



From Page to Screen: Dancing to the Altar in Recent Film Adaptations of Jane Austen's Novels

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“TO BE FOND OF DANCING was a certain step towards falling in love” (9), writes Jane Austen at the outset of *Pride and Prejudice*. So she includes dances in all her novels to catalyze courtship, the subject of Mr. Elton’s charade in *Emma* (72) and the subject of all of Austen’s fiction. Austen herself was fond of dancing and excelled in the art, as we know from her letters. She wrote to her sister Cassandra from Steventon about a 1798 Christmas Eve ball: “There were twenty Dances & I danced them all, & without any fatigue. . . . I fancy I could just as well dance for a week together as for half an hour” (24 December 1798). Not all of her characters are fond of dancing, however. Fitzwilliam Darcy, for example, dislikes the activity, and it takes all of Volume One of *Pride and Prejudice* to overcome his distaste. In *Emma*, George Knightley says, “Fine dancing, I believe, like virtue, must be its own reward” (258). But Austen demonstrates that dancing with the right partner can lead to greater rewards. Austen choreographs her ball scenes skillfully to prefigure the proposals of marriage that conclude her novels. She employs the same terminology for dancing as marriage: the man “offers his hand,” “engaging” the woman as his “partner” in the parlance of the period—suggesting the mating dance may be a prelude to matrimony.

Courtship patterns do underlie the formal etiquette of the dance ritual. As Steven Lonsdale notes, “Dance is an activity that can tame excessively brutal impulses while still allowing erotic expression. Dance in many cultures is an acceptable and effective way for the young to release and express sexual feelings for members of the opposite sex” (71). In the restricted social intercourse allowed to single young men and women in Regency England, dancing was one of the few ways they could converse privately or actually touch each other—a socially sanctioned method of establishing their chemistry—even though both partners wore gloves! Lonsdale adds, “The dances sort out the weak and clumsy and match up those pairs most compatible for matrimony” (71). Havelock Ellis notes, “Here we are in the sphere of sexual selection” (242), for “dancing is often an essential part of courtship” (242). Darrell Mansell compares Austen’s fiction to dance: “Her novels are more like ballroom dances than like anyone’s conception of life in the raw. They present the relationship between the sexes in a graceful, restrained and highly stylised form of art that has developed in polite society. . . . In dancing the sexual passions are celebrated in a ceremony that hints at their power while keeping them safely contained in art” (8).

This mating-dance pattern renders Austen’s novels intensely sexual, even though they appear very decorous. The dance scenes also render her novels highly cinematic, as many recent films can verify. Sue Birtwistle, the director of the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, states in her chapter on “Dancing” in *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*, “In Jane Austen’s time dancing was an integral part of social life. Given her own love of dancing and the crucial role it played in courtship, it is no surprise that she set many key scenes in the book at dances or balls” (67).¹ So it is also no surprise that film directors make the most of Austen’s dance scenes, and these ball scenes, in turn, make the movie adaptations scintillating. As Linda Wolfe argues, “For many film-goers and television watchers, the stately dancing in the recent spate of Jane Austen dramatizations stirred a touch of culture envy: a longing for a presumably lost Eden of elegance, for forms of social intercourse less brash and brazen than our own” (1).²

The ball scenes in Austen’s novels have been featured prominently in recent film adaptations. Austen employs her dance scenes to catalyze courtship—either to initiate it, or, in some cases, to terminate it, because the ballroom provides a dramatic forum to publicize the state of a relationship. Austen’s more comic novels—*Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*—present active courtships represented by dancing, while, in the more

serious novels—*Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*—the courtship of the principal couple is in abeyance because the hero is courting another woman: Edward Ferrars is engaged to Lucy Steele, Frederick Wentworth is courting Louisa Musgrove, and Edmund Bertram is entranced by Mary Crawford. In these more somber novels—somber because the central courtship is inactive—the heroine sometimes does not dance, indicating that she is not in the market for marriage. In the more serious novels, declining to dance may indicate an unwillingness to marry.

Emma Thompson's 1995 film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* offers a striking example. *Sense and Sensibility*, as its title suggests, has a dual structure: Marianne, with her exaggerated *sensibility*, like Willoughby, loves to dance, while her sister Elinor's sober *sense*, like the mature Colonel Brandon's, is shown in her reluctance to dance. Elinor and Brandon enjoy "sitting down together by mutual consent, while the others were dancing" (55), while Marianne and Willoughby demonstrate their mutual attraction by dancing together more than propriety permits (54). When Willoughby decamps, Marianne forswears dancing, symbolizing the hiatus in their courtship (99). The climax of their courtship occurs at the London party where Willoughby snubs Marianne. In her film adaptation, Thompson wisely sets this critical scene at a ball. Willoughby's snubbing Marianne so publicly at the dance, under the watchful eye of his well-heeled partner, Miss Gray, constitutes a very pointed rejection, indicating his unwillingness to consider the impoverished Marianne any longer as a possible marriage partner, as Elinor's grim prophecy indicates: "every circumstance that could embitter such an evil seemed uniting to heighten the misery of Marianne in a final separation from Willoughby—in an immediate and irreconcilable rupture with him" (179). As Langdon Elsbree notes, "the reaction of each individual to the crowded dance floor—a symbol of the great social world of fashion, money, and marital aspirations—is one of the main techniques Jane Austen uses to dramatize his character" (116). David Daiches's comment—"How ruthless is the clarity with which Jane Austen observes and records the economic realities underlying this graceful social dance!" (291)—applies perfectly. Here, as W. H. Auden writes in his "Letter to Lord Byron," Austen "Reveal[s] so frankly and with such sobriety / The economic basis of society" (79). Thompson's ballroom scene renders this rupture highly dramatic—indeed traumatic—for Marianne, augmenting heartbreak by public humiliation.³

In Austen's last novel, *Persuasion*, composed when she herself was long past the dancing stage, her heroine, Anne Elliot, does not dance at all, indi-

cating her depression since refusing Captain Wentworth's proposal of marriage. Austen uses dancing to contrast Anne's thoughtful behavior with the mindless vitality of the Musgroves: "The girls were wild for dancing; and the evenings ended, occasionally, in an unpremeditated little ball. . . . Anne, very much preferring the office of musician to a more active post, played country dances to them by the hour together" (47). Rather than Anne's dancing, which would indicate she is in the market for marriage, or on the marriage market, she is relegated to the role of accompanist. When dancing is proposed at the Musgroves' home, where Henrietta and Louisa flirt with Captain Wentworth, Austen writes, "Anne offered her services, as usual, and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved" (71). Anne overhears Wentworth ask his partner "whether Miss Elliot never danced? The answer was, 'Oh! no, never; she has quite given up dancing. She had rather play. She is never tired of playing'" (72). In the 1995 BBC adaptation of the novel, directed by Roger Michell, screenwriter Nick Dear augments the pathos by adding a scene in which Wentworth gives up his seat at the piano to Anne in order to dance with the Musgroves, leaving Anne to play solo accompaniment. This scene provides a good example of a director adding a dance scene that enhances Austen's characterization.

Anne and Wentworth never do dance in the novel, although Austen allows them a metaphorical minuet, as their "spirits danc[e] in private rapture" (240) after Anne reads Wentworth's letter, and they reach an understanding when Charles Musgrove has the happy impulse to purchase a double-barrelled shotgun at the end of the novel—an ideal dance preceding Wentworth's spoken declaration of undiminished devotion (241). But Roger Michell was not satisfied with dancing spirits. He added a circus parade that more resembles a Federico Fellini film than a Jane Austen novel—a sense of carnival that inspires Anne and Wentworth's indecorous and un-Austen-like kiss in the public street.

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price, like Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, does not participate in dancing, initially. Because she is "'not out'" (51), as Mary Crawford puts it, she does not consider herself to be on the marriage market. Like Anne, Fanny is relegated to the sidelines as an observer. "Fanny's first ball" (117) is an impromptu dance that occurs during the period of misrule that reigns in Sir Thomas Bertram's absence. After four felicitous dances with Edmund, Fanny is seated with the chaperons, "while all the other young people were dancing" (116). Although she hopes to dance again with the now

absent Edmund, she is approached by Tom Bertram. Instead of inviting her to dance, however, he proceeds to give her a report on a sick horse! After his insultingly languid offer—“If you want to dance, Fanny, I will stand up with you”—is civilly declined, he expresses his relief and contempt for the activity: “I am glad of it . . . for I am tired to death. I only wonder how the good people can keep it up so long.—They had need be *all* in love, to find any amusement in such folly” (118). In establishing a parallel between dancing and loving, however, Tom speaks truer than he knows.

On his return, Sir Thomas notes Henry Crawford’s interest in Fanny and plans a ball at Mansfield, ostensibly to gratify “William’s desire of seeing Fanny dance” (252), but really to launch her onto the marriage market and straight at the head of Henry Crawford. As Elsbree observes, “Dancing, particularly the ball, is for the young girl the formal announcement of her nubility—an obvious, traditional, and important function” (115). He adds, “*Mansfield Park* is the most explicit about the dance as a ritual which celebrates a girl’s . . . marriageability” (122). Fanny, dubbed “Queen of the evening” (267), is “to lead the way and open the ball” (275), much to her dismay because, as we know, “To dance without much observation or any extraordinary fatigue, to have strength and partners for about half the evening, to dance a little with Edmund, and not a great deal with Mr. Crawford, to see William enjoy himself, and be able to keep away from her aunt Norris, was the height of her ambition, and seemed to comprehend her greatest possibility of happiness” (267).

Fanny’s hand, to her delight, is solicited first by Edmund, who says, “You must dance with me, Fanny; you must keep two dances for me; any two that you like, except the first” (272). But Henry Crawford signals his interest by engaging Fanny for the first two dances, just as Edmund signals his interest in Mary Crawford. Henry’s soliciting her hand in the dance is a prelude to his requesting her hand in marriage. Edmund, whom we could call the dark-horse dancer, who is willing to defer the pleasure of dancing with Fanny, also defers the pleasure of marrying her. But an Austen heroine must marry her hero, and a pearl of such price must be rewarded for “the sweetness of her temper, the purity of her mind, and the excellence of her principles” (468). Eventually, “Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire” (470).

Patricia Rozema’s 1999 film adaptation of *Mansfield Park* emphasizes the ball scene, but inaccurately, in my opinion. The scene shows Fanny Price flirting and dancing with Edmund Bertram *and* Henry Crawford with almost

equal delight, although in the novel Fanny is rendered very uncomfortable by Henry Crawford's attentions while pining to dance with Edmund, who is, of course, besotted with Mary Crawford. The whirling scene, with blurry close-ups and slow-motion actions, suggests Fanny's giddy, even tiddly, state, whereas Austen makes it very clear that Fanny is highly uncomfortable about being "the Queen of the evening." Moreover, for Fanny to tell Henry to "Keep your wig on" (78) is totally out of character! Rozema acknowledges in her commentary on the film that the ballroom scene "is not strictly period dance" but "a slightly more intimate" dance that emphasizes the interrelationships among the "quartet" of characters. Claudia Johnson affirms that "the ball here is not shot as a set-piece of Regency spectacle" but "is conceived almost as a semi-private scene so as to bring out Fanny's awakening to the pleasure of her body and the circulation of erotic interest between and among the two principal couples" (8). While Rozema's film is attractive and evocative, however, it is not accurate as an adaptation of Austen's novel. Whereas Thompson's alterations enhance Austen's portrayal of her characters' relationships, Rozema's adaptation undermines Austen's art.

While the heroines of Austen's more somber novels either do not dance at all—like Anne Elliot and Elinor Dashwood—or suffer at the ball—like Fanny Price and Marianne Dashwood—Austen nevertheless employs dancing skillfully as a metaphor for marriage. The other three more comic, or light-hearted, novels—*Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*—feature dancing in a more positive fashion as a catalyst for matrimony.

Northanger Abbey features dancing prominently, as the first important scenes take place at the Bath Assembly, where Mr. King matches Catherine Morland with her dance partner and eventual marriage partner, Henry Tilney. Tilney explains to Catherine the parallels between dancing and marriage: "I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage. . . . Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties of both; and those men who do not chuse to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours" (76). Tilney enacts his own parallels by first dancing with Catherine and then proposing marriage to her. John Thorpe, that rattle with a gig, mortifies Catherine by monopolizing her and preventing her from dancing with Tilney (55). His invitation—"Well, Miss Morland, I suppose you and I are to stand up and jig it together again" (59)—drives her to declare her desire to dance no more, thus putting it out of her power to dance with Tilney, who has meanwhile found another partner, leaving Catherine to listen to Thorpe's disquisition on dogs and horses with as much civility as she can muster.

Thorpe's and Tilney's proficiency on the dance floor is mirrored by their skill in driving a lady in a carriage: Catherine's misery in the rattle's gig (69) is contrasted by her comfort in Tilney's curricle: Catherine reflects, "Henry drove so well,—so quietly—without making any disturbance, without parading to her, or swearing at [the horses]," that she concludes, "To be driven by him, next to being dancing with him, was certainly the greatest happiness in the world" (157).

Henry Tilney's "definition of matrimony and dancing" articulates the following parallels:

"that in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, formed for the advantage of each; and that when once entered into, they belong exclusively to each other till the moment of its dissolution; that it is their duty, each to endeavour to give the other no cause for wishing that he or she had bestowed themselves elsewhere, and their best interest to keep their own imaginations from wandering towards the perfections of their neighbours, or fancying that they should have been better off with any one else." (77)

Henry Tilney's parallel is apt, for the country-dances of Austen's era—such as "Follow Your Lover," "Haste to the Wedding," "Cuckolds All in a Row," and the Boulanger, which is danced at the Netherfield Ball in *Pride and Prejudice*—clearly replicated mating dances, albeit in a formal manner.⁴ Couples lined up longways, facing one another, as in a Virginia Reel, and danced up and down the line, separating and reuniting, turning and even kissing one another, and then casting off each partner in favor of another, until they returned to their original partners. As Darrell Mansell writes, "There is room for slight innovation and the cautious expression of one's individuality, but again the conventional form of the art is always preserved. There is nothing that could be called 'suspense' concerning the final disposition of the couples who began; only a gentle tension as they threaten to deviate from traditional patterns, but finally do not. The destined couples thread their way through an intricate design, to be united at the close" (8-9). Lady Mary Wortley Montagu extends the model of the country dance to life, as she writes to Lady Mar in 1721, "I suppose we shall all come right in Heaven, as in a Country Dance, the hands are strangely [*sic*] given and taken while they are in motion, at last all meet their partners when the Jig is done" (11). As the readers "see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (250), we can assume that Catherine and Tilney are dancing to the altar as in a Shakespeare comedy.

The 1987 BBC/A&E television adaptation of the novel does justice to

Tilney's principles, as it portrays him performing the country-dances that he views as metaphors for marriage. Peter Firth as Henry Tilney explains the parallel between country-dances and marriage to Catherine as he dances with her: "You will allow, that in both, man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal" (77). In the film version, Catherine replies significantly, "Do not underestimate the power of refusal."

Austen employs the country-dance pattern as a metaphor for marriage not only in *Northanger Abbey* but also in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland is partnered by John Thorpe until she is matched with her life partner, Henry Tilney. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet flirts with George Wickham, is proposed to by William Collins, and ends by marrying Fitzwilliam Darcy. Similarly, in *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse flirts with Frank Churchill, is proposed to by Mr. Elton, and is ultimately destined for George Knightley. Adams notes that Austen's novels feature "a heroine who moves, sometimes gracefully, sometimes awkwardly, through a sort of courtship dance in which she must judge each of her dancing partners for appearance, style, character, and, most importantly, compatibility, not just for the dance, but also for possible marriage" (56). Thus, dancing is both a metaphor for and a prophecy of matrimony.

Dance is more important to *Pride and Prejudice* than any other Austen novel, for she employs the dance patterns in Volume One as a paradigm for the relationships in Volumes Two and Three.⁵ Austen structures Volume One as a series of dances that choreograph the complex courtship of Darcy and Elizabeth and contrast the smooth sailing of Charles Bingley's courtship of her sister Jane—until Darcy intervenes, that is. The novel opens at the Meryton Assembly, where Elizabeth and Darcy get off on the wrong foot, as it were. Bingley demonstrates his affability by dancing every dance, while his friend proves his unsociability by dancing only with his own party. Darcy's dislike of dancing suggests his resistance to marriage, for Caroline Bingley's fawning flattery demonstrates how Darcy must continually repel advances from single *women* in want of a good fortune. Bingley declares his preference for Jane by dancing with her twice and invites his taciturn friend to engage Elizabeth, but Darcy's *pride* causes him to decline: "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (12), thus earning Elizabeth's inflexible *prejudice*. When Mrs. Bennet urges, "Another time, Lizzy, . . . I would not dance with *him*, if I were you," Elizabeth declares, "I believe, Ma'am, I may safely promise you *never* to dance with him" (20). These

are famous last words indeed, and it is amusing to witness the fast-stepping Elizabeth must perform to avoid dancing with Darcy in a volume that revolves around dancing.

The second dance occurs at Lucas Lodge, where Sir Williams' remark, "There is nothing like dancing after all" (25), invites Darcy's famous retort, "Every savage can dance" (25). Obtuse to Darcy's snub, Sir William exercises his gallantry by urging Darcy to dance with Elizabeth. Darcy agrees this time, but Elizabeth refuses. When Sir William inquires, "who would object to such a partner?" Elizabeth "looked archly, and turned away" (26). Clearly Elizabeth is applying a woman's power of refusal. Austen, who notes, "Her resistance had not injured her with the gentleman" (26-27), choreographs their courtship as a dance in which each time Darcy takes a step toward Elizabeth, she takes two steps back—the pattern of the mating dance imitated in the tempestuous tango.

The climax of Volume One is the Netherfield Ball, where Elizabeth encounters the presence (or absence) of her three suitors, for the plot has thickened in the arrival of the charming Wickham and the fatuous Collins. Anticipating "the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of his heart" (89), Elizabeth regrets the absence of Wickham, whose absence signals his disinclination to marry the impecunious Elizabeth. Instead, she is besieged by the absurd Mr. Collins, who signals his wish to marry her by inviting her to dance. His poor performance as a dance partner symbolizes his unsuitability as a marriage partner: "The two first dances . . . were dances of mortification. Mr. Collins, awkward and solemn, apologising instead of attending, and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave her all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of dances can give. The moment of her release from him was exstasy" (90). As David Daiches notes, "The characters circle round each other with appropriate speeches and gestures, and occasionally a grotesque like Mr. Collins joins the dance as a symbol of one kind of fate that threatens the dancers" (291). Collins's invitation to dance—like John Thorpe's engaging Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*—is a prelude to a proposal of marriage, and the next morning "Mr. Collins made his declaration in form" (104).

Darcy voluntarily invites Elizabeth to dance at the Netherfield ball, but this time he "took her so much by surprise in his application for her hand, that, without knowing what she did, she accepted him" (90). Blaming him for Wickham's absence, she piques him with queries, neglecting to furnish "the fan and the lavender water" (*NA* 77) that Tilney specified as being woman's

duty on the dance floor. Sir William's compliment on the "superior dancing" of Darcy and his "fair partner" and his anticipation of Jane and Bingley's union (92) results in a halt to dancing and a hiatus in courtship, as Darcy, alarmed for Bingley's safety at the hands of the Bennet women, persuades him to decamp.

Both the 1995 BBC television adaptation and the 2005 Hollywood movie version do full justice to this brilliant ball scene. The pattern of the dance causes Elizabeth and Darcy to separate and reunite in a to-ing and fro-ing motion that characterizes their relationship throughout, giving the impression of a fencing match rather than a flirtation. The pattern also gives Elizabeth time to think of a sharp retort, while allowing time for her barbs to sink in. Both directors emphasize the contrast by employing different dance moves and music for Collins and Darcy: Collins's music is a jaunty jig and his steps jerky, while Darcy's music is slow and stately and the dance dignified. As Colin Firth, who plays Darcy in the BBC version, says, "I think the scene where they dance together is wonderful because it lays out the whole of their relationship at that point perfectly" (Birtwistle 102).

Austen employs the metaphor established through the dance scenes that comprise Volume One as a model for marriage in Volumes Two and Three, as the to-ing and fro-ing of their dancing is reflected in the on-again, off-again rhythm of their courtship. According to the pattern set by the dances in Volume One, Darcy, against his will, his reason and his character, solicits Elizabeth's hand in marriage in Volume Two: "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (189). Elizabeth, according to the pattern established on the dance floor, rejects his proposal, declaring, "You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it. . . . I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry" (192-93), reaffirming her power of refusal. Finally, in Volume Three, prefigured by the dance patterns of Volume One, with a little prompting by Elizabeth, Darcy repeats his proposal of marriage, and this time she accepts. Thus, through Austen's skilful choreography, Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane and Bingley, dance their way to the altar.

The climax of the dance motif in *Emma* occurs at the Crown Inn, where an exchange of partners is effected. Heretofore, Emma has not engaged in dancing—until the impromptu dance at the Coles', when "Frank Churchill, coming up with most becoming gallantry to Emma, had secured her hand,

and led her up to the top” (229)—implying that, like Anne Elliot, she is not on the marriage market. Mr. Knightley also “[does] not dance himself” (257), indicating that he, too, is not in the market for marriage. But Emma notices that his graceful movements “prove in how gentlemanlike a manner, with what natural grace, he must have danced, would he but take the trouble” (326). Though Emma “wished he could love a ballroom better” (326), Knightley dislikes dance, even as a spectator sport: “Pleasure in seeing dancing!—not I, indeed—I never look at it—I do not know who does.—Fine dancing, I believe, like virtue, must be its own reward” (257-58). But he is soon to learn otherwise.

Mr. Elton declines Mrs. Weston’s invitation to dance with Harriet Smith, claiming that, as “an old married man, . . . my dancing days are over” (327), reinforcing the parallel between dancing and courtship. This deliberate snub—like Darcy’s rejection of Elizabeth at the Meryton Assembly or Willoughby’s rejection of Marianne at the London party—reveals Elton’s true character and also demonstrates the truth of Langdon Elsbree’s tenet: “Dancing [is] a test of a character’s sense, [for] the individual’s reasons for dancing, his attitude towards a particular partner, and his success in pleasing a discriminating partner are indices of his competence in judging others accurately and in conducting himself decorously” (115)—a test that Elton fails and Knightley passes spectacularly.⁶

Mr. Knightley, who “was no dancer in general” (229), delights the observant Emma by “leading Harriet to the set,” where “[h]is dancing proved to be just what she had believed it, extremely good” (328). Thus, his knightly behaviour in this scene draws him into the dance. Once his rescue of Harriet has revealed his dancing prowess, Emma is quick to attach him to herself when Mr. Weston invites her to set an example and lead the dance: “You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper.” “Brother and sister! no, indeed” (331), responds Knightley with feeling. With this brief exchange, Emma and Knightley doff the roles of elder brother and younger sister, or teacher and pupil, clearing the way for a new kind of relationship.

Their dancing together prefigures their marriage, just as Willoughby’s refusal to converse with Marianne at the London party signals his unwillingness to consider her any longer as a potential marriage partner. So the introduction of dancing indicates an instigation of courtship, and the astute reader discerns a potential partnership in Mr. Knightley’s emphatic response to Emma’s comment on their relationship. Although Adams says an Austen

heroine “cannot choose her own partner, but must wait passively to be chosen” (56), Emma’s prompting Knightley to invite her to dance prefigures her inadvertently prompting him to propose marriage.

Although Emma attempts to usurp the novelist’s role as choreographer and match-maker—imagining that Mr. Elton is entranced by Harriet Smith and Frank Churchill captivated by herself—the true choreographer, Jane Austen, sorts out the couples, and everyone gets the partner he or she deserves—just as in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s figure, for “at last all meet their partners when the Jig is done.” Frank Churchill weds Jane Fairfax, Mr. Elton marries Miss Hawkins, Harriet Smith weds Robert Martin, and Emma marries Mr. Knightley. Of the marriage of her hero and heroine, Austen says: “the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union” (484).

Thus, the ballroom scene at the Crown Inn unites the predestined couples and serves as a public and private acknowledgement of their union. Both recent feature film adaptations—the 1996 ITV/A&E production directed by Diarmuid Lawrence and starring Kate Beckinsale and the 1996 Hollywood version directed by Douglas McGrath and starring Gwyneth Paltrow—make the most of this scene, one of the most satisfying in Austen’s *oeuvre*. But screenwriter Andrew Davies was not satisfied with that. For the ITV/A&E version he adds a harvest-home country-dance scene recalling the wedding dances that conclude Shakespearean comedies. Here we see the three major couples—Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, and Emma and Knightley—literally dance their way to the altar.

Austen choreographs her novels cleverly, using dancing to parallel the courtship patterns that underlie the polite intercourse of Regency society. As Adams concludes, “When we realize how frequently dancing and courtship are connected in the novels, we begin to see the terrible importance of getting a partner both for the dance and for life” (57). Film directors are inspired to translate Austen’s novels from page to screen, and they make the most of her brilliant ballroom scenes to realize the characters’ relationships visually. Thus, their film adaptations of the novels do full justice to Austen’s choreography, both literal and figurative, to dramatize courtship.

NOTES

1. Allison Thompson states, “dancing forms [such] an important part of all of her fictional heroine’s [sic] lives . . . that the six novels become an useful source document for the dance historian.”
2. Claudia Johnson disagrees: “Ballroom scenes . . . are standard fare in Austen movies, and often they’ve become starchy productions in which one senses the presence of dance coaches and etiquette advisors off-camera, hectoring actors into the appearance of historically correct merriment” (8).
3. Emma Thompson won a Golden Globe award for best screenplay. In her witty acceptance speech, most of which is delivered in Austen’s idiom and which is included in the special features of the DVD version of the film, she says, “We owe all our pride and all our joy to the genius of Jane Austen.” Although Elinor never dances in the novel, the film shows her partnered briefly by Willoughby. Thompson does not mention in her diary that she and Greg Wise, who plays Willoughby, became a duo. She concludes her diary appropriately by reporting, “Fantastic wrap party. . . . Danced all night” (280).
4. Nancy Lee-Riffe says, “Country dance provided a natural marriage market” (103), and Molly Engelhardt writes that “it was on the dance floor, within the disciplined realm of courtship, that young people could experiment with the romance plot before ultimately determining it” (239).
5. Elsbree states, “Of the six novels, *Pride and Prejudice* is the one in which the dance is most important in revealing a character’s class origins and values and in helping to create the initial rhythm—the pattern of the dramatic movement—of the relationships among the main characters” (121).
6. Jacqueline Reid-Walsh says, “Ballroom scenes are central to Jane Austen’s novels for they provide public arenas where the characters reveal both their degree of accomplishment in surface manners and their inner courtesy or vulgarity” (115). According to Allison Thompson, “the skill of a person’s dancing expressed the quality of his or her soul or spirit,” and “one measure of determining whether a man was truly a gentleman was by his ability to dance.”

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