

Tereza Říčná, *Humour and Irony in Jane Austen: Novels and Film Adaptations*

BA thesis

Supervisor: PhDr. Soňa Nováková

Oponent's review

T. Říčná's thesis is interdisciplinary: it addresses issues of literary as well as film studies in its attempt to compare specific means used in two different media for representing the same material. As film adaptations of "classical" works of world literature has become a very important instrument of mediating one form of art through a different, and from the point of view of contemporary audience more digestible, form, discussions of them make an essential part of mass culture studies and as such may be a very adequate and valuable contribution to how the means of popular media of one era are transformed into the means of popular media of another one.

The opening section of the thesis (chapters 1 and 2) is the most satisfactory one, showing that the student is aware of the role film adaptations of Austen's novels play; in her mapping of the recent development she is able to reflect on relevant critical reception and on a broader generic context that helped to decide about the character of individual films. This part is well researched (in terms of a BA thesis research), even though some goals she sets here for her own analysis sound rather naïve ("I would like to ascertain if Austen's humour and irony contribute to the notion that her ideas used in the recent adaptations are timeless", p. 14 – I admit that I can hardly find a convincing answer to this near-metaphysical question in the thesis).

The part introducing the use of irony lacks a discussion of the role of irony in Austen's novels, i.e. it neglects well-known studies devoted to this topic. Yet to characterize Austen's own specific use of irony seems indispensable for contrasting it with the ways filmmakers employ irony in their modification of the Austen stuff. As it stands, the distinction is not clear enough and is based on partial and random comments. Especially the issue of conservative morality should be covered more complexly and profoundly in the analytical chapters.

Unfortunately, Tereza's treatment of the selected film adaptations suffers from the same lack of firmer conception, which results in a patchwork of unsystematic and often rather shallow statements. Examples seem to be selected randomly; at least the relevance of particular quotations is not always fully explained and the comments tend to be descriptive rather than analytical (one of the most blatant cases can be found on p. 27, where the student asserts that "Lastly, Mr Woodhouse [...] cannot be omitted" and then gives him not much over six lines).

With such an approach it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make any really convincing conclusion; no wonder then that the concluding part mostly repeats what has been stated much earlier in the thesis.

From the language point of view the thesis suffers from various relatively frequent errors, the most persistent one being the “the Austen's text” construction (at least 22 occurrences). Also, surprisingly, the Czech abstract reads like a clumsy translation of the English version, which it truly is (e.g. how should we understand this: “s humorem, který se v jejích dílech stává důsledkem její ironie”?).

In my view, the submitted BA thesis mostly fails to address the topic adequately. The use of irony in the selected film adaptations is only partly elucidated, due to the fact that the analysis of the differences in the function of irony is far from being complex. In view of this principal objection I **recommend** the thesis for the defence but cannot suggest a better mark than three (**dobře**).

PhDr. Zdeněk Beran

2 September, 2011