Clueless is characterised by an utterly engaging impulse — an impulse at once utopian and comic — to remake or refashion the world. Just as Cher and her friends take particular delight in witty wordplay and visual jokes, their hyperbolic sense of style, the strings of quotations and misquotations, the way in which they generate a new modernity in the novel. And it is precisely this conflation (between world and village), along with the dual impulse to satirise and to elaborate a kind of fictional ethnography, that provides a key to Clueless and its central conceit: Los Angeles as a village, a village peopled by teenagers who think that Beverly Hills is the centre of the world.

From certain critical perspectives, we might note, Jane Austen's satire has been dubiously regarded. As Edward Said has pointed out, her preoccupation with the local served not as fodder for satire, but rather to consolidate and advance the interests of Empire, of the West — by figuring a little patch of England as universal, as center, home, norm. Other critics, arguing from a feminist perspective, have drawn attention to the particularity of Austen's modernist impulse — that her novels brought onto stage a world that had not previously been deemed suitable for literary treatment. She conjured up a new world of women and although she certainly subjected this world to satire she also delineated its quotidian contours meticulously and celebrated its denizens with wry affection. These different approaches to Austen are worth noting, not only because film critics tend to reproduce these approaches in their appraisals of Clueless, but also because the genius of the film derives from its deployment of what we might call the Austenian dual impulse which indicates a careful and imaginative reading of the novel Emma.

The film opens with a declaration that these are ‘Kids in America’ but the image gives us a very particular kind of ‘America’ and a particular kind of kids. Cher is truly a child of Hollywood, her mother having died in ‘a fluke accident during a routine liposuction’, and her conception of the Beverly Center as the center of the world serves as an index of Hollywood’s imperialism — its promulgation of a universalizing insularity, its relentless celebration of consumer culture and ready-to-go false consciousness. Cher thinks that Bosnia is in the Middle East and hazards a guess that Kuwait is in the Valley. The Valley itself, as far as these kids are concerned, is literally off the map — they think that Cher does indeed have an ancient and glorious lineage, though not in the novelistic tradition: both she and her best friend Dionne are named ‘after great singers of the world to satire she also delineated its quotidian contours meticulously and celebrated its denizens with wry affection. These different approaches to Austen are worth noting, not only because film critics tend to reproduce these approaches in their appraisals of Clueless,

Cher Horovitz, handsome, clever and rich, had lived nearly sixteen years in LA with very little to distress or vex her. Just like Emma Woodhouse. Emma it’s true is a little older — nearly twenty one — at the beginning of Jane Austen’s novel than Cher is at the beginning of Amy Heckerling’s movie, and Emma, so we are told, lived not in LA, but ‘in the world’. These minor differences aside, there is something uncanny in the way that Cher reprises the role that Emma Woodhouse vacated in 1816. We are told that Cher did indeed have an ancient and glorious lineage, though not in the novelistic tradition: both she and her best friend Dionne are named ‘after great singers of the world to satire she also delineated its quotidian contours meticulously and celebrated its denizens with wry affection. These different approaches to Austen are worth noting, not only because film critics tend to reproduce these approaches in their appraisals of Clueless,

Emma in Los Angeles: Clueless as a remake of the book and the city

by Lesley Stern

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Clueless

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Cher Horovitz, handsome, clever and rich, had lived nearly sixteen years in LA with very little to distress or vex her. Just like Emma Woodhouse. Emma it’s true is a little older — nearly twenty one — at the beginning of Jane Austen’s novel than Cher is at the beginning of Amy Heckerling’s movie, and Emma, so we are told, lived not in LA, but ‘in the world’. These minor differences aside, there is something uncanny in the way that Cher reprises the role that Emma Woodhouse vacated in 1816. We are told that Cher did indeed have an ancient and glorious lineage, though not in the novelistic tradition: both she and her best friend Dionne are named ‘after great singers of the world to satire she also delineated its quotidian contours meticulously and celebrated its denizens with wry affection. These different approaches to Austen are worth noting, not only because film critics tend to reproduce these approaches in their appraisals of Clueless,
Emma is both a comedy of manners and a cautionary tale. It takes a simple musical peripetis which is dramatized through a largely episodic structure. It centers on a motherless young woman, wealthy, endowed with 'the power of having rather too much her own way and a disposition to think a little too well of herself'. Assuming the role of a kind of female Svengali she adopts and undertakes the transformation of Harriet, new to the village. Whilst orchestrating her proteégé's social elevation Emma arranges a series of romances for Harriet, but as the matchmaking goes repeatedly wrong our heroine is revealed as supremely clueless when it comes to sex and romance. Eventually she realizes her own snobbishness and blindness not only to others' desires but to her own. With self-revelation (and a touch of remorse) comes reformation, romantic fulfillment and a happy ending— that is to say, marriage.

Mr Knightley is the old family friend who is also her brother-in-law and also the only person who dares criticize Emma. Eventually she realizes that he is the one she loves. But before this, she falls for Frank Churchill, who like Harriet, is an outsider. In her flirtation she fails to discern Frankishness—that is, she is in love with Jane Fairfax (though indeed this knowledge is largely withheld from the reader as well). This capacity for misreading the signs of attraction, sometimes willfully, sometimes ignorantly, leads Emma into lots of trouble. Dismissing the object of Harriet's affection, Mr Martin the farmer, she becomes convinced that Mr Elton (whom she deems more socially suitable) is enamoured of Harriet, failing to see what is obvious to the reader and some other characters—that it is Emma he is in love with.

Cher is also motherless, and her father is a high powered, wealthy and far-from polite litigation lawyer. Mr Knightley becomes Josh, a student of environmental law and the son of one of her father's previous wives—therefore a sort of step brother. The two outsiders are Tai (the Harriet figure) who arrives from the East with a broad Bronx accent and Christian (the Frank Churchill figure) who arrives from Chicago and is gay. Mr Elton, the snobbish vicar becomes the snobbish Jaguar-driving college boy Elton, and Mr Martin the farmer becomes the dope smoking, skate-boarding loady, Travis, who takes the bus to school. Jane Fairfax disappears from the film and there is a new figure— Dionne, a rich black girl who is Cher's best friend.

Emma, who is wealthy enough not to have to work, spends most of her time socializing, refining her accomplishments painting, playing the piano, reading and deciphering riddles, cultivating the art of conversation, doing occasional good deeds, thinking about sex and romance, talking obliquely but at great length about sex and romance, doing sex and romance via matchmaking and flirting.

Cher, who is wealthy (and smart) enough not to have to try too hard at school, spends most of her time hanging out with her girlfriends, learning to drive, shopping, flaneusing in Rodeo Drive, dieting, exercising to Steel Buns, watching Ren and Stimpy and Beavis and Butthead on television, developing a taste for sex and romance, talking ostentatiously and at great length about sex and romance, doing sex and romance via matchmaking and flirting. In both book and movie the plot progresses episodically, configuring and reconfiguring character clusters via a series of social events. The topography of Highbury or LA environs are mapped out in the same movement by which social relations are charted—through detailed descriptions of travel and modes of communication.

In the movie updating the modernization is manifested in a process of Los Angelisation, and teennification. Los Angeles and the teenage phenomenon are connected through the motif of modernity, of updating, of contemporaneity. Configured by the generic imperatives of a teen movie LA comes itself to signify the 'modern', the contemporary, the new, the different, the fashionable. Modernity is not just here, it is everywhere, it is the anxious search for identity, a constant reassessment of the self and of the world, an endless quest for novelty and change.

Much of the humour of Clueless derives from the generic choices that Heckerling makes. Most simply it is in the choice to turn an early nineteenth century comedy of manners into a late twentieth century teen movie. Clueless is remarkably faithful as a structural repetition, and inventively divergent in terms of incidents. In fact it is the tension between these two that generates pleasure.

Emma is one of the first novels to be written in the new fashion of realism, which was intended to be a departure from the sentimental novels of the eighteenth century. The novel is written in the form of letters between the main character and various other people, and it is through these letters that the reader is able to gain insight into the character's thoughts and feelings. The novel is set in the early 1810s, and it follows the life of Emma Woodhouse, a young woman who is surrounded by social obligations and expectations. Emma is the main character of the novel, and she is known for her independence and her desire for social status.

She is the daughter of Mr Woodhouse, who is a wealthy and respected member of society. Emma is sent to the village of Highbury to stay with her friend Mr Elton, and it is in this village that she meets Mr Knightley, a local man who is known for his wisdom and his intelligence. Emma is drawn to Mr Knightley, and she begins to fall in love with him, but she is also aware of her own social status and the expectations that come with it.

Emma is also known for her love of matchmaking and her desire to bring people together. She is able to use her social connections to arrange introductions and to help people find love. Emma is also known for her independence and her desire to be true to herself, even if it means going against the expectations of society.

Clueless is a modern adaptation of the novel Emma, and it was released in 1995. The film is directed by Amy Heckerling and stars Alicia Silverstone as Cher, a modern-day version of Emma. The film is set in Los Angeles, and it follows Cher as she navigates through the world of high school and the pressures of becoming an adult. Cher is a wealthy and intelligent young woman who is known for her independence and her desire for social status. She is also known for her love of matchmaking and her desire to bring people together.

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