

Emma and clueless

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Transformations often involve familiar themes but reflect those themes in a different context in order to resonate the values and interests of that society. Thus, context dictates form and meaning as well as the values inherent in the texts. Amy Heckerling's, 20th century American film, *Clueless* is a transformation of Jane Austen's conservative Regency England, *Emma*. The use of different techniques and medium allow *Emma*'s themes of personal growth, social structure and the role of women in society to be conveyed in a more appropriate form in *Clueless*.

The main characters, Emma and Cher are representational products of their society and parallels can be drawn in the opening scenes, particularly in relation to self-knowledge. The Bildungsroman progression from delusion to social awareness is a universal value in both texts despite their differing contexts. Emma is introduced as "handsome, clever, and rich" who had "a disposition to think a little too well of herself." Austen's satirical tone as the omniscient narrator alerts the responder to Emma's inability to understand her position in society. Furthermore, while Emma successfully matches Mr. Weston and Ms.

Taylor, her motives are superficial as she sees it as "the greatest amusement in the world!" She also believes Harriet's beauty "should not be wasted on the inferior society", and it would be "interesting and highly becoming" to "improve her". Austen employs verbal irony through Emma's dialogue, which exposes her flaws of arrogance and shallowness. However, Emma eventually develops self awareness as shown when she realizes her mistake of matching Harriet with Mr. Elton and influencing her to refuse a

suitable marriage with Mr. Martin. There is a similar character development in Cher despite the difference in context.

Heckerling implements voice overs to create an immediate sense of irony when Cher's "way normal life for a teenage girl" is juxtaposed with a dolly-tracking shot of her choosing outfits from a computer operated wardrobe in a grand bedroom. In doing so, Heckerling continues Austen's satirical mode by highlighting Cher's lack of social awareness. This is further reinforced through her dialogue, "I have direction...towards the mall" and Dionne's statement, "Cher's main thrill in life is a make-over...it gives her a sense of control in a world full of chaos", which imply her superficial obsession with image and materialistic values.

Cher's final ability to see beyond the superficial and realize her mistakes "I was just totally clueless" is parallel to Emma's reconciliation to society and its values. Similar to Austen, Heckerling reflects values that are consistent with any age and time- the absolute necessity for young people to gain social awareness. Social hierarchy in Regency England was permanent and immobile. It was governed by strict rules of adherence to rank and place, and was determined by birthright and inheritance. Miss.

Churchill and Captain Weston's marriage challenged the social hierarchy due to a large social imbalance in their marriage, and through authorial intrusion, it was deemed "an unsuitable connection and did not produce much happiness." Austen demonstrates the virtually impermeable social structure through her criticism of the Coles and that "it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them",

indicating that money gained through trade and not birthright, doesn't indicate status.

Emma's high modality and contemptuous tone employed when she claims "the yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do" further highlights the inflexibility on class interactions. Finally, Harriet's marriage to Mr. Martin, a farmer, results in the loss of friendship between Emma and Harriet as stated by Austen's authorial intrusion, "the intimacy between her and Emma must sink." This epitomizes the clear demarcation of status and that Emma shouldn't associate with Harriet due to their differing social status. Cher's world also has a class structure that underpins her society.

This idea is explored through the camera panning out to take long shots of the rigid societal tiers, whilst Cher introduces Tai to the stratified social groups at school including the "Persia mafia", the crew and the "loadies". Elton's indignant tone conveys class consciousness in his rhetorical questions towards Cher as she suggests Tai as a romantic partner, "Why Tai?! Do you know who my father is?" Later, Cher is abandoned in a carpark by Elton, and the far shot of a blinking neon sign of a clown symbolizes society's mockery of her attempt to undermine a defined system of class.

Clearly, class consciousness pervades both societies, especially in selecting romantic partners. Regency England dictated the position of women in society by strict codes of conduct. Primarily, women of Emma's class were constrained by society's expectations of a match within their social class. Captain Weston's marriage to Miss. Churchill is juxtaposed to Miss. Taylor's, thus allowing Austen to comment on the female and male positions in

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society, in that women are meant to be passive and have less say in their marriage. According to Mr.

Weston's idea, "it's being a great deal better to chuse than to be chosen, to excite gratitude than to feel it", hence demonstrating the double moral standard prevalent in society. Furthermore, Emma's sister, Isabella, is married to John Weston, and through authorial intrusion, Austen comments that "Isabella always thinks as he does" demonstrating a women's duty as a wife. The use of dialogue in Mr. Knightley's warning to Emma, "Men offamilywould not be very fond of connecting themselves with a girl of such obscurity...[Harriet]", exemplifies society's expectation of women to interact within their own social class.

On the other hand, Clueless doesn't offer the restricted patriarchal world of Austen as young women could be independent, outspoken and have many more choices, including marriage. The focus of the medium shot on Cher as she struts down the schoolyard in her vibrant yellow costuming portrays her outgoing attitude. The eye contact of male passerbys creates vectors and the comment "As if!" highlight Cher's disgust at their attention, exemplifying women's freedom to choose their romantic partners. This idea is reinforced by Cher's comment on Dionne's relationship, "Dee, you could do so much better. Contrary to Austen, Heckerling recognizes the change in the position of women in society in that they have more freedom in their social behavior and relationships. In conclusion, Emma and Clueless offer profound and satirical insights into their respective contexts. While the need for social stability and the need for young people to gain social awareness, remain unchanged, but the position of women in society has shifted

dramatically. Such ideas are reinforced by the different mediums, both of which effectively reflect the themes and values of that context.