

Emma and Clueless in the ESL Classroom:

A comparative study from a Marxist perspective



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Abstract

This essay provides an understanding of why a teacher of English in Sweden can use the novel *Emma* (1994) and the film *Clueless* (1995), in comparison, to describe and use Marxist literary theory in the classroom. As there are various ways of teaching the English language to adolescents, using literature and film provides a chance for teachers to teach new terminology connected to critical theory, and to show how learners can contrast and compare the world with critical eyes. Through comparison of extractions of the famous novel and transcriptions of its contemporary adaptation that was set in the 1990s, learners are given an idea of how Marxism can be used to analyse both then and now. Also, it shows that various issues of social class were prominent in both cases, and discussable through the extracts provided, for learners to see the development of the divide between social classes. Although neither of the works are outspokenly Marxist, the ideas of social class are still prominent enough to show, as well as to compare the differences and likenesses. In the end, it was concluded that, although the comparable passages in the novel and film could be used in the setting of an English classroom in Sweden, further research regarding the comparison of the novel and film through their different media was encouraged. This was because of the lack of other essays and articles researching the comparison of *Emma* and *Clueless* to be used in a classroom setting, as well as the interesting comparison they proved to possess.

Keywords: ESL, Marxist criticism, Jane Austen, Emma, Clueless.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND AND THEORY	2
Why critical theory?	2
Learners understanding social class through literature	3
The creation of the novel and the film	4
Critically analysing <i>Emma</i> (1994) and <i>Clueless</i> (1995)	5
Marxist theory	6
METHOD	8
Data collection	8
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	11
First impressions of Harriet/Tai	11
Mr. Martin and Travis	13
Objectifying Harriet/Tai	15
Taking popularity to heart	16
Emma/Cher and Mr. Elton/Elton discuss Tai	18
Arguing over Harriet/Tai	20
Harriet/Tai and Mr. Martin/Travis	21
Liking Mr. Knightley/Josh	23
The ending	25
Further discussion, practical implications, and classroom activities	26
CONCLUSION	29
REFERENCES	31

Introduction

One of the most well-known critical theories is Marxist criticism and there is reason to use it in ESL teaching because learners can then understand how economic injustices can be seen in literature and film, and how it affects the actions of the characters in those works of art. To then look at a novel from the past and compare it to its later adaptation is a way of seeing how the world has changed - and not changed. This is in accordance with Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education) as they state that every English as a Second Language (ESL) learner in upper secondary school in Sweden is supposed to be able to use the English language in different ways to suit various situations (Skolverket, 2012. "Aims of the subject," para. 1).

To be able to adapt and understand the language, teachers must then, in accordance with the statement above, provide learners with the equipment to do so. Terminology to be able to do so can be explained through examples present in literature and film, such as the novel *Emma* (1815), that was written 1815, as well as its contemporary adaptation, the film *Clueless* from 1995. To analyse their relationship to each other, and the socio-economic injustices that are present, is one way of explaining Marxist criticism. This has been one of the reasons to choose to examine them through this essay; the other reason being their fame and canonical traits, that give an anchor to the learners' own world.

Through this essay, I aim to show that the comparative differences in the novel *Emma* and the film *Clueless* are a way of describing to ESL learners how both old and new works of art are possible to use to explain and interpret literature through Marxist literary theory.

Background and theory

This chapter consists of the background of this study, as well as the background of the creation of the works analysed for this essay to show why differences in storytelling might have occurred. The background for using literature with ESL learners will be connected to the Swedish National Curriculum (Skolverket, 2012) to further strengthen the reasons for using critical analysis through Marxist theory in ESL learning. I will also be discussing the theoretical framework of Marxism, as well as some key concepts used when analysing literature and film through Marxist theory.

Why critical theory?

Teachers must follow the English Curriculum provided by Skolverket (2012), that clearly states that learners must be given: “The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket, 2012. “Aims of the subject,” para. 2). To reflect on living conditions requires that learners must be equipped with the right tools to be able to reflect. It means that they must be able to critically analyse the world they live in. This can be done in many ways, and the learners must be given the tools to be able to analyse these issues, through many angles, to be able to see the bigger picture and develop as human beings. Brookfield (1987) describes that critical thinkers create, and recreate their lives both individually and collectively as their futures are not fixed (p. 5). This collective behaviour gives reason to teach terminology that helps them develop their own understanding of the world, and what they choose to believe.

Researchers Mei-yun Ko & Tzu-fu Wang (2013) argue that the reason for learning to read and write is, according to critical literacy theorists, to be able to change social inequalities (p. 222). Just the smallest kind of awareness towards the way one can analyse text might be a big deal for learners, as Ko & Wang (2013) showed through ESL learners they did

research on, and argued that learners' knowledge of critical thinking could prevent them from "follow[ing] other's ideas without judgment" (p. 224) and help them become more independent and critical of what others wanted them to think. Lois Tyson (2011) agrees with Ko & Wang as she states that: "[...] most of my students find that the study of critical theory increases their ability to think creatively and to reason logically, and that's a powerful combination of vocational skills" (p. 1). Tyson continues, by arguing that no matter what anyone will work with in the future, and no matter what cultures they will encounter during their lifetime, the use of being able to see something from various points of view will help them broaden their world view (p. 1). Another argument is that it is hard for people to get to know people from other cultural settings if they are not put in others' shoes, and that one way of doing that is to learn more about critical theory (p. 2).

To further state the importance of critical literacy for ESL learners, Ko & Wang (2013) show through their research on ESL learners of various proficiency levels that: "[ESL] students' variable English proficiency may give rise to different approaches to critical literacy but will not discourage them from actively engaging in Critical Literacy Practices." (p. 228) This idea of everyone benefiting from critical literacy, regardless of proficiency in English, gives teachers a stepping stone to know that everyone in the classroom will have use of learning about critical theories, and that these new insights will help them to interpret the world in their own way, on their own terms.

Learners understanding social class through literature

Though there are many ways of interpreting a text, I have chosen to use Marxist Criticism to show how it can be an analytic tool for ESL learners in Swedish upper secondary school. Tyson (2011) describes that Marxist critical theory looks at socio-economic systems that affect how everything is created in its time (p. 4). This shows that teaching this critical

theory would expand the view of the world that the learners live in, and can give them a new point of view that might have been hidden from them.

The learners' ability to analyse, is an important point of view whenever a text is read and analysed, as Skolverket (2012) states that they want learners to see living conditions and social issues in English speaking countries ("Aim of the subject," para. 2). The ability to analyse must then be taught to the learners so that this is even possible to do. Tyson (2011) stresses the ability of using critical theory to see how society can change and adapt works of art to fit with today's society. She compares Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) and the remake, *West Side Story* (1961), to show how one can reveal similarities and differences that give the learners the tools to see how interpretations, differences, and similarities of literary works can emerge from the societies where they were created in (p. 6). This comparison to educate learners is just what I want to achieve with my research. The comparison of then and now is a way of showing ESL learners how they can use literature and films to analyse the socio-economic conditions of the time they were created. Below, there will be an introduction to Jane Austen's world when she created her novel *Emma* in 1815, and a short introduction to why Amy Heckerling, 170 years later, recreated the story of *Emma* in the settings of 1995's Beverly Hills.

The creation of the novel and the film

The industrial revolution was the most important development between the 1780s to the middle of the 19th century (Mckay et.al, 2010. p. 567), and meant that people started to explain their world through social classes that were connected to a family's financial status. Social classes, and the indifferences connected to injustices in the social class system lead to the French Revolution in 1789 (p. 537) and that, in its turn, made the British aristocracy weary of any change to the status quo of the social classes existing in Great Britain (p. 602).

When *The Communist Manifesto*, written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, came out in 1848 (McKay et al. 2010. p. 597), issues regarding social class system had already started a long time ago, with the French Revolution. These descriptions of social class are also a part of the British aristocracy that Jane Austen portrays in her novel *Emma*. To then look at a literary work that seemingly does not set out to be critical to its socio-economic world, but has connections to upper and lower class in 19th century England, can give ESL learners an idea of what affects the way an author sees and describes things. It is then a way to show that there are descriptive traits of Marxist criticism in the novel *Emma*. This can accordingly be shown through the adapted film *Clueless*.

With above said in mind, it means that the modern take on the novel *Emma* has some of the same elements of the aristocracy, and the lower social classes of early 19th century England. The creator, Amy Heckerling, thought the novel to be quite modern and applicable to the 1990s Beverly Hills, and felt that it could be reinvented as it had the plot of a perfect teen romance film (Heckerling, 2009. in Carson (ed.) p. 177).

Critically analysing *Emma* (1994) and *Clueless* (1995)

Just as all of Jane Austen's other literary works, *Emma*, has been poked and probed by many researchers before I set off to analyse it. To then find a new focus of research would be to compare it with its contemporary remake - *Clueless*, a film that has not been as vastly analysed as its predecessor. Also, to look at both of them to find the educational benefits they could provide, regarding Marxist literary criticism, was an aspect that was scarcely considered by other researchers. A reason for this lack of comparative research, might be found in research done on *Emma* where, for example, Arnold Kettle in 1951 proclaimed that it would be impossible to recreate a contemporary version of *Emma* as he believed that the descriptions of the upper class in the novel were too extreme to be able to recreate (Kettle, 1951. in Lodge (ed.)). Since an adaptation has taken place through the 1995 film, the transformation from

then to now can be described to ESL learners, and might show the new way of thinking, considering differences in social class that can be compared with the novel.

In most cases of critically analysing *Emma*, the authors have at least mentioned the power struggles posed by the characters' social statuses and how it affects the outcome of the novel (Mudrick, 1952. in Lodge (ed.); Brooke, 1999; Paris, 1978.). Their analyses show that, even though there is no class revolution in the novel, there are ways to use the novel to describe Marxist theory to learners of English. The film can also be seen in the same way, as the representations of social class can be seen in a similar way, when teaching Marxist theory.

Marxist theory

In this section, there will be a description of the origin and theoretical frame for Marxist critical theory. After the introduction to Marxist theory and origin, there will be a description of the keywords that will be used in this research: Classism, Capitalism, Socio-economic class and Commodification.

Origin and theoretical frame: The origin of analysing works from a Marxist point of view Terry Eagleton (2006) describes thusly: "Marxist criticism is part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand *ideologies*—the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times." (Eagleton, 2006. p. v). It means that this analytical theory aims to point to what society looked like at different points in time, and what ideologies were governing at any specific time.

Classism: Classism is the ideology of human value being, which means that the higher the class one belongs to, the higher value one has. This is thought to be "in one's blood" (Tyson, 2011. p. 112), so those born into a lower class would be more dishonourable and lazy and those of higher class the opposite. This divide would then define what is good and what is bad, and would show what people should aspire to be.

Socio-economic class: As described by Tyson (2006), this is a struggle between two polar opposites; the *bourgeoisie* - those who have power and money - and the *proletariat* - those who do not have money or power (p. 54). The struggle between these socio-economic classes is defined by classism: that one is better than the other.

Capitalism: Capitalism is an ideology based on the conception of everything, from objects to persons, being valued, and that making money as the only virtue of value (Tyson, 2011, p. 113). The object of capitalism is then to 'own' as much as possible that is of value, and this is defined by what the contemporary society values highly at the time.

Commodification: Commodification is a term used to describe the way everything is used as if it has a price tag, a monetary value, also: even if this 'monetary value' is not actual money but also values that are created in the social context (Tyson, 2011, p.114). These commodities do not have to be objects, but are defined by what capitalist values there are at the time.

Method

Working with both a novel and a film has meant analysing different media in the same way. The comparisons will be made through transcriptions of dialogue, as well as descriptions of both characters and settings in the film, and the dialogue, character descriptions and settings in the novel. It will be a qualitative, inductive research as I had read the book, and seen the movie before, and could then see tendencies of social class in both cases, that sparked an interest of comparing them. More emphasis will be put on the film as it has not been analysed to the same extent as the novel, as well as being more easily accessible to upper secondary ESL learners because of the time it was created in. It is social status in both the book and the film that are comparable, and that is why Marxist literary criticism is used as a foundation for claims that are made in the research.

Data collection

I will be critically analysing the novel *Emma* through Marxist Criticism, where the main point of research will be finding passages for interpretations of the different social classes that exist in their society, using the terminology described in the background section, to accurately define the passages in question. Finding and analysing quotes and passages in the novel has been done several times before (eg: Mudrick in Lodge, *Irony as Form: Emma*, 1952), and shows a good foundation for me to do the same. As it has been done before in this manner, it makes the research more valid.

Connecting the novel to its adaptation *Clueless* is a good way of showing ESL learners a connection between “[c]ontemporary and older literature” (Skolverket, 2012. “Core content - reception,” para. 3). This will then be looked at from the same points of view that were stated above, which is an analyse of passages that contain evidence of social class that can be analysed through a Marxist perspective. It will be done through transcribing dialogue in the film that is relevant to the research, as well as describing passages that can be relevant for the

research. The transcription will be done through Martinez' (2015) way of citing dialogue (p. 4) with the modification of indenting the dialogue, adding the name of the speaker, and timestamps. When the main character, Cher, narrates the film, this will be written in italics to specify what is said out loud and not. I have highlighted the sections in the novel and film that are important to my research of Marxist criticism, as described by Catherine P. Mulder (2013. p. 285), and placed them in a matrix, side by side, to pinpoint passages that described class issues in the novel and could be compared to the film.

As the book was adapted into a film it was supposed to mirror the society of its contemporary setting, so there were some changes made to suit the modern society. For example, the characters' names were altered, and so, to make the descriptions in my analysis easier, I will list some of the name-changes here: Emma is in *Clueless* called Cher; Harriet is called Tai; Mr. Knightley is called Josh; Mr. Martin is called Travis; and Mr. Elton is called Elton. The character Dee has no equivalent in the novel, but is Cher's best friend and present in the film.

All issues stated above will be looked at using relevant terminology stated in the background section. The edited volumes and articles used in this research have been found through searching in databases, using keywords such as: "Marxism", "Critical Theory", "ESL", "Jane Austen", "Emma", and "Clueless". They were chosen if they in some way could connect to the Swedish Syllabus of English (2012) in upper secondary school in terms of giving evidence for the value of teaching Marxist Theory to ESL learners, using *Emma* and *Clueless*. An analytical approach to both a novel and film, can broaden learners' abilities of critical thinking, and creating, as Ko & Wang (2013) describe (p. 222).

The data collection is limited in the connection to the background of the researcher, as well as the validity of the research method, as there will be an element of subjectivity present (Nunan, 1992. p.12). Another aspect that might affect the results is only looking at one critical

theory, and thus leading to possible instances of overlooking key parts of interpretation if they are too connected to another angle of interpretation (Eagleton, 2006. p. 8).

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the novel and the film are divided into sections, where each section reflects upon scenes that correspond to each other in the film and novel. The analysis and discussion will partly take place within the chapters, and partly at the end where there will be a chapter with more thorough discussion of using Marxist theory with ESL learners.

First impressions of Harriet/Tai

The story follows the relationship between two young women, and how they find their footing in the different societies they are in contact with throughout the novel and film. The first time Emma/Cher and Harriet/Tai meet it is seen how the two media put emphasis on the rich young woman's (Emma and Cher) idea of what is good and bad. This moves the story along as the 'poor' girl (Harriet and Tai) wants to conform to these ideas of good and bad. In the novel, Emma sees something special in Harriet that she believes must be stimulated, so that Harriet elevates her own social class, and is thusly a form of classism that the characters do not reflect upon, where the higher class sees her as inferior because of the circumstances of her existence (being an orphan and poor):

[She] should not be wasted on the inferior society of Highbury and its connexions. The acquaintance she had already formed were unworthy of her. The friends from whom she had just parted, though very good sort of people, must be doing her harm. (Austen, 1994. p. 19)

Just as Emma wants to take Harriet under her wing, Cher wants to, as she meets Tai for the first time. Cher and her class have physical education as a man approaches with Tai trailing behind, looking lost and frightened.

Man: "Ladies! We have a new student with us. This is Tai Frasier." [Cher and her classmates look judgmentally at Tai as the man leaves.]

Physical Education Teacher: “Tai, you don’t have time to change but... [looks judgmentally at Tai’s clothes] you could hit a few balls in those clothes.”

Amber [Mockingly]: “She could be a farmer in those clothes...!” [Some girls in the class laugh at Amber’s joke, but Dee and Cher look disapprovingly at Amber.]

Cher: “Dee, my mission is clear. Would you look at that girl?” [Meaning Tai] “She is so adorably clueless! We’ve got to adopt her.”

Dee: “Cher, she is toe-up. Our stock would plummet.”

Cher: “Dee, don’t you want to use your popularity for a good cause?”

Dee: “No?”

Cher [Under her breath, as she waves to Tai]: “Come here!” [Tai points at herself in question] “Yeah, come here! Hang with us.” (*Clueless*, 1995. 21.57 - 22.31)

After this Cher and Dee decide to show Tai the school, and tell her about the groups that exist there. They do this as they walk in front of the school building.

Cher [Talking about a group of teenages under a tree, using computers]: “That is Alana’s group over there. They do the TV-station. They think that is the most important thing on earth.” [Looking at a group of teenagers talking on their cell phones] “And that is the Persian maffia. You can’t hang with them unless you own a BMW.” [Looking at a group of teenage men] “And there is Elton in the white west. And all the most popular boys in school.”

[...]

Cher [About the popular boys]: “If you make the decision to date a high school boy they are the only acceptable ones.” (*Clueless*, 1995. 22.56 - 23.17)

Looking at the way Tai is dressed in comparison to the rest of the girls shows a difference in social class. The baggy clothes and the way she is looked at and mocked by the

other girls shows a form of superiority that comes from the others. ‘She could be a farmer in those clothes’ is an indication of what values are important for the rest of the class that Tai has to conform to in order to be accepted by everyone.

Furthermore, there is the explicit description of who Tai should avoid at school. In the novel, there is no equivalent to this, and the absence is likely related to the lack of trans-class interaction that was the norm of the early 19th century. In Emma and Harriet’s world there is no high school, and thus no platform for the various social classes to mingle. But in the Beverly Hills high school they have no choice but to be put in the same place. Here it also seems that the class system at Cher’s high school comes from something other than how much money, and good names, the families have. After showing Tai the school and receiving an impressed remark on how proper everyone seems to be, Cher replies: “Oh, well this is a really good school.” (23.45 - 23.47). This then tells us that even if there are different commodities tied to the groups that are present at school, they still have the same chance at education, and as they live in Beverly Hills, there is a big chance that everyone at that school already has it well off, moneywise. Tyson (2006) describes Marxism as being explanatory for human activity between socio-economic classes, and its distribution of power (p. 54). For ESL learners this can be a good reason for discussion as the contrasts of then and now offer the thought of what “good” and “bad” really is, since “[...] authors cannot help but create works that embody ideology in some form” (Tyson, 2006. p. 66), and this would then give learners an example to work with.

Mr. Martin and Travis

When Emma first sees Mr. Martin there is a description of him that shows how Emma, through her capitalist values, sees his lower class-status as something she does not want Harriet to be acquainted with:

[H]e looked like a sensible young man, but his person had no other advantage; and when he came to be contrasted with gentlemen, she thought he must lose all the ground he had gained in Harriet's inclination. (Austen, 1994. p. 25)

The same feelings stir in Cher when Tai on her first day sits down with Cher and Dee to have lunch, and Tai tells them she met Travis:

Tai: "I met a really cool guy."

Cher: "Describe!"

Tai: "Alright, he's got long hair, he's really funny. Straight off, right, he offers me some smoke." [Tai giggles and looks towards the entrance of the cafeteria] "There he is!" [Travis stands with a lunch tray in his arms and drops it as he tries to wave to Tai]

Cher [Judgingly]: "Are you talking about drugs?"

Tai [Sheepishly]: "Yeah..."

[...]

Cher: "Loadies generally hang on the grassy knoll over there." [Travis joins this group of teenagers wearing baggy, worn clothes] "Sometimes they come to class and say bonehead things, and we all laugh of course, but no respectable girl actually dates them."

Dee: "Mm-mm."

Cher: "You don't wanna start off on the wrong foot now, do you?" [Tai shakes her head in confirmation] (*Clueless*, 1995. 25.03 - 25.49)

The nature of the events stated above are described by Erlich (1979) who showed how learners could detect how slang had changed over time when authors reconstructed the past (p. 95). Here it is more explicitly shown how there are other problems than slang when recreating the past. For Tai to 'start off on the wrong foot' implies that there is no way of Tai

being able to hang out with Cher and Dee if she chooses to hang out with the ‘loadies’. Since the word ‘gentlemen’ from the novel is rarely used in today’s English, the events have changed perspective in the film. Instead of using the comparison of good men, Cher has used the other group’s description as something bad. Then how can the reconstruction of the past go from a farmer to a ‘loadie’? The creator of *Clueless*, Amy Heckerling (in Carson (ed.) 2009), describes how she settled on letting Cher have some ‘attitude’ towards ‘pothead[s]’ (p. 178). This is an example of comparing then and now for ESL learners of English, and through that there is a chance to talk to them of the ideologies that shaped their times (Eagleton, 2006. p. v). The perspective of “different social classes thrown together in the same story” (Beach et al, 2016. p. 140) tells learners how the world can be explained. To compare the version of social class of then and now might give the learners other tools to see that even if times change, there will still be injustices that can be pointed out if it is known how to look for them.

Objectifying Harriet/Tai

After Harriet has been acquainted with Emma for some time, people start to notice how Emma has been able to refine Harriet, and giving her commodities, such as good manners, that before her acquaintance with Emma only were for those of a higher socio-economic class. For example, there is an admiration that Mr. Elton expresses when it comes to the improvements Emma has achieved with Harriet: ““Skilful has been the hand!”” (p. 33), as if Harriet was clay to be moulded into something new. In *Clueless*, this objectification happens when Cher and Dee look at each other in a motherly way and exchange words that describe how Tai is an object for them. As it was seen further up in this essay, Emma felt the same about Harriet, when they first met each other.

Dee [About Tai]: “She’s nice.”

Cher [About Tai]: “Iih, project!” (*Clueless*, 1995. 23.53 - 23.55)

Marxism describes how the historical forces shape the psychological experience of individuals and groups that are present in the real and literary world (Tyson, 2006. p. 64), and it can be connected to socio-economic values of ‘having’ and ‘not having’. Just as both Emma and Cher seemingly feel about “‘I’m only as good as what I buy’” (p. 60) in the sense of being rich enough to be independent enough to try to make her into something she is not (Emma objectifying Harriet), and being popular enough to fit someone into the rules of being popular at her school (Cher objectifying Tai), gives the idea of how objectifying a person occur in their minds. This objectifying can be discussed with ESL learners as a way of describing commodities as well as classism and the idea of higher class being of higher value.

Taking popularity to heart

As Emma introduces Harriet to a higher society, she believes that Harriet has taken the manners and ideologies of higher socio-economic class to heart. This can be seen when Harriet receives a proposal of marriage from Mr. Martin (Austen, 1994. p. 39), and Harriet asks Emma for advice, as she is unsure whether to accept it or not. Emma replies thusly:

It would have grieved me to lose your acquaintance, which must have been the consequence of your marrying Mr. Martin. [...] I could not have visited Mrs. Robert Martin, of Abbey-Mill Farm. [...] You would have thrown yourself out of all good society. (Austen, 1994. p. 42-43)

This passage describes social class prominent during the turn of the 18th century. Emma tells Harriet that she will be too low socio-economic class for Emma to be acquainted with, and thus not worth enough for Emma to care for. Emma feels that it is *her* effort of refining Harriet that will be wasted. There is a sense of Emma not really caring for the

feelings of Harriet, but only what it would mean for Harriet's newly gained elevation in her social class status if she married a farmer.

Connected to this, there is a scene in *Clueless*, where Tai, Cher, and Dee arrive at school to find that a lot of the boys there are looking at Tai in an admiring way. Travis approaches them and invites them to a party he is hosting that weekend. When Travis then runs off, Tai asks Dee and Cher if they think Travis will be there:

Dee: "Tai...! I thought we moved on from this."

Cher: "Don't sell yourself short now, you've got something going for you that no one in this school has."

Tai: "Oh, I'm not a virgin."

Cher: "I mean mystery. As far as everyone's concerned you're the most popular girl in your school. And the fact that you hang with Dee and I, well, heh -"

Dee: "- Speaks very highly of you." (*Clueless*, 1995. 29.27 - 29.42)

As seen here, Cher and Dee think the same way as Emma does. The popularity that Tai now has gained should not be thrown away, according to them. Cher and Dee might as well have said 'But think of all the hard work we put in to make you popular, what about us?'. In both the case of Emma and Cher, there is a sense of 'cultural communication' that relies on rules and principles that have been created in the social and cultural world of the ones in question (Hodge, 1988. p. 1), and that makes them believe that this is the right way to act. Kettle (in Lodge (ed.) 1951) argues that Jane Austen was incapable of seeing the problems of a class society and that this was why she could not suggest a solution for the problem in the novel (p. 97-98). Kettle (in Lodge (ed.) 1951) then continues to state that readers must keep this historical fact in mind when reading *Emma*, because it would be impossible to discuss

these ideas in modern terms (p. 100), as the ideologies that were prominent then have changed over time. As *Clueless* has been analysed by Wiltshire (2001) from the perspective of social class and argues that the changes in the film boils down to commodities such as style and consumption (p. 57). The commodities in *Emma* are in contrast their position in society and would be cause for interesting discussions in the ESL classroom.

Emma/Cher and Mr. Elton/Elton discuss Tai

In the novel and film, it turns out that Mr. Elton/Elton likes Emma/Cher, and not Harriet/Tai, as was intended. These passages are quite similar; a ride home in a carriage has been replaced with a ride home in a sports car. Accordingly, the dialogue between Mr. Elton and Emma, and Elton and Cher, are also similar, but with differences due to contemporary settings. Mr Elton and Emma have an argument over Harriet in their carriage home, as Emma has believed that Mr. Elton has had feelings for Harriet:

‘Never, madam,’ cried [Mr. Elton]: ‘[...] Miss Smith is a very good sort of girl; and I should be happy to see her respectably settled. [...] I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!—No, madam, my visits to Hartfield have been for yourself only; and the encouragement I received—’

’Encouragement! [...] Sir, you have been entirely mistaken in supposing it.’ (Austen, 1994. p. 102)

The same thing happens in the interaction between Cher and Elton that occurs, when Elton pulls over with his car and tries to kiss Cher. When Elton does not understand why Cher would not want him to kiss her, this dialogue takes place:

Elton: “You know, I don’t get you Cher. I mean, you flirt with me all year...”

Cher: “As if! I have been trying to get you together with Tai.”

Elton: “Tai...! Why would I go with Tai?”

Cher: “Why not?”

Elton: “Why not? Why not!?! Don’t you even *know* who my father is!?”

Cher: “Ugh, you are a snob and a half.”

Elton: “Cher, listen to me. Me and Tai... [almost regurgitates] We don’t make any sense. Right? Me, an- and you... well, I mean... it makes sense.” (*Clueless*, 1995. 41.03 - 41.35)

The obvious value statement here from both Eltons, show how social class is important to them. The only one in *Clueless* who expresses some sort of capitalist thought regarding social class connected to family or money is Elton. All other interaction between high and low social class stems from commodities such as clothes or interests. When Elton expresses the sentence: ‘Don’t you even *know* who my father is!?!’, it is understood that his motifs stem from capitalist, and monetary values, and not the commodities that seem to be the main argument for everyone else. Just as Mr. Elton expresses that Harriet is too low in social class, and a clash between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, shows from his point of view when he says: ‘I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!’.

Here the characters explicitly talk of how degrading it would be for someone to be seen with someone of lower socio-economic class. There are significant similarities here that can point learners in the right direction to be able to dissect the scenes as well as comparing them from a Marxist point of view to find similarities and differences that are connected to the ideologies of their time that they were created in.

Arguing over Harriet/Tai

In both the film and the novel, there is someone who sees some sort of absurdity in Emma/Cher choosing Harriet/Tai as a companion. Here elements of outcome of companionship between different social classes, and how it might affect the one from the lower class in a negative way, are shown.

Josh, who is the modern version of Mr. Knightley, has a discussion with Cher about Tai, and tells her how strange her relationship with Tai is; after having met her for the first time:

Josh [Ironically]: “Hah, I’m amazed.”

Cher: “That I’m devoting myself so generously to someone else?”

Josh: “No. That you found someone even more clueless than you are to worship you.”

Cher: “I am rescuing her from teenage-hell. Do you know the wounds of adolescents can take years to heal?”

Josh: “Yeah...! And you’ve never had a mother, so you’re acting out on that poor girl like she was your Barbie doll.”

[...]

Cher: “Whatever. I am going to take that lost soul in there, and make her well dressed and popular. Her life will be better because of me.” (*Clueless*, 1995. 28.10 - 28.39)

The expression ‘Barbie doll’ that came from Josh shows how Cher’s ‘project’ is happening. That expression tells the viewer the implications of Cher’s interference with Tai and what she possibly will become. When Cher finishes their discussion, expressing how ‘popularity’ is a commodity that is more important than the question of Tai being a ‘Barbie doll’ or not.

Had it been Mr. Knightley who has this discussion, it might have been time for this next quote to leave his lips, but the scene in the film ends there, giving the impression of Cher doing a good deed for Tai. This is an argument that Emma and Mr. Knightley have about Harriet:

You will puff her up with such ideas of her own beauty, and of what she has a claim to, that, in a little while, nobody within her reach will be good enough for her [...] [and] if you encourage her to expect to marry greatly, and teach her to be satisfied with nothing less than a man of consequence and large fortune, she may [...] grow desperate, and is glad to catch at the old writing-master's son. (Austen, 1994. p. 50-52)

Here the differences between Mr. Knightley and Josh in their belief of social class are shown. There is never a question for Josh that Tai would be too popular and then fall down to being even lower in status than before. He instead argues that it is Tai's naivety that is her only issue, and simply comments the odd, trans-class friendship that has kindled between Cher and Tai. Also, how Cher behaves as she sees Tai as more of an object than a person. Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, sees evil in Emma and Harriet's friendship and urges Emma not to turn Harriet into 'something she is not'. The differences between then and now, and its ideologies, can thusly be described through these quotes and transcriptions, as they describe what is regarded as most important in both contemporary societies. The fact that someone's future marriage is the only thing to worry about can then be discussed with ESL learners as times change and the way of thinking of relationships have changed.

Harriet/Tai and Mr. Martin/Travis

Harriet and Emma have a near death experience in chapter 39 in *Emma* (Austen, 1994), and so does Tai in the film. There is no change in Harriet's social status after the experience, but it is used in another context that is not relevant to this research. In the film Tai

becomes popular because of the near death experience. She appreciates her newfound popularity and tells anyone who wants to hear her story. At lunch, a whole group of people are listening to Tai's story when Travis approaches them to talk to Tai:

Tai [About Travis approaching them]: "Oh, swoon, here comes your boyfriend."
[Laughs degradingly]

Travis: "Tai, check it out." [Spits up into the air and catches it with his mouth]

Most of them, but not Cher: "Eugh!"

Tai [Rolling her eyes]: "Ugh."

Travis [To Dee]: "Could you shove down a bit?"

Dee: "No!"

Tai [To Travis]: "Ugh. Hello, don't the slackers prefer that grassy knoll over there?"

[The group, but not Cher, laughs. Travis shares a mortified, but surprised look with Cher before he leaves.] (*Clueless*, 1995. 1.10.27 - 1.10.49)

This, as stated, has no equivalent episode in the novel to compare to the film. With that in mind, it is still something to use to compare the character Tai and the character Harriet as a whole. There is no passage where Harriet acts malevolently towards Mr. Martin. Why, then, would Heckerling choose to have this in the film? The reason could be to describe today's social class and ideologies regarding the socio-economic classes. Since Tai has become popular she might see the 'loadies' the same way as Cher did at the beginning of the novel. Then why would this be needed in the film? Comparing this to the marriage proposal in chapter 39 in *Emma* the reader does not meet Mr. Martin after that, until Harriet accepts his second proposal. Because Travis is present throughout the film there must be some sort of

divide for Tai and Travis to be able to become a couple in the end. This scene is mainly there to show how Tai has elevated her social status and now has become the most popular girl in school, and uses classist ideas of bourgeoisies and proletarians divide in a high school setting. This is comparable to the novel as Harriet never elevates her social status to be equal to Emma. The fact that Cher does not like the new way Tai acts towards Travis is, as Wiltshire (2001) describes the film, a “makeover of the soul” (p. 56).

Liking Mr. Knightley/Josh

Near the end of the novel Harriet reveals that she likes Mr. Knightley, and that she believes he likes her back. This a big vexation to Emma. She is quite cruel as she in her head says things such as:

‘Such an elevation on her side! Such a debasement on his! It was horrible to Emma to think how it must sink him in the general opinion [...]. How Harriet could ever have had the presumption to raise her thoughts to Mr. Knightley! [...] But Harriet was less humble, had fewer scruples than formerly.—Her inferiority [...] seemed little felt.—She had seemed more sensible of Mr. Elton’s being to stoop in marrying her, than she now seemed of Mr. Knightley’s.’ (Austen, 1994. p. 312-313)

It seems here that Emma believes that Harriet cannot make Mr. Knightley happy. The same is felt by Cher in *Clueless*, as she finds out that Tai likes Josh.

Cher: “But, Tai, do you really think you’d be good with Josh? I mean, he’s like a school nerd, heh.”

Tai: “What, am I some sort of a mentally challenged airhead?”

Cher: “No! Not even! I didn’t say that!”

Tai: “What, I’m not good enough for Josh, or something?”

Cher: “I- I just... don’t think you mesh well together.” (*Clueless*, 1995. 1.16.32 - 1.16.54)

This is a manifestation of inferiority, when it comes to social class, that Cher believes is present. A difference between the novel and the film is shown through Harriet in the novel, as she feels that she must express her inferiority to Mr. Knightley:

‘I do not wonder, Miss Woodhouse,’ she resumed, ‘that you should feel a great difference between the two, as to me or as to any body. You must think one five hundred million times more above [...] than the other.’ (Austen, 1994. p. 308)

This inferiority has manifested itself in both the novel and film. In the novel, it is both Emma and Harriet who feel that Harriet is inferior to Mr. Knightley, but in the film it is mainly Cher who feels that way about Tai. The classism is then more prominent in the novel that expressly see Harriet as inferior, both from her own and others’ points of view. Tai is not necessarily seen as inferior in the scene stated above. Then, as the film goes on, a manifestation of superiority from Cher regarding Tai and Josh is found, that also can be connected to Emma’s feelings in the novel. The quote goes as following: “*“But what would he want with Tai? She couldn’t make him happy. Josh needs someone with imagination.”*” (*Clueless*, 1995. 1.18.51 - 1.18.57)

This idea of ‘imagination’ shows the commodity that Cher believes to be most important. Cher believes that Tai has no imagination, because Cher has spent all her time with Tai trying to change her and make her into something other than she is from the beginning - changing someone from clueless (lack of imagination) to having a clue. Cher believes that Tai only acts from what she is told to do, as it was what she saw in Tai from the beginning of the film. She must be thinking of when Tai wore baggy clothes and wanted to smoke pot, and think that those attributes were because of her lack of imagination, and not because of a conscious choice. This is a difference between the novel and the film that can be discussed

with ESL learners. What the most prominent commodities are for Josh, versus what they were during the early 19th century for Mr. Knightley.

The ending

The endings of the novel and the film are both happy, but there are still differences. In the novel, Emma recognises the union between Mr. Martin and Harriet and leaves the rest of the story to be at a status quo: "Robert Martin, who was now introduced at Hartfield, she fully acknowledged in him all the appearance of sense and worth which could bid fairest for her little friend." (Austen, 1994. p. 365)

Here Emma displays a sense of understanding that Mr. Martin is good for Harriet as their social statuses are the same. Comparing this to the film, the ending of *Clueless* has differences in social class posed as well; If (1.31.28) is freeze framed, where the group of friends are sitting at a table at a wedding, the social class differences are shown between Travis, who is wearing a black blazer, a white t-shirt, and a black bow tie; Murray (Dee's boyfriend), who has a green suit and no neck tie, but a small gold chain instead; and Josh, who wears a full suit in black. The women, on the other hand, have equally nice clothes on them that only signify their taste in fashion (freeze frame: 1.31.12). It is then concluded through the attire that all of them wear in this scene, that Tai has kept her elevated social class, and that Travis has not reached her level - but is still accepted as part of the group. In the novel, Harriet stays in her lower social class, as she marries Mr. Martin. How the authors have chosen to end their novel and film show another difference that can be seen from a Marxist point of view: change that has occurred over time. The final scene of the 1995 film shows that in this adaptation there is more of an acceptance of various social classes mingling than it is in the novel that was written in 1815. Sarah Benesch (1999) states that:

Not only can critical thinking be taught through the encouragement of greater awareness, but choosing not to teach critical thinking may result in unquestioning

acceptance of prevailing conditions, limiting possibilities for dissent and change. (p. 579)

Looking at this quote, and looking at the last scenes of the novel and the film, it is evident that there are differences between then and now, and that letting ESL learners compare these scenes, would give them a wider understanding of social class then and now, and that learning more about different times might show which status quos have prevailed or not. They can be shown that things change over time but that there still are events that can be analysed and criticised to get a fuller understanding of their world.

Further discussion, practical implications, and classroom activities

Beach et al. (2016) describe how learners make ‘text-to-text’ connections to describe the literary works and the world the learners live in (p. 11). This can also be applied to text-to-film connections and thusly describe the differences that are shown in a novel and film as a whole. All of the examples above show that there are similarities between the film and its predecessor. The scenes that correspond to each other have elements of social class that are analysable by those who want to use Marxist literary criticism, and are also possible to use for educators to teach the differences marking what social class has transformed into over the ages.

However, the novel and film are not outspokenly trying to state something about the social class issues that are shown in them, but try to entertain where the different social classes give the perfect tension to create humour and stereotyping. According to Tyson (2011), Marxist criticism does not want the poor to be content with their poverty but rebel against those who oppress them (p. 119). Further on, Tyson (2011) argues that if the literature does not question the capitalist society it by default supports it (p. 133). With this in mind, there are some questions that Tyson (2006) suggests one can ask learners when they are analysing from a Marxist point of view are for example: What does the work reinforce? Is this

a critique of oppression? How does it reflect the time it was created in? (p. 68) For learners to, for example, write a comparative essay through a Marxist lens with these questions in mind, can give them a chance to develop their skills in critical theory regarding theoretical terms such as ideology, bourgeoisie, socio-economic class, and classism.

Learners of ESL in Sweden are supposed to be able to adapt their language skills to suit different situations and contexts, and are supposed to be given to see different cultural aspects from various places in the world where English is spoken (Skolverket, 2012. "Aim of the subject," para. 2). Accordingly, Beach et. al. (2016), Benesch (1999), and Janks (2013), all state that teenagers should be given the opportunity to know what shapes their lives and that they are shown that it is a purpose connected to the literature that teachers give them to read. To be able to understand the English language that is used both then and now, as well as seeing the differences in the culture surrounding societies of different times can thusly be shown through comparison of this novel and film.

To use a whole novel and film to explain one critical theory has posed to be possible, but limits the big picture for learners, if only one theory is taught. Intertextuality shows how then and now intertwine and how interpretation and recreation work in novels and films. There are several other aspects that can be seen in this novel and film that can be interpreted and dissected, such as feminist criticism. Troise (2007) states that giving learners the opportunity to have several critical lenses in mind when working with one literary work gives them the ability to see that the various critical theories do not exist on their own (p. 88). Looking again at what Skolverket (2012) says about language skills it is understood that they want learners to be able see how things work together in the world and how aspects have a bit of each other in them. As *Emma* and *Clueless* have no outspoken reason for existence more than to entertain, learners are given the opportunity to look at the works of art through several lenses at the same time. This would be a contrast to looking at a novel that is, for example,

Marxist and thusly has an agenda in its creation. Since Tyson (2006) argues that when we are entertained we put our guard down and are more susceptible to ideological reinforcement (p. 60), and making ESL learners aware of this will help them in their critical thinking as to not be lulled into beliefs that are covert and almost impossible to spot.

Another aspect of problems that might occur is stated by Troise (2007) as there is the question of what ideas learners bring to the classroom. She argues that those who have a deeply rooted belief in capitalist ideologies might find it hard to accept Marxist literary criticism, and continues this discussion by stating that learning more about Marxist literary criticism might make them “at least [challenge] some ideology they have passively followed.” (p. 89). In the same way, she argues that these ideologies present are more of a reason to teach critical thinking so that their world view might be broadened (p. 89). Through the use of this novel and film, learners could be taught to at least see where the other side is coming from, as the problems posed in the novel can also be found in the film, and can show that inequalities can affect actions of fictional characters.

Neither *Emma* nor *Clueless* have an outspoken agenda and do not question the world they live in but conform to it, leaving the reader and/or watcher to decide for themselves what to take from it. To show learners that even works of art that are there purely for entertainment still are possible candidates analysing, will then give an even broader perspective of what critical theory is and how it can be used.

Conclusion

This project has shown how Marxist literary theory can be used in the critical comparison of the novel *Emma* and the film *Clueless*. There have been aspects drawn from this to illustrate how it can be used in an ESL classroom to describe concepts and ideas that are used to describe novels and films from a Marxist point of view.

As the works have been analysed before, previous research have been used to draw from to strengthen the idea of social class issues that are present. There have also been connections drawn to the classroom perspective and Marxist literary theory as a whole. The aim has been to show that both old and new works of art can be compared to show how they are equally good to use when discussing Marxist literary theory.

Since the film is based on the novel there have been several passages where the comparison of the two of them have shown the differences in class society between then and now. As the novel and film are not outspokenly against a class society as most works that are analysed from a Marxist point of view are, the material is less about a class rebellion and more about a status quo. It was still argued that the material could be used to describe what injustices and differences that Marxist literary criticism tries to highlight, and that using the material in a comparative way in a classroom could give learners a chance to develop their skills in critical analysis (Ko & Wang, 2013; Benesch, 1999; Erlich, 1979; Tyson, 2006.).

There were issues of Marxist criticism being too small a scope for usage in a classroom setting. There is reason for using at least one additional critical lens to be able to show learners that critical theory is linked, and that there is more than one way to look at a literary work or a film. Hodge (1988) states that someone who creates a message relies on the recipient's level of understanding to decipher the message in question (p. 4). If learners are given the right awareness of critically analysing text or film there is a better chance of them to

be able to understand other texts or films from that perspective. This research can thusly be part of further study and analytical perspectives for the use in an ESL classroom.

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