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Comparative Essay

There is not much to distinguish between Jane Austen's 'Emma' and Amy Heckerling's, 'Clueless.' Emma was twenty-one and she had all the good things anyone her age would have desired. Cher (Alicia Silverstone) on the other hand, was just sixteen, and she too had all the goodies contemporary America could offer. After all, she was the only daughter of a very successful lawyer in California, who charged \$500 an hour "to fight with people," as Cher says. In many ways, Heckerling's Clueless can be mistaken to be the modern version of Austen's Emma. However, there are bound to be differences; Austen's Emma lived in early nineteenth century England, and life in those days, were very different from late twentieth century America. The settings, the style, and language are different, but the theme and plot is juxtaposed with one another. Emma is a young, smart, rich and clever, twenty-one year old woman who professes to make the lives of others happy. The novel looks at the youthful hubris and perils of misconstrued romance. Heckerling's Cher is almost identical, except that she is only sixteen years old. This seems to suggest that young women in the nineteenth century could act independently only after they matured mentally. One look at Cher, and one gets the feeling that here we have an exuberant, young girl, who, still in school, can take and make decisions on her own.

Emma had convinced herself that she herself will never marry, as she, a precocious twenty-year-old resident of the village of Highbury, believes that she has the qualities to conjure love matches. Cher, a sixteen-year-old Californian school girl, too believes that she has the special gift to conjure

matches in school. She, with the help of Dionne, plants a flower and a note in Ms. Geist's locker that had the name of Mr. Hall on it. Later, Cher tells Mr. Hall saying that Ms. Geist thought that "you were the only one in school with intelligence." Later, when Tia is introduced to the class during a tennis lesson, Cher develops a special bond, and goes around hunting for a suitable partner for her. She asks Tia to ignore Travis, as he is an addict and was not good company; she tries to get Tia involved with Elton. In Austen's *Emma*, after successfully getting her governess and Mr. Weston, a village widower, together, she begins to look around for an eligible match for her new friend, Harriet Smith. Like in Tia's case, Harriet's parentage is unknown, and Emma is convinced that Harriet deserves to be a gentleman's wife and sets her friend's sights on Mr. Elton, the village vicar. Heckerling introduces Elton as a student, whom Cher introduces to Tia. While Cher makes Travis look like a bad boy, and tries to dissuade Tia from getting into any form of relationship, Emma persuades Harriet to reject Robert Martin, for whom Harriet clearly has feelings.

Elton has other ideas; he is in love with Cher, just like how Austen's Elton is in love with Emma. When Emma finds out that in trying to find a suitable partner for Harriet, she was blinded by her own true feelings for Mr. Knightley, her brother-in-law, she sees Harriet's growing attachment with Knightley, with disdain. In *Clueless*, for all her effort, when she sees and hears from Tia that she wants to make up with Josh, her step-brother, it dawns on her that she, herself, was suddenly attracted to him. When Frank Churchill walks into Emma's life, Knightley is suspicious of the young man, who has suddenly flattered Emma and engaged in a flirtation with her. At a

village ball, Knightley earns Emma's approval by offering to dance with Harriet, while in *Clueless*, Cher is happy to see Josh dancing with Tia. When Harriet tells Emma that she has fallen in love with Knightley, Emma is upset, and is distressed to realize that she is in love with Knightley. Cher also falls in love with Josh. All's well that ends well, and in the novel, Harriet and Mr. Martin marry, while Emma and Knightley fall in love. In the movie, Travis and Tia are seated together at Mr. Hall and Ms. Geist's wedding, and Cher and Josh kiss each other to bond their love.