational pieces), attention is focused on the use of silence in the love skirmishes between the novel's two protagonists: Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy:

They stood for some time without speaking a word; and she began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two dances, and at first was resolved not to break it; till suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to her partner to oblige him to talk, she made some slight observation on the dance. He replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes, she addressed him a second time with:

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. John Davie, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 154.

“It is *your* turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy. – *I* talked about the dance, and *you* ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples.”

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say should be said.

“Very well. – That reply will do for the present. – Perhaps by and by I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones. – But *now* we may be silent”.<sup>3</sup>

From a psychological point of view, the above passage is crucial. Inasmuch as the protagonists’ innermost intentions are concealed both by their words and their silence, it might be right to claim that the moral principle that informs Austen’s realism is deeply ingrained in a linguistic attitude which, while bestowing authority on the spoken word, on many occasions, aims to divest it of the *auctoritas* of truth. More importantly, we may also note that the quoted passage evinces that the protagonists are not only ‘actors’ of an interpersonal scene dominated by silence, but – and this is a metalinguistic side of their brief talk – they consciously debate over the nature of their silence and, implicitly, the way of transcending it. The underlying meaning of such scenes as this one between Elizabeth and Darcy is not difficult to understand. There is a never-ending dialectics between word and silence which cannot be sketchily reduced to an oppositional binomial since it entails a larger axiological area characterized by a complex convergence of codes (linguistic, cultural, ethical, social, psychological, etc.). It stands to reason that this bundle of codes accounts for the intricacies of human relationships in their development in time and space as well as for the social and psychic fluidity which, as Montaigne claims<sup>4</sup>, marks the self in

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. James Kinsley, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> See Michel de Montaigne, “Du repentir”, in *Essais*, Chronologie et introduction par Alexandre Micha, 3 vols., Paris, Flammarion, 1979, III, p. 20-33. In particular, with regard to the way the definition of self by others seems always doomed to be misleading if not wholly wrong, Montaigne

its contact with others. In this connection, to understand the way Austen dramatizes an interpersonal relationship it is important to take into consideration not only what is adumbrated behind the screen of conversation, but also what is concealed behind the seemingly blank wall of silence.

2. If we now turn to *Emma*, the first necessary observation to make concerns the modality in which the eponymous heroine's dialogue with society is profoundly, and tellingly, manifested through her peculiar relationship with spoken and written words. From one point of view, it is of course only too simple to subscribe to that critical tradition which regards Emma as a manipulating mind whose egoistic relation with subordinate people (her first victim is Harriet Smith, a girl of seventeen, "a natural daughter of somebody"<sup>5</sup>) will be eventually 'cured' and modified by a sequence of sad lessons from experience. In Tanner's words: "[...] it is important that we see her as a privileged, well-endowed manipulator, much more willing to put others (Harriet) than herself at emotional risk. It is also clear that Harriet provides a distraction"<sup>6</sup>. Almost on the same wavelength, but with a more positive interpretation of the heroine's role, Roger Gard takes into account Emma's ethical and behavioural weaknesses with the intent of striking a moralistic note: "For she embodies a deeply sympathetic, though obviously vulnerable, positive ethic [...] Every reader is made an expert on her failure – in self-knowledge, in self-control, in discipline, in humility [...]"<sup>7</sup>.

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observes: "Il n'y a que vous qui sçache si vous estes lâche et cruel, ou loyal et devotieux; les autres ne vous voyent point; ils vous devinent par conjectures incertaines; ils voyent non tant vostre nature que vostre art. Par ainsi ne vous tenez pas à leur sentence; tenez vous à la vostre" (p. 23).

<sup>5</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. James Kinsley, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 19. All subsequent quotations are from this edition with the page number following *E*.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Gard, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Art of Clarity*, New Haven and

According to Richard Jenkyns, Emma is “the prisoner of Hartfield” in the sense that “[she] is pent without knowing it, and her story will be one of a liberation unlooked for and not even consciously desired”, but at the same time “Emma is unique in the novels in being the queen of her society”<sup>8</sup> – which seems to be a reading of *Emma* by no means indifferent to the contradictory condition in which the heroine exerts influence and control over her territory.

Thought-provoking and rich in convincing arguments though these interpretations of *Emma* may be, it is a fact that they are characteristically founded on critical strategies which do not consider adequately the linguistic and metalinguistic aspects of the novel. Given the heroine’s almost obsession with language and the way words may influence individual behaviour and psychological responses, it is legitimate to regard Emma’s as a role which goes beyond her failure as a match-maker<sup>9</sup>. In my view, it is not exaggerated to claim that Emma is wholly involved in language and that experimentation, both of its rhetorical mechanisms and its persuasive drives, is part of Emma’s main objectives. In this sense, in the throes of her progress towards self-knowledge, Austen’s heroine and language are one and the same thing. Or, to put it another way, Emma can be equated to the language she produces, and upon which she is fond of dwelling while she does her best to faithfully embody the role of “the queen of her society”.

Accordingly, observed exclusively from the semantic and diegetic perspective, the heroine appears to be indeed a manipulator whose imaginative powers are necessary for her ideological predominance over the community she lives in. That

London, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> Significantly, the chapter that Tony Tanner, in his monograph *Jane Austen*, cit., devotes to the novel is titled “The Match-Maker: *Emma*” (pp. 176-207).

is why, in the circumscribed social context of Highbury, one of the recurring themes pivots on rank and its defence from the attacks of a changing world – part of Emma’s mission in life seems to be her defence of the status quo and, apparently, this function is the prison-house within which her hyperactive mind operates. But, when we consider Emma from a linguistic angle and contextualize her way of encoding ideas and strategies, what immediately emerges is the complexity of her character which, in many respects, is a challenge to any kind of definition and social convention. Not all the means by which a reader is enabled to see Emma’s progress towards a final self-knowledge are discernible in their literary functionality. Indeed, the modality in which each narrative segment is functional to the making of an artistic whole is indisputably nuanced and a full recognition of this semiotic process implies an investigation into some metalinguistic procedures of *Emma* as well. Paradoxically, in too many cases Emma Woodhouse has been interpreted as though she were a real person with a real mission in life. But, of course, this is not a correct reading of the novel. It may be useful here to cite Kundera’s concise description: “A character is not a simulation of a living being. It is an imaginary living. An experimental self”<sup>10</sup>. And in consonance with this fitting definition, and also considering that, “All good novelists know all about their characters – all that they need to know”<sup>11</sup>, it would not be out of

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<sup>10</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, London, Faber and Faber, 1990, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 265. The American critic devotes an entire chapter to Emma: “Control of Distance in Jane Austen’s *Emma*” (pp. 243-266). As regards the question of the point of view, Booth acutely observes: “By showing most of the story through Emma’s eyes, the author insures that we shall travel with Emma rather than stand against her. It is not simply that Emma provides, in the unimpeachable evidence of her own conscience, proof that she has many redeeming qualities that do not appear on the surface; such evidence could be given with authorial commentary, though perhaps not with such force and conviction. Much more important, the sustained inside view leads the reader to hope for good fortune for the

place to define Emma as an experimental self. Nor does it seem to me wrong to hold that Emma, before manipulating and mapping the lives of the people under her sway, manipulates the semiotic codes by which language and silence are contextualized and transformed into human possibilities. In addition to being more complicated and richer in critical suggestions, this interpretative itinerary is undoubtedly consistent with the intricate valence of Emma's developing personality whose verbal expressions, actions and existential objectives are in any case the artistic results of Austen's natural tendency to experimentation. In brief, the novel's imaginative and rhetorical strategies are put into effect by a written work whose narrative programme contemplated the fabrication of a heroine that, only on a fictitious plane, was able to participate in the authorial role, even though it goes without saying that Austen and Emma cannot be considered on the same level – life and fiction being different spheres of human experience<sup>12</sup>.

3. One of the most revelatory scenes of the novel takes place in Volume I, Chapter VII, in which Emma takes her plan to destroy the growing attachment between Harriet and Robert Martin to extremes. Mr. Martin's letter containing "a direct proposal of marriage" (*E*, p. 44) is transformed by Emma into the battlefield where her manipulative skills will be deployed without any sort of restriction. Her contrasting agency appears

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character with whom he travels, quite independently of the qualities revealed" (pp. 245-246).

<sup>12</sup> The first sentence of *Emma* seems, in this regard, a sort of snare leading to critical confusion: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (*E*, p. 3). See what John Hardy, *Jane Austen's Heroines* (London and New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), notes on *Emma's* incipit: "The creation of Emma and her world is as seamless as this blending of the heroine's consciousness and the author's. It appears that Emma seems to herself what is being said of her, her happiness being as conscious as it seems to her unalloyed" (p. 82).