

4-1-2011

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**Jane Austen: A Study of Film Adaptations**

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**Spring 2011**

Jane Austen's novels have been adapted for film and television since 1938. This popularity is due to the fact that Austen's novels tell timeless love stories, which are appealing to audiences. In the 1990's there were massive quantities of movies or television mini-series made from her books. Today, most people know about the novels through the films they watch. It is hard for the modern reader to relate to the lifestyle and everyday events of the characters in Jane Austen's books because of such a vast time span. The films help modern society to interpret Austen's writings.

In regards to film adaptation there are two schools of thought. The first school is the traditionalist school that believes that a film should mirror the original work, the novel, as closely and faithfully as possible. The second school is more modern in its interpretation, borrowing certain elements from a novel and presenting them as in a new way. I will examine how directors interpret the novels of Jane Austen through the medium of film. Two traditional adaptations of Austen's novels are the 1972 BBC mini series, *Emma*, and the 1995 BBC/A&E mini series, *Pride and Prejudice*. Two modern adaptations of Austen's novels are 1995's *Clueless* and 2001's *Bridget Jones's Diary*. I will compare and contrast the novels with the selected films; focusing on characters and plot elements.

## **Jane Austen: A Study of Film Adaptations**

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the book is always better than the movie. However, there are so many Jane Austen inspired films that it would cause one to wonder the validity of the first sentence. Austen's novels have been adapted for film and television since 1938. This popularity is due to the fact that Austen's novels tell timeless love stories, which are appealing to audiences. Two of her most popular novels are *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*. *Emma* tells the story of Emma Woodhouse, a twenty-year-old girl who enjoys playing matchmaker for her friends in the town of Highbury. *Pride and Prejudice* tells the story of Elizabeth Bennet and her journey to find her true love.

In regards to film adaptation there are two schools of thought. The first school is the traditionalist school that believes that a film should mirror the original work, the novel, as closely and faithfully as possible. The second school is more modern in its interpretation, borrowing certain elements from a novel and presenting them as in a new way. I will examine how directors interpret the novels of Jane Austen through the medium of film. Two traditional adaptations of Austen's novels are the 1972 BBC mini series, *Emma*, and the 1995 BBC/A&E mini series, *Pride and Prejudice*. Two modern adaptations of Austen's novels are 1995's *Clueless* and 2001's *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

I will compare and contrast the novels with the selected films; focusing on characters and plot elements. Through my analysis I will try to bridge the gap from the Regency era to the modern day.

### **Emma Mini-Series (1972)**

The BBC mini-series, entitled *Emma*, is a close adaptation of the novel. It appeared on BBC-2 TV in six parts during July and August of 1972. John Glenister

directed the mini series. He is a British television director responsible for many television series. Denis Constanduros, who wrote the screenplay for the film, has experience writing screenplays of classic literature including *Sense and Sensibility* and *Little Women*.

When casting actors for the film adaptation of a novel the director should select actors who are able to embody convincingly the characters of the novel. This can be a challenge when casting for a Jane Austen film adaptation because she is not very descriptive in her writing. She provides few and sketchy descriptions of the main characters' outer appearances and traits. The director must rely on the clues provided by the novel and his or her own interpretations to know whom to cast for certain roles.

The production group desired to make the Emma mini-series as faithful as possible to the novel. It was important for them to cast actors that would bring the characters to life. John Glenister took great care in selecting actors who would exemplify the characters in Austen's novel not only in appearance, but also in voice, manner, and personality. His first task was to find the right actress for the lead role of Emma Woodhouse.

In the novel, there are few descriptions of the physical appearance of Emma. The reader learns most about her character through her actions and behaviors. She is described as "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition" (3). The narrator says, "The real evils in Emma's situation were the power of having too much of her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (3). The most extensive description of Emma is given by Mrs. Weston during a conversation with Mr. Knightley:

Such an eye! – the true hazel eye- and so brilliant! Regular features, open countenance, with such a complexion – oh, what bloom of full health, and such a pretty height and size; such a firm and upright figure. There is health, not merely in her bloom, but in her air, her head, her glance. One hears of a child being ‘the picture of health;’ now Emma always gives me the idea of being the complete picture of grown-up health. She is loveliness itself (35-36).

John Glenister understood the character of Emma in a unique and original way. He did not see her as a “mischievous, pretty, wicked lady”, but as someone who was “disturbed/.../slightly unstable/.../ with certain repressions and frustrations and certain activities which were sublimations of her own fears and desires” (Lauritzen 117).

Glenister, looking for “somebody who would appear highly-strung”, cast Doran Godwin for the role of Emma in the 1972 BBC mini-series. Godwin was age 22 at the time, close in age to the 20-year-old Emma. Godwin’s portrayal of Emma exemplified Glenister’s interpretation of the character. Godwin was able to effectively express the character’s high-strung personality through subtle facial expressions and movements.

In the novel, George Knightley is described as “a sensible man...he had a cheerful manner which always did him good” (7). Glenister cast John Carson for the role of Mr. Knightley because he “had the right age/.../ the calm gentle, firm, authoritative voice, and attractive looks without being glamorous” (Lauritzen 117). Carson was 45 at the time of filming, eight years older than the character’s age of 37. It was important to emphasize the age difference between Emma and Mr. Knightley in order to establish credibility for his role as “one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them” (8).

In the novel, the narrator provides the reader with a brief, yet detailed, description of Harriet when she and Emma are first introduced.

a very pretty girl, and her beauty happened to be of a sort which Emma particularly admired. She was short, plump, and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness (20).

Debbie Bowen was cast for the role of Harriet. Bowen was 17 at the time of filming, the same age as the character she portrayed. She contrasted Godwin in both physical appearance and manner. Although it is noted in the novel that there was not “any thing remarkably clever in Miss. Smith’s conversation”, the Harriet played by Bowen is very empty headed (20). Her blank looks, lack of confidence and over played awe of Emma, make her a wasteland of intellect and interest (Parill 125). The exaggeration of Harriet’s lack of intellect was employed to establish Emma’s superiority over her and allow Emma to dominate Harriet by trying to improve her and introduce her into society.

In the novel, Frank Churchill is described as “a very good looking young man; height, air, address, all were unexceptionable, and his countenance had a great deal of the spirit and liveliness of his father’s” (179). Glenister cast Robert East for the role of Frank. He was 29 at the time of filming, 5 years older than the character he was playing on screen. East needed to be able to convince the audience that everyone will like this character, even after it becomes apparent that he has deceived a great many people (Parill 126). In order to do this, the adaptation emphasizes the charm of Frank Churchill. In the film, Frank Churchill is forever bestowing complements and is always willing to partake in the festivities allowed to him.

Jane Fairfax is another important role to consider when casting since Emma dislikes Jane because; as Knightley points out, “[Emma] saw in [Jane] a really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself” (156). In the novel, Jane Fairfax is described as

very elegant, remarkably elegant /.../ Her height was pretty, just such as almost everybody would think tall, and nobody could think very tall; her figure particularly graceful; her size a most becoming medium, between fat and thin, though a slight appearance of ill-health seemed to point out the likeliest evil of the two /.../ and then, her face – her features – there was more beauty in them altogether than she has remembered; it was not regular, but it was very pleasing beauty. Her eyes, a deep grey, with dark eyelashes and eyebrows had never been denied their praise, but the skin /.../ had a clearness and delicacy which really needed no fuller bloom (157).

Anna Marson was cast for the role of Jane. She was 23 at the time of filming, close to her character’s age of 21. (Note: See illustrations 1-5.) Thin, dark haired, and beautiful, she offered an effective contrast to Doran Godwin. Her portrayal of Jane was very effective. This can be seen most frequently in the scenes where she is interacting with Mrs. Elton, played by Fiona Walker. Although she tries to maintain her ground and decline all of Mrs. Elton’s recommendations, she does so in a calm and soft-spoken manner.

There are many important scenes throughout the novel that help to establish the plot and create twists and surprises for the reader. The BBC mini-series is remarkably faithful to the novel in terms of scene order and inclusion of everything that happened in the little town of Highbury. There are very few, if any, instances of omitted

scenes/characters, additional scenes/characters or changed elements. I will discuss four scenes that were important in the novel and how Glenister chose to depict them in the film.

The first scene is Emma's introduction to Harriet. In the novel, Mrs. Goddard, the schoolmistress, asks Emma for permission to bring Harriet Smith to an evening card party at Hartfield. This was a welcome request because although Emma only knew Harriet by sight, she had long felt an interest in her. In the film Mrs. Goddard calls on Emma and brings with her Harriet. After being introduced, Emma invites them both to a small dinner party the Woodhouses are hosting. It is interesting that in the film Mrs. Goddard does not bother to ask Emma for permission to bring Harriet to Hartfield. The dinner party scene is important because Emma has decided to make Harriet her next matchmaking project.

In the novel, Emma's plans of uniting Harriet and Mr. Elton form gradually in Emma's mind. At this early stage of the plot Emma's plan had not completely been established. In the film Emma has already decided on her project. When Emma formally introduces Harriet and Mr. Elton to each other at the dinner party, she takes great efforts to turn his attention to Harriet. Emma says, "Mr. Elton, Miss Smith has nothing to eat. Please be so kind as to escort her to the buffet." Also, when she notices that Mr. Elton is no longer conversing with Harriet, she points out to him that he has "abandoned poor Miss Smith" and then moves him to where Harriet is standing.

Two more important scenes in the novel are the strawberry picking and trip to Box Hill. In the novel the Strawberry picking occurs at Donwell Abbey, followed the next day by a day trip to Box Hill. During the strawberry picking Mrs. Elton informs Jane

that she has found her a governess position and urges her to write an acceptance letter immediately. Jane, overwhelmed by Mrs. Elton's urges, politely excuses herself and walks home. Later the reader finds out that Frank crossed paths with Jane as she was walking home and they argued.

In the novel, the trip to Box Hill occurs the following day. This is a crucial scene because this is when the reader witnesses Emma at her worst. It showcases her tendency to be heartless and arrogant toward people who are in an inferior position to her. She offends Miss Bates through a thoughtless joke and Mr. Knightly scolds her for her behavior.

The film compresses the strawberry picking and the trip to Box Hill into the same day. A large group of people gathers at Donwell for the strawberry picking. Although it is Mr. Knightley's residence, Mrs. Elton appears to be taking over the position of the host and attempts to organize the gathering.

The group to Box Hill consists of Emma, Mr. Weston, Miss Bates, Mrs. Elton, Mr. Knightley, and Frank Churchill. In the novel, Jane Fairfax and Mr. Elton are also in attendance. Since the party ate lunch at Donwell earlier in the day, there is no picnic in the film. The dialogue in the film closely resembles the prose in the novel. Frank complains about the dullness of the party and, as in the novel, commands that they tell Miss Woodhouse what they are thinking. He says that Miss Woodhouse commands from each of them "one thing very clever" or "two things moderately clever; or three things very dull indeed..." Miss Bates exclaims, "'three things very dull indeed.' That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I opened my mouth, shan't I". Emma says, "Ah, ma'am, but there may be difficulty. Pardon me - but

you will be limited as to number - only three at once” (353). Following the insult, Mr. Knightley looks grim as he recognizes that Miss Bates is hurt by Emma’s jab. Mr. Weston laughs and poses a conundrum in praise of Emma, apparently oblivious as to what has just passed. Emma appears unaware that her joke has been inappropriate until Mr. Knightley tells her after the others have gone to the carriages, “It was badly done!” She is shown silently crying as she rides back in the carriage.

The final important scene is when Mr. Knightley proposes to Emma. The events in the film are similar to those described in the novel, except for there being less dialogue, up to the point where Emma is called upon to respond to his proposal. In the novel, Emma goes out for a walk in the garden. She sees Mr. Knightley and he joins her; He sympathizes with her over Frank’s supposed betrayal of her. He is so overjoyed by her confession that she has never had feelings for Frank that he is inspired to go further. Because Emma thinks that he is going to speak of his feelings for Harriet, Emma silences him. Emma notices how dejected he looks and she says that as a friend she will hear anything he wants to say. He says that he does not wish for her friendship and declares his love. By the time they reach the house they are engaged to marry.

In the film, the proposal itself occurs in a gazebo. The lovers are sitting as Mr. Knightley confesses that he cares for her. Emma is silent. The film then cuts away to Mr. Woodhouse, who is in the house worrying about his daughter’s health in the damp weather. When the film cuts back to the couple they appear to have come to an agreement. They decide to keep their engagement secret until a favorable opportunity presents itself.

The treatment of this scene is similar to the novel in so far as that the reader does not witness Emma's acceptance of Mr. Knightley's proposal. In the novel, when it is time for Emma's response the narrator states, "What did she say? Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does" (411). The reader doesn't have the opportunity to witness exactly how Emma accepts the proposal. In the film, the camera cuts away from Emma and Mr. Knightley when it is time for her to accept his proposal. When the camera returns to the couple it is clear that she has already accepted his proposal.

### **Pride and Prejudice Mini-Series (1995)**

The BBC/A&E mini series, entitled *Pride and Prejudice*, is another close adaptation of the Jane Austen novel. It appeared on BBC-1 TV in six parts during September and October of 1995. Simon Langton, who directed the mini-series, is a British television director and producer who has directed many television series. He was nominated for a British Academy Television Award for his directing of *Pride and Prejudice*. Andrew Davies wrote the screenplay for the film. He is well known for his adaptations of classic works of literature, including *Vanity Fair* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

Much like the filmmakers of the 1976 *Emma*, the filmmakers of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* were concerned with fidelity to the novel. As with Austen's other novels, it was a challenge when casting actors for the roles of the characters of *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen very rarely directly describes a character's physical appearance or personality. Instead, the reader learns about a character through his or her actions and what other characters say about him or her. When casting the many characters of *Pride and Prejudice* Langton was looking for actors with wit, charm, and charisma, who could

also play the Regency period (Birtwistle 15). His first task was to find the actors to play the lead roles of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy.

In the novel, there is no direct description of Elizabeth. The reader can get a vague idea of her appearance and manner when reading about her from Mr. Darcy's perspective.

He began to find [her face] was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing (18).

Davies wanted to emphasize that Elizabeth is a very attractive, lively girl, not just mentally but also physically (Birtwistle 4). Jennifer Ehle was chosen for the role of Elizabeth Bennet. She was 26 at the time of filming, 6 years older than the character she played. Elle's portrayal of Elizabeth is equal to Davies' interpretation of the character. In the film there are many scenes of Elizabeth walking in the woods and fields that surround her. Ehle is very witty and brings the character to life with her playful banter throughout the mini-series. She conveys Elizabeth's confidence in her own opinions and her willingness to express them (Parrill 65).

In the novel, Mr. Darcy is first introduced to the reader and the town at the assembly ball.

Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien...and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his

popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased (7).

The casting team envisioned Mr. Darcy as a naughty, arrogant, difficult man who underneath has great charm and sensitivity (Birtwistle 15). Colin Firth, age 35 at the time of filming, was cast for the role of Mr. Darcy. Although playing a character seven years his junior, he is considered by many as the definitive cinematic Mr. Darcy. Firth understood that “what Darcy doesn’t say” is as important as what he says or does (Collin). Therefore the viewer learns more about Darcy’s character and changing states by watching subtle changes in his facial expressions and observing the others.

Once Elizabeth and Darcy were cast, Langton could move on to the Bennet family. In the first chapter of the novel, Mrs. Bennet is described as “a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.” Alison Steadman, age 49 at the time of filming, was cast for the role of Mrs. Bennet. In the novel, Mrs. Bennet’s age is never revealed, it is estimated that she is in her forties. Steadman provides an entertaining and lively performance of the character. Throughout the film Steadman gives her best during Mrs. Bennet’s nervous fits when Mr. Bingley first arrives and Lydia runs off with Mr. Wickham.

Another important member of the Bennet family to cast is Jane Bennet. In the novel, she is considered a “beautiful angel” by Mr. Bingley and a “sweet girl” by his sisters (12). She is less sure of her opinions and more reserved than Elizabeth. She always tries to find something good to say about everyone. Susannah Harker was cast for the role of Jane Bennet. She was 30 at the time of filming, eight years older than the character she portrayed. She played the role of the quiet and demure Jane very well. In the novel, Jane

is described as the prettiest of the five Bennet daughters. Although Harker is an attractive woman, she does not live up to the expectations of the character's physical beauty, especially when placed beside Jennifer Ehle.

Lydia Bennet plays a key role in the novel and the film. Her behavior causes great distress to her family and she is totally unashamed of herself. In the novel, she is described as "self-willed and careless... ignorant, idle, and vain" (168). The casting team envisioned Lydia as very witty, and naughty, attractive, feisty and with knockdown energy (Birtwistle 18). They chose Julia Sawalha for the role of Lydia. (Note: See illustrations 6-10.) Although eleven years older than the 16-year-old character she plays, her acting experience allowed her to deliver the powerful performance necessary for the character's impact in the film. Throughout the film the audience witnesses Lydia's indecorous behavior culminating at the point when she runs away with Mr. Wickham.

Many scenes throughout the novel help to establish the plot and expand upon the storyline. The goal of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* production was to remain true to the tone and spirit of the novel, but at the same time to exploit the possibilities of visual storytelling (Belton 186). The BBC/A&E mini-series is quite faithful to the novel in terms of scene selection and order. There are very few instances of omitted scenes/characters or changed elements, with exception to the additional scenes Davies provided to fill out Darcy's life. I will discuss four scenes that were important in the novel and how Langton chose to represent them in the film.

The first scene is the assembly ball at Meryton. In the novel, this is the first time that the Bennet family is introduced to the Netherfield party. It is at this ball that Jane and Bingley first set eyes on each other and that Darcy is established as a proud and

disagreeable man. Although the scene is crucial in setting up the storyline, Austen only allocates three pages of the novel to describe this event. For this reason, the filmmakers decided to substantially build upon the scene in the adaptation (Birtwistle 6).

The TV adaptation expanded this scene in order to introduce and build upon characters, comment on the difference between the social status of the townspeople and the Netherfield party, and to illustrate the exchange between Darcy and Bingley. The only dialogue provided by the novel is of the conversation between Darcy and Bingley. In this conversation, Bingley encourages Darcy to dance, which Darcy refuses to do. He suggests Darcy partner up with Elizabeth; Darcy responds by stating,

She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humor at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men (8).

In the film, the viewer is able to witness Elizabeth listening in on the exchange. Ehle's facial expressions throughout the scene express the character's lively, playful disposition. When she goes off to tell the story to her friends, she eyes Darcy in a way as to communicate to him that she has overheard the conversation.

Later on, Darcy experiences a change of heart and realizes that he wishes to marry Elizabeth. It is a surprise that Darcy should propose to Elizabeth after witnessing his initial judgment of her. The first proposal scene takes place at Hunsford where Elizabeth has gone to visit with Charlotte Lucas. In the novel, Elizabeth is alone at the Collins's when Darcy calls upon her. She is surprised that it is he who has come to visit and they sit in silence for several minutes. He finally breaks the silence by confessing to her,

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 (149).

He proceeds to comment on the inferiority of her birth and the inappropriate behavior of members of her family. Elizabeth immediately rejects his proposal and is angered by its absurdity and his insults.

Elizabeth's rejection of his proposal comes as a great shock to Darcy because he assumes that "a man in his situation who decides that a woman is desirable is certain of her acceptance" (Belton 190). Both Ehle and Firth perform this scene with such conviction. Ehle expresses Elizabeth's simmering anger at Darcy because of her understanding of Darcy's role in causing Bingley to reject Jane. Firth shows the intensity of Darcy's struggle between his love for Elizabeth and his proud reluctance to ally himself with her family (Parrill 74).

Another important scene in the novel and film is Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley, Darcy's estate, while on holiday with her aunt and uncle. In the novel, Elizabeth's aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, suggests they visit Pemberley since they are in the area and since it is a "place with which so many of [Elizabeth's] acquaintance are connected" (190). After hearing that Darcy will not be home, Elizabeth decides that she has no problem with the group visiting Pemberley. While there, Elizabeth thinks to herself, "And of this place, I might have been mistress" (193).

After Elizabeth and the Gardiners complete their tour of the house, Darcy unexpectedly emerges down the road. This scene was challenging for Davies to write since Austen is vague in her description of Darcy during this period. Darcy needs to prove a great deal to Elizabeth in a short space of time (Birtwistle 104). He needs to convince her that the things she disliked about him at their last meeting have changed.

Davies believes that Darcy hasn't suddenly turned into a good man; he has always been a good man underneath his stiff exterior.

The final significant scene is Darcy's second proposal to Elizabeth. In the novel, Darcy and Bingley call upon the Bennets and Bingley suggests that they all go out for a walk. Jane, Bingley, Kitty, Elizabeth, and Darcy set off on the walk. After a while, Jane and Bingley begin to lag behind the group and Kitty leaves to call upon Maria Lucas, leaving Elizabeth and Darcy to entertain each other. It is now that Darcy expresses to Elizabeth, "If your feelings are still as they were last April, tell me so at once. *My* affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on the subject forever." The reader learns that, "[Elizabeth's] sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure his present assurances" (289).

The adaptation follows very closely to the situation and dialogue of the novel. The couple is shown looking lovingly at each other, but they do not touch as they confess their feelings. Ehle and Firth perform the scene very well; the audience can feel their controlled joy during this scene. Darcy and Elizabeth continue walking, talking about Lady Catherine's visit to Longbourn. Darcy explains that Elizabeth's reply to Lady Catherine gave Darcy him hope that she might love him back. The scene ends with a long shot from behind Darcy and Elizabeth showing them walking a short distance behind Bingley and Jane.

Although this adaptation is considered to be one of the closest adaptations to the novel, Davies deviates from the novel in one area. In the novel, the reader experiences everything through Elizabeth's eyes. Elizabeth's encounters with Darcy help shape the

reader's judgments about him. Davies wanted the audience to get a sense fairly early on that there is a lot more to Darcy than what Elizabeth sees (Birtwistle 5). For this reason, Davies added several scenes to give the viewer a sense of Darcy away from Elizabeth and to showcase him as a physically active and sensitive individual (Parrill 66).

Davies utilizes the letters that Elizabeth receives from both Darcy and Mrs. Gardiner to reveal to the audience the more amiable qualities of Darcy's character. Darcy's letter to Elizabeth explains his actions in breaking Bingley's attachment to Jane and relates his association with George Wickham. As Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter, a series of scenes reveal Darcy to be morally superior to Wickham, fair to Wickham, and a loving brother to Georgiana (Parrill 67). Mrs. Gardiner's letter to Elizabeth describes Darcy's role in discovering Lydia and arranging the marriage. As Elizabeth reads Mrs. Gardiner's letter, a series of scenes reveal Darcy to be a man of action and authority (Parrill 68).

Davies wanted to show Darcy as a "physical young man" (Birtwistle 3). In the opening scene, the audience sees Darcy and Bingley riding on horseback, looking toward Netherfield. In other scenes Darcy is seen bathing and getting out of a tub, fencing with a fencing master, or jumping into a lake to swim. The audience sees Darcy sweaty and tired from exercise, far from the formal Darcy that the reader of the novel is used to seeing.

The added scenes help to build the transition from the proud and arrogant Darcy the audience meets at the beginning to the thoughtful and loving Darcy the audience comes to know at the end (Birtwistle 6). In the novel, Darcy's change of character appears to be sudden and abrupt. It catches the reader off guard because he or she has gotten so used to disliking Darcy that it is jarring the first time his true character is

revealed. Davies wants the audience to believe in Darcy's complete change of character brought on by Elizabeth.

### **Clueless (1995)**

Not all adaptations follow the source text as closely as the two films previously discussed. Some directors and screenwriters use a novel as a springboard to create something unique and original. *Clueless* is an example of a film that borrows elements from a novel, Jane Austen's *Emma*, and adapts them in a way that upon first glance, there appears to be no relationship between the two works. In fact, the novel's presence in *Clueless* went undetected by many of the teenage girls who were the film's primary target audience (Monaghan 215). *Clueless* was released in the United States in July of 1995. It was written and directed by Amy Heckerling. She is an American director and writer also known for her other films *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Look Whose Talking*. Heckerling borrowed all the characters and major plot elements from Austen's novel while creating something all her own.

The main character of *Clueless*, Cher Horowitz (played by Alicia Silverstone), closely parallels Austen's Emma. In order to relate to a modern audience, Heckerling changed the character's age from 21 to 16 and transported her from the early nineteenth century English countryside to a modern day high school in Beverly Hills, California. Much like Emma, Cher is spoiled, wealthy, and attractive; she has "lived in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (*Emma* 3). Her mother passed away when she was young, making her the mistress of the house. Like Emma, Cher "manages" her father, encouraging him to eat a healthier diet. Her assessment of situations is often warped by her own very materialistic and wrong-headed notions (Parrill 117).

The Mr. George Knightley of the film is college freshman Josh Lucas (Paul Rudd), the son of one of Cher's father's ex-wives. Like Mr. Knightley, Josh is "one of the few people who could see faults in [Cher Horowitz], and the only one who ever told her of them" (*Emma* 8). Josh and Cher argue continually but without malice; she mocks him for his interest in current events and literature and he teases her for being selfish, vain, and superficial. Although Josh teases Cher, he shows his caring and concern for her. The antagonism which exists between these two bears little similarity to the relationship which existed between Emma and Mr. Knightley (Parrill 116). This antagonism is attributable to a vein of traditional Hollywood romantic comedy, known as screwball comedy. Screwball comedy, which first gained prominence in the 1930's, involves fast-talking, witty repartee between battling odd couples who eventually unite by the end of the film. However, screwball comedy also generally includes farcical elements and preposterous disguises/deceptions, not prominent here.

Changing Mr. Knightley into a college student alters the workings of the novel. Austen has the two with an age difference sufficient to make Mr. Knightley sexually invisible to Emma: at twenty, she thinks of likely partners for romantic interest as being in their twenties; Knightley at thirty-six, is impossibly old. She clearly has ruled him out as a romantic interest and so does the modern day reader (Mosier 235). It comes as a surprise to the reader when Emma realizes her affections for Mr. Knightley. Since Josh's interest in Cher is transmitted to the audience early on in the film, their eventual pairing off does not come as much of a surprise. Their closer age difference of three years makes Josh a possible romantic interest for Cher. Ironically, at the time of filming, Silverstone was actually eighteen and Rudd was almost twenty-six.

Tai Frasier (Brittany Murphy) closely parallels Austen's Harriet Smith. Harriet is a girl who lives at the local boarding school. Very little is known of her past or her family. Tai is the new girl at Bronson Alcott High School. She moved to Beverly Hills from Brooklyn, complete with accent, street manners, a grunge wardrobe, and a liking for recreational drugs (Turim 46). In the novel, Emma decides to befriend Harriet Smith with the goal to improve her and introduce her into society; Cher befriends Tai with the same intentions.

Cher decides that it would be the perfect idea to give Tai a makeover. Cher proceeds to transform Tai from the unstylish new girl to someone who could associate with the popular people at school. What follows is a montage of Tai trying on clothes, having her hair dyed and eyebrows plucked set to Jill Sobule's *Supermodel*. Cher makes Tai do aerobics to give her "buns of steel", and advises her to enlarge her vocabulary and lose her accent. She encourages her to read "one non-school book" a week, and "do something good for mankind or the planet for a couple of hours".

Cher also tries to extinguish the strong mutual attraction between Tai and Travis Birkenstock (Breckin Meyer) and to steer her toward Elton Triscia (Jeremy Sisto). In the novel, Emma tries to extinguish Harriet's attraction to Robert Martin and match her up with Philip Elton. Travis, an amiable skateboarding slacker, parallels the farmer, Robert Martin. Elton, a rich and popular boy at school, parallels the village vicar, Mr. Elton.

The Frank Churchill of the film is Christian Stovitz (Justin Walker), a newcomer at the school, who is momentarily Cher's love interest. Frank Churchill is the son of Mr. Weston by a previous marriage. After his mother's death, his aunt and uncle raised him. Frank is charming and much admired by everyone, except Mr. Knightley. The arrival of

Frank causes Knightley to sense consciously for the first time the real nature of his feelings for Emma because he feels immediate jealousy (Margison).

In contrast to the novel, Christian is in no way related to the Mr. Weston of the film, Mr. Hall. He also does not live with his aunt and uncle, instead alternating school semesters between his divorced parents in Chicago and Beverly Hills. He is, however, much admired by everyone, except for the Mr. Knightley of the film, Josh. When Christian arrives to take Cher on their first date, Josh watches jealously as Cher descends the stairs to greet Christian. Josh recommends to Cher's father that he should go to the party to keep an eye on her.

In the novel, Emma and Frank form a close friendship and many people think that they will one day be more than friends. However, this does not happen because it is discovered that Frank has secretly been engaged to Jane Fairfax. In the film, Cher tries to win Christian's affections. She tries to catch his attention by sending herself flowers, candies and love notes. When they attend a party together, he ignores all her advances. Like Frank Churchill, Christian also has a secret. Cher naively and repeatedly fails to recognize Christian's homosexual tendencies, and tries to unsuccessfully seduce him while they are alone one night watching a movie. The next day, as she is relating this story to her friends it becomes apparent to her that he is not interested in girls. The film attaches no blame to Christian; whereas, in the novel, Frank is blamed for misleading Emma. Frank's secret is also used to underline Emma's tendency to fantasize and invent love affairs. Because Christian's secret turns out to be that he is homosexual rather than secretly engaged, the film has dropped the character of Jane Fairfax.

Other major characters of the film have their equivalents in *Emma*. Cher's father, Mel Horowitz (Dan Hedaya), a successful lawyer is Mr. Woodhouse; Mr. Wendell Hall (Wallace Shawn) and Miss Toby Geist (Twink Caplano), the teachers brought together by Cher are the Westons; Cher's rival, Amber Mariens (Elisa Donovan), who ends up dating Elton is Mrs. Elton; and Dionne Davenport (Stacy Dash), Cher's friend, has been interpreted as Miss Taylor/ Mrs. Weston because she gives Cher someone to talk to.

(Note: see illustrations 11-13.)

In addition to appropriating most of the characters from *Emma*, Heckerling also appropriated many scenes from the text. In the novel, Emma sketches a portrait of Harriet, intending to draw Mr. Elton's attention to Harriet's beauty. Mr. Elton is attentive while Emma sketches and praises the portrait's likeness. However, Mr. Elton's praise of the portrait is not meant for Harriet's beauty, but for Emma's artistry. Emma discovers this, to her surprise, when he proposes to *her* during a carriage ride home from the Westons Christmas party. These events are exactly duplicated, though updated, in *Clueless*. Cher takes Tai's photograph and mistakes Elton's request for a copy as evidence of his attraction to Tai. Like the novel, Elton arranges to drive Cher home alone from a Christmas party. Cher realizes her misunderstanding when he shocks her by attempting to kiss her. Significantly, both Eltons object to Harriet's class. Mr. Elton exclaims, "I need not totally despair of an equal alliance as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!" (124). His cinematic counterpart asks incredulously, "Don't you know who my father is?" (Ferriss 125).

Another scene adapted by Heckerling is the gypsy attack on Harriet. In the novel, Harriet is walking with a friend when a gypsy child approaches them. Harriet's friend

becomes frightened and runs away, leaving Harriet behind. A group of gypsies surrounds her and demands money. Frank, who happens to be walking along, frightens the gypsies away and brings Harriet to Emma's house. In the film, Tai is talking to some boys at the mall, while Christian and Cher stand nearby. At one point, the boys hold Tai over the railing of the second level of the mall. When Christian notices this he comes to Tai's rescue. In the novel, Emma wonders whether this event might make Harriet and Frank interested in each other. In the film, Cher does not have this thought about Tai and Christian.

Josh's rescue of Tai closely parallels Knightley's rescue of Harriet. In the novel, Harriet is left without a partner during a dance at the Crown Ball. Mr. Elton, also without a dance partner, pointedly refuses to ask Harriet to dance. Knightley comes to Harriet's rescue by asking her to dance. In the film, Josh partners Tai at a party because no one else will ask her to dance. Like Knightley's rescue of Harriet, Josh's rescue of Tai leads to Tai's falling in love with him (Parrill 118).

Like Harriet, Tai also destroys souvenirs she has collected that remind her of Elton. In the film, Tai tells Cher that she is getting rid of souvenirs associated with Elton because she is "so over him". She had saved a tape of the song *Rollin' With The Homies* that they danced to and a towel that he put ice in when she bumped her head at a party. After throwing her souvenirs in Cher's fireplace, Tai confesses that she now cares for Josh. In the novel, Harriet tells Emma that she no longer cares for Mr. Elton and wishes to give up the trinkets she had saved to remember him by. She had saved a piece of court-plaster that she had lent to him when he cut himself and a pencil that he had discarded. After throwing her souvenirs in Emma's fireplace, Harriet confesses that she

now cares for someone of higher rank, Mr. Knightley. Upon hearing this news Emma is overcome with jealousy. Emma suddenly realizes that her jealous rage at the thought of Mr. Knightley marrying someone else means that she must be in love with him herself (Mosier 247). Emma's realization comes as a surprise to the reader. However, in *Clueless*, Cher doesn't realize her feelings for Josh as suddenly and it is not a surprise to the audience that the two are paired together by the end of the film.

Another scene Heckerling borrowed from the novel is the Westons' wedding. In the opening chapter of *Emma*, Miss Taylor, Emma's governess, has just married Mr. Weston and has quit Hartfield. Mr. Woodhouse, who hates change, is sulking over her departure. While Emma and Mr. Knightley are sitting down comforting her father, Emma takes credit for arranging the match. The Westons of the film, Mr. Hall and Miss Geist, are married in the final scene. The scene begins with a long-distance rear view of a bride in full wedding regalia. An audience reared on Hollywood comedies will assume it is Cher, who in the previous scene, finally found true love with Josh. However, Cher's narrative voice interrupts to assert, "As if! I mean, I'm only 16 and this is California not Kentucky" (Monaghan 219). The ending of the film marks the beginning of Cher's entry into adulthood, not its conclusion. She has her Mr. Knightley but this does not mean, as it does for Austen, that she has now achieved her true identity.

### **Bridget Jones's Diary (2001)**

Another film that borrows elements from a Jane Austen novel is *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The film is actually based on a book of the same name written by Helen Fielding. Fielding admitted that she wrote *Bridget Jones's Diary* as homage to *Pride and Prejudice* and the popular 1995 BBC/A&E adaptation. The film was released in the United States in

April of 2001. Sharon Maguire directed the film. She is an English director who made her feature film directorial debut with *Bridget Jones's Diary*. She also has experience directing television shows, documentaries, and advertisements. Helen Fielding wrote the screenplay for the film. She is an English novelist and screenwriter. ~~She is~~, best known for creating the fictional character Bridget Jones in a sequence of novels and films. She began *Bridget Jones's Diary* as a weekly newspaper column in *The Independent* on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1995.

The main character of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget Jones (played by Renee Zellweger), closely parallels Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth is a single British woman in her early twenties. She is intelligent, attractive, witty, and well mannered, but has the tendency to judge people before she really gets to know them. Bridget is a single British woman in her early thirties. She struggles with, among other things, her weight, her family, her job, her self-esteem, and her love life. Like Elizabeth, she is opinionated, strong-willed, and embarrassed by her family. According to Suzanne Ferriss, “both women learn the error of their perceptions of men and discover true love in the process” (Woolston).

Like Elizabeth, Bridget belongs to the middle class, rather than to the lower or upper orders of society. Only through a suitable marriage can Elizabeth live a comfortable life, since her father's estate is entailed to her cousin, Mr. Collins. Like Elizabeth, Bridget's family presses her to find a mate. They continuously ask her about her love life and remind her that time is running out to find someone.

The Fitzwilliam Darcy of the film is a character that shares a similar name, Mark Darcy (Colin Firth). It is not a coincidence that Firth was chosen for this role. Firth, who

played Mr. Darcy in the 1995 BBC/A&E television production of *Pride and Prejudice*, plays this part exactly as he played the earlier role, making it evident that the two Darcys are essentially the same (Berardinelli). Mr. Darcy is a wealthy landowner. Although he is handsome, intelligent, and tall, his aloof behavior is seen by many as an excessive pride and concern for social status. He makes poor impressions on strangers but is valued by those who know him well. Mark Darcy is a smug, condescending human rights barrister. Like Mr. Darcy, he is handsome, intelligent, and tall and makes a poor first impression when meeting Bridget, causing her to loathe him.

Unlike in the novel, Mark is not a newcomer to Bridget's social sphere. He is an acquaintance of the Jones family. Both Bridget and Mark's parents are old friends and Bridget used to "run around naked in his paddling pool" when they were children. Like Mr. Darcy, Mark represents Bridget's potential passport to the uppermost echelons of contemporary London's meritocracy, as elitist as the Regency gentry (Solender). Mark struggles against his feelings for Bridget, just as Mr. Darcy does against his feelings for Elizabeth.

Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant) parallels Austen's George Wickham. The selection of Grant for the role, again, ties the film to Jane Austen. Grant performed as Edward Ferrars in the 1995 adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. George Wickham is a member of the local militia stationed in the nearby town of Meryton. He is handsome, charming, and easy to speak with. Elizabeth develops a friendly relationship to him and finds herself attracted to him.

Daniel Cleaver is Bridget's boss at the publishing company she works for. He is handsome, outgoing, charming, and popular among women. They start dating until

Bridget ends it when she catches him cheating on her with another woman, a colleague from the publishing company's New York office. In the film, Bridget resolves not to “form romantic attachments to any of the following: alcoholics, workaholics, sexaholics, commitment phobics, peeping toms, megalomaniacs, emotional fuckwits, or perverts” Unfortunately for her, Daniel embodies all of the above. Like Wickham, Daniel appears to be too good to be true, and proceeds to prove this suspicion correct.

Pam Jones (Gemma Jones), Bridget's mother, corresponds to both Austen's Mrs. Bennet and Lydia Bennet. (Note: See illustrations 14-17.) The selection of Jones for the role, again, ties the film to Jane Austen. Jones performed as Mrs. Dashwood in the 1995 adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. Mrs. Bennet is frivolous, excitable, and narrow-minded. Her public manners and social climbing are an embarrassment to her daughters, Jane and Elizabeth. Mrs. Jones is an overconfident, doting woman. Like Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Jones desperately tries to get her daughter married, focusing on a man of good fortune.

Mrs. Jones also parallels the youngest of the Bennet sisters, Lydia. In the novel, Lydia runs away with Wickham and lives with him before they get married. Mrs. Jones abandons her role as wife and mother, and runs away with her new boyfriend Julian, the host of a home shopping cable television show. It is ironic that Mrs. Jones should correspond with Mrs. Bennet and her favorite daughter, Lydia.

The difference, however, between Lydia and Mrs. Jones is that Mrs. Jones regrets her behavior and how it has affected her family. In the novel, Lydia returns home to Longborne as if nothing scandalous has happened.

Elizabeth was disgusted, and even Miss Bennet was shocked. Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. She turned from sister to sister, demanding their congratulations... It was not to be supposed that time would give Lydia that embarrassment from which she had been so wholly free at first (248-9).

Lydia is blissfully unaware of the suffering she has caused her family and the inconveniences she has caused for others. At the end of the film, Mrs. Jones returns home on Christmas Eve to apologize for her behavior and ask her husband for forgiveness. She shows humility and a general concern for her family, not just herself.

Fielding also borrowed events from the novel for her homage to *Pride and Prejudice*. The New Year's day turkey curry buffet scene parallels the Meryton assembly ball in the novel. In this scene, Bridget first meets the Mr. Darcy character of the film and overhears him criticize her to his mother. This parallels Elizabeth Bennet's introduction to Mr. Darcy and the conversation between Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley regarding Elizabeth.

In the novel, Mr. Bingley suggests that Mr. Darcy dance with Elizabeth, but Darcy refuses, saying, "she is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me." He proceeds by declaring he has no interest in women "who are slighted by other men" (8). Elizabeth, overhearing this exchange takes an immediate and understandable dislike to Mr. Darcy. She forms a prejudice against him that he is a proud, arrogant, difficult man.

In the film, Bridget's mother introduces her to Mark Darcy, hoping that the two of them will like each other. Mark has no interest in Bridget, and he remains standoffish and

cold toward her attempts at small talk. After their introductions, Bridget overhears Mark disparage her to his mother.

Mother, I do not need a blind date. Particularly not with some verbally incontinent spinster who drinks like a fish, smokes like a chimney, and dresses like her mother.

After hearing his opinion of her, Bridget excuses herself from the room. Her first impression of him is that he is arrogant, aloof, and unapproachable.

Wickham's lie to Elizabeth parallels Daniel's lie to Bridget. In the novel, Wickham claims that Mr. Darcy has not fulfilled the dying wish of his father, old Mr. Darcy. According to Wickham, old Mr. Darcy wished to bestow upon Wickham a living as a priest. The truth is that Wickham relinquished the position and requested a sum of money to pursue an education in law, of which he never did study. Also, Wickham tried to convince Mr. Darcy's younger sister, Georgiana, to elope with him. By marrying Georgiana, Wickham would come into possession with a hefty sum of money that was entitled to Georgiana.

In the film, Bridget learns that Daniel and Mark used to be friends and is confused by their less than congenial behavior toward one another. Daniel lies to Bridget about a dispute between him and Mark, trying to enhance his chances with Bridget. Daniel explains to her that Mark ran off with Daniel's fiancée. Upon hearing this Bridget dislikes Mark even more than she did before, hating him on Daniel's behalf. In fact, it was Daniel who wronged Mark. Mark discovered that his wife and Daniel were having an affair.

In the novel, Mr. Darcy takes it upon himself to rescue the Bennet family from social ruin. While Elizabeth is away visiting the countryside with the Gardiners, her aunt and uncle, she receives two letters from Jane. The first informs her that Lydia has eloped with Wickham and the second reveals that there is no word from the two and they may, in fact, not yet be married.

Darcy feels that had he exposed Wickham's true nature he could have prevented this tragedy from happening. Therefore, he takes it upon himself to seek out the couple in London. He found Lydia and Wickham in hiding and paid the money that facilitated the marriage. Without his help, the Bennet family's reputation would have been tarnished and the other Bennet sisters would not have been able to find husbands. Elizabeth finds out about his generosity in saving Lydia's good name and thanks him for it. He replies that he only helped because Lydia is Elizabeth's sister.

In the film, Mark Darcy does not rescue a straying relative but Bridget herself. For her job with *Sit Up Britain*, Bridget is assigned to interview a British aid worker married to a Kurdish freedom fighter whom the Government wants to extradite. While she is waiting for the couple to leave the courthouse, where they are waiting to hear the verdict about the extradition, she stops into a convenience store to get a package of cigarettes and misses them. Realizing how important the interview was, she realizes that this mistake might cost her job.

Luckily, Mark Darcy is in the same convenience store and informs her that no one was able to interview the couple because he is their lawyer and told them not to speak to the press. He arranges an exclusive interview for her with the couple. The interview is a success and saves her job with *Sit Up Britain*.

The scene in which Mark tells Bridget he likes her parallels Mr. Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth. In the novel, Mr. Darcy calls upon Elizabeth when she is alone at the Collins's. He declares his love for her by saying, "I must tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (149). He also proceeds to insult her by remarking on her inferior social standing and the improper behavior of her family members.

In the film, Bridget runs into Mark at a dinner party at the house of her friends, Magda and Jeremy. The party consists entirely of couples that bombard her with questions about her love life as a singleton. When she leaves, Mark follows her to the door where he declares to her, "I like you, very much. Just as you are." Like Darcy, Mark unintentionally insults Bridget by commenting on the behavior of her mother and her tendency to "let whatever's in your head come out of your mouth without much consideration of the consequences".

After Mr. Darcy's proposal, Elizabeth rejects him telling him he is "the last man in the world whom [she] could ever be prevailed on to marry" (153). Although she is understands the great compliment he bestows upon her by his proposal, she is angered by his behavior toward her sister, Jane, and toward Wickham. In the film, Mark and Bridget are interrupted by Mark's law partner, Natasha, who calls him to the other room. Bridget is not able to respond to Marks confession before he leaves. She later tells her friends about what transpired. Unlike Elizabeth, Bridget shows that she does like s Mark.

The film also contains other references to *Pride and Prejudice*. For example, the publishing firm at which Bridget works is named *Pemberley Press* and Mr. Darcy lives at Pemberley estate. When Bridget stops at a mall to see her mother, she begins the scene's voiceover by saying that, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that as soon as one part

of your life starts looking up, another part falls to pieces." This is an update of the famous opening lines of the novel, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." The fact that Bridget keeps a diary ties in with the epistolary style of Austen's works. In the novel, the reader learns about key plot elements through the letters that characters send to each other. Like the novel, Jones's diary entries help the audience understand her thoughts and learn about new plot elements.

The novels of Jane Austen have inspired film adaptations throughout the century. Directors can desire to be either completely faithful with the text or to modernize the plot and characters to appeal to modern audiences. The directors of the 1972 *Emma* and the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* chose to follow closely to the novels. The directors of the 1995 *Clueless* and the 2001 *Bridget Jones's Diary* deviated from the historical telling of the novels and created films for the modern era. The characters and plot elements of the selected films have been examined and analyzed to help bridge the gap between the regency era and modern day.

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