Pictures of Perfection? Filming Jane Austen

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At first glance, the glut of films and television adaptations of Jane Austen's novels in the 1990s looks like nothing more than a massive indulgence in the chocolate-box of the Heritage Industry as we hurtle mercilessly towards the millennium and the uncertainties of the cyber-world. But there is more to it than that: each of the recent successful films is markedly different in what it takes from and what it adds to Jane Austen; each adapts the novel in order to fulfil a specific artistic agenda which meets the cultural needs of the community it envisages as audience.

Why adapt an Austen novel? The simplest answer has to be that she provides many of the ingredients that have traditionally engaged audiences: a narrative that centres on the coming to maturity of a young person; a love story; moral and ethical dilemmas satisfyingly resolved. All of this takes place among people who are recognisably like ourselves in their psychological make-up, supported by a cast of lesser characters who fill a range from the gently comic to the grotesque. Austen's world, despite the manifest differences in social structure, is that of the literate middle-class which her readers still inhabit. Further, however, there is the peculiar delight offered to readers by Austen's narratorial voice: a wit which both tells and structures the story in such a way as to draw us into intellectual complicity, a recognition of shared cleverness, emotional insight, and wisdom.

The challenge for any adaptor is to find a way of representing this voice, in order that some at least of Jane Austen's charm might magically rub off onto this new product. Each of the 1990s films approaches this issue of the Austenian 'voice' in a different way, usually by foregrounding an awareness of the fictionality of the text we are 'reading'. In film this can be done most easily through visual devices.

Nick Dear's *Persuasion* (1995)[1] has a frame-breaking moment close to the end, when Anne and Captain Wentworth kiss in Bath Street — a very theatrical (though actually real) set of pale stone colonnades — as a large and rowdy circus troupe parades down the street. The lovers remain oblivious, as in the novel; but in Austen's text, they are in the secluded Gravel Walk, and the everyday world of 'sauntering politicians, bustling housekeepers, flirting girls'[2] is what passes them by. It seems that for Dear and his director, the point needed to be made more obviously — the lovers stand outside the 'circus' of social life which the rest of the film has depicted so satirically. More interestingly but equally obtrusively, Dear's script then returns to what he sees as the real frame of the story: the historical placing of it in the male world of the Napoleonic Wars. Austen's (and Anne's) famed affection for the Navy as an institution 'who have done so much for us' (p. 49) is traduced by a heavy-handed Hollywood historicism, complete with footage from the 1984 film *The Bounty*.

Emma Thompson's script for *Sense and Sensibility* and the accompanying diary of the making of the film under Ang Lee's direction display a subtle awareness of the emotional and thematic complexity of the story, particularly in its focusing on the lives of two young women. One must regret, as Thompson herself does,[3] the cutting of Willoughby's dramatic visit to Cleveland when he believes that Marianne is dying, and the effect that his narration has on Elinor. The decision to build the sensibility and attractiveness of Colonel Brandon at the expense of Willoughby can only be justified in terms of market demand (and in response to readers' perennial complaints that Marianne

[1] Nick Dear's script of *Persuasion*, with his quasi-directorial comments, is published by Methuen Drama Books, 1996.

[2] Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1818), ed. D.W. Harding (Penguin, 1965), p. 243.

[3] '[A] wonderful scene in the novel which unfortunately interfered too much with the Brandon love story': Emma Thompson, *Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility: the Screenplay and Diaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 272.

deserves a romantically better fate than the man in the flannel waistcoat). Thompson and Lee's film has shades of Gothic[4] — for example Brandon's galloping through the night to bring Mrs Dashwood to her daughter's sick-bed; the high and receding camera angle over Marianne's bed which momentarily convinces us that she has indeed died: these intensify the central focus on the emotional torture of the two sisters in the elegant and unfeeling world of late eighteenth-century England. This is a self-conscious genre-shift, from romantic comedy — a form which Austen herself was not to perfect until *Pride and Prejudice* — to a drawing-out of the sub-text of Radcliffean quasi-melodrama which inhabits this troubling novel.

Passing over the six-hour television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* which is not usefully comparable with the film-length versions, I turn to the extraordinary phenomenon of the three versions of *Emma* which were made in 1995-6: Douglas McGrath's movie (also scripted by him); Andrew Davies and Sue Birtwistle's telemovie (by the team responsible for *Pride and Prejudice*); and Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (also scripted by her). What is it about this novel, never before adapted at film length, which appeals to three such different creative teams in the mid-1990s? Offering not just a brilliant story of the moral and emotional education of a privileged young woman, these three versions of *Emma* are also fascinated by the image of the community in which the story takes place. It is prosperous and civilised — but does it have the utopian qualities with which we tend to endow the fairytale world of romantic comedy?

[4] Patrice Hannon observes that 'Combe Magna presents a delightfully Gothic picture, and so does Cleveland, the house where Marianne's sickbed scene takes place. The gray stone, dark wood panels, flickering candles, white nightgown, unbound hair, deathly fever - the Gothic iconography contributes to making Marianne's Romanticism so much more interesting' ('Austen Novels and Austen Films: Incompatible Worlds?', *Persuasions*, 18, 1996, p. 26), though I cannot agree that this renders Marianne's personality 'more appealing' than the 'wit and restraint' of Elinor as depicted in the film.

It should go without saying that Jane Austen's novel is also a commentary on the England of the early nineteenth century. I have dealt elsewhere[5] with its engagement with contemporary British conservative politics, its francophobia, its vision of an England essentially blessed, though troubled both from within and from without — by the poor produced by the effects of the Enclosure Acts and the economic crises of the wars against France, and by the threat of Napoleon to England's sovereignty. There is no requirement that a late twentieth-century adaptor should slavishly attend to these historical manifestations of social unease, but the three films under discussion here all register a parallel impulse accompanying and underpinning the glorious comedy of Emma's emotional education. If the latter is the vehicle for the films' obvious wit, the former represents the adaptors' need to comment on the notion of the 'community' which exists to cocoon such a person.

Douglas McGrath's *Emma* (1996): 'This summer, Cupid is armed and dangerous!'

McGrath's film opens very self-consciously with a spinning papier-maché globe against a background of impossibly theatrical stars and music (by Rachel Portman) that transports the audience to the never-never land of Disney fairytales. A voice-over, which we later discover to be that of Emma's governess, played by Greta Scacchi, soothingly introduces the story: 'In a time when one's town was one's world, and the actions at a dance excited greater interest than the movement of armies, there lived a young woman who knew how this world should be run.' It is immediately clear that we are entering a fictional 'world' which has a very different ontological status from that of Jane Austen's novel, whose opening narratorial voice invites us into a complicity which ironises the heroine's belief in her control over reality: Emma 'had lived nearly

[5] Penny Gay, *Jane Austen's Emma* (Horizon Studies in Literature, Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1995).

twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.'[6]

McGrath continues as he has begun, filming the familiar story (to which he is quite faithful) in a visual style which is period chocolate-box almost to the point of parody. This is a Heritage England which only ever existed in the nostalgic imagination of Hollywood film-moguls. The settings are without exception picturesque to the point of vulgarity: all the gentry houses are huge, elaborately furnished fashionable eighteenth-century dwellings (Donwell is no longer a converted abbey, 'rambling and irregular', as Jane Austen describes it). The women are frequently shown in dresses of absurdly inappropriate décolletage with hair decked to match, as though the whole of life were a ball, and not just at the local inn either. Fruit and flowers flourish in impossible profusion, most notably in the apple-orchard scene, which offers a cartoon-like vision of 'English' fertility as Harriet and Emma discuss Harriet's friendship with the Martins. Its excess removes it a vast distance from the image of a truly well-tended and fertile English estate so carefully established in chapter 42's climactic strawberry-picking party at Donwell (a scene which is barely represented in this film, its equivalent taking place instead on Box Hill, where wild strawberries are apparently the object of the hunt — a comically inappropriate Bergman reference which was surely unintended).

The origin of this visual style of deliberate and cartoonish excess can be found in the tradition to which it is clear that McGrath is offering a *hommage*. The clue is given us in the 'archery' scene — a scene which does not occur in the original novel (though the dialogue concerning Harriet's rejection of Robert Martin does occur, unromantically indoors). Nor does the surreal garden furniture, which also bedecks other scenes in the film and which never existed outside the fevered

[6] Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816), ed. Fiona Stafford (Penguin, 1996), p. 7. Subsequent quotations refer to this edition, and are incorporated parenthetically in the text.

imagination of a 1930s Hollywood set designer. The archery tent is a direct copy of that used in a similarly invented and equally obviously metaphorical scene in Robert Z. Leonard's famous 1940 film of *Pride and Prejudice*, which starred Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson. Once this connection is made, it is clear that Jeremy Northam's young, witty and handsome Mr Knightley is modelled on Olivier's Darcy, and Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma similarly recalls the style and looks of the sparkling Greer Garson. McGrath's intention, pursued with absolute consistency throughout the film, has been to re-create that American imagining of a pre-war England of effortless romance and endless summer days. Even the poor, in McGrath's reading, are picturesque and unworrying: Emma and Harriet's visit to the house of a sick tenant is notable mostly for the invented farce of Harriet's failure to play the efficient attendant to Emma's Lady Bountiful. The whole scene is photographed in warm yellows, oranges and browns: the hovel is remarkably clean and well-equipped with the humble necessities of life; there is no pain or real distress to be drawn to our attention here — and why should there be in an admittedly fairytale world?

Where the costume designer of *Pride and Prejudice* unashamedly dressed her women in anachronistic early-Victorian crinolines, McGrath's set designer iconically evokes the same comfortingly Dickensian Merrie England. The one winter-establishing shot, before the Westons' party, is suffused with gentle snow and a warm glow from the solid houses; a snatch of 'Deck the Halls' is heard on the sound track. This generalising and deliberately romantic perspective on Austen's novel has consequences in much of the characterisation. If Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma is undoubtedly handsome, clever and rich, so too is Jeremy Northam's Mr Knightley. The age difference between the two is minimised, and thus the romance is a foregone conclusion from the first scene; whereas in the novel it perhaps requires a more careful reading than we generally give opening chapters to realise that Austen is setting up Mr Knightley as Emma's future partner — a person who, unlike her father, can 'meet her in conversation, rational or

playful' (p. 8). They flirt so naturally that Frank Churchill, who first appears in a crass invented scene of ungentlemanly impudence, never has a chance to attract Emma's sexual interest. Churchill's untrustworthiness is further heavily signalled by his hair, a long ginger mop which has clearly never been near a London hairdresser. The semiotic here is the traditional theatre one: the red-haired man is not to be trusted — he is a Judas-figure, a trickster. Jane Fairfax is also easily readable as the woman with a mystery, with her dark hair and low voice, but McGrath never allows us to glimpse a hint of her passion for Frank — we do not catch, as Emma does, 'a smile of secret delight' (p. 201), nor do we see anything of her tendency to bodily suffering which marks her in Austen's text as a potentially tragic figure in contrast with Emma who is always 'the picture of health' (p. 34).

McGrath's winding-up of Emma's love story is, once again, pure pre-war Hollywood romance. He rewrites Emma's quasi-stream of consciousness in this section so as to provide her with a language more comic and sentimental, less intellectually troubled. After hearing Harriet's revelation of her hopes, Emma runs off to Mrs Weston to tell her, 'I love him, so dearly, so greatly', which segues into her declaration 'He must marry no-one but me!', with Mrs Weston as the affectionately amused commentator. We are then treated to a comic Dear Diary scene: 'I tried not to think about him...', followed, with some stylistic incongruity, by a prayer scene. In the parish church, Emma prays (in a clichéd visual image drawn from Roman Catholicism rather than the restrained pieties of the Church of England), 'Let him go on as he has always done...'. This is a grave misrepresentation of Austen's attitude to religion: her own prayers, and her use of prayer for her heroines in moments of strong emotion, suggest that she sees prayer as an opportunity for reflection, repentance, or gratitude; *never* to ask God for personal favours. But Hollywood romance relies on the myth of a personally benevolent God — or Good Fairy, who as Emma comes home from her visit to the church, allows her literally to bump into Mr Knightley.

McGrath attempts to fill in the comic awkwardnesses of the proposal scene with a discussion of Emma's and Mr Knightley's friendship. But his 'Marry me, my wonderful darling friend' is an extremely anachronistic and unidiomatic line; moreover it is dispiritingly reductive of Mr Knightley's own embarrassment: 'Tell me, ... have I no chance of ever succeeding?' (p. 352). After the lushly-framed conclusion to the scene (the summer countryside, the lovers finally in embrace in long-shot), Scacchi's voice-over takes us quickly through the various stages of the dénouement, though unfortunately omitting the all-important poultry thieves. The amused tones of a mature observer of Emma's story do come close to Austen's narratorial voice at this point. And Juliet Stevenson's wonderfully vulgar Mrs Elton speaks her intrusive last lines to the camera in just the same way as she interrupts the final paragraph of Austen's text. The camera pans away from the wedding scene to a painted backdrop on which are superimposed the credits: we are once again reminded of the fictionality of the romance we have been enjoying. The faux-naif painted church and portraits of the happy couples represent an untroubled Merrie England; the soft tones of harp and strings — music that is neither recognisably modern nor even pastiche eighteenth-century — restfully accompany the credits. McGrath has offered the late-twentieth-century audience a time trip — not to the world of Regency England but to that of the Hollywood 'period comedy, romance' (the classification on the video box) in its glory days, before the anxieties of a post-war America had manifested themselves.

Andrew Davies and Sue Birtwistle, ITV, 1996

Following the huge success of their television serial adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Davies and Birtwistle[7] produced a two-

[7] Throughout this section I refer to the film as principally the work of Andrew Davies, though it was directed by Diarmuid Lawrence. It is clear from the shooting script that Davies had the predominant artistic input. See

hour version of *Emma* as a film for television. Without the extravagant budget of *Pride and Prejudice* — and also because *Emma* insists upon the relatively immobility of its protagonists in their country village ('fixed, so absolutely fixed', p. 119) — Davies dispensed with the expensive ambience-establishing scenes of the serial and opted for a tight concentration on situation and dialogue. This results in a film which uses more of Austen's dialogue than McGrath's does, and allows room to represent visually the hints offered to the attentive reader about the relationship of Jane and Frank. We glimpse them, for example, springing apart as Emma enters the Bates's house; we witness Jane's smile of secret delight in the piano-playing scene at the Bates's; the camera frequently has both in shot though only one in close focus. Director Diarmuid Lawrence's camera works subliminally to convince us that there is something between Jane and Frank, just as the novel does. Further, Jane is allowed a presence in the film-text independent of Emma's view of her: she is given her full speech about 'offices for the sale ... of human intellect' (p. 247); her persecution by Mrs Elton is strongly rendered; and there is a striking shot of her, towards the end, 'wandering about the meadows, at some distance from Highbury' (p. 322) weeping like the tragic heroine she potentially is.

Emma is played by Kate Beckinsale, Mr Knightley by Mark Strong. Their age difference is marked, with Strong looking well over forty (and prone to gloom and short temper, rather more like his brother than the original text suggests). Beckinsale's Emma is pretty, bossy, and almost child-like; only Harriet (Samantha Morton), short, blonde and blue-eyed, looks more naive. Where McGrath's film made too easy the romance between Emma and Mr Knightley, this casting makes it almost impossible to believe. This is unfortunate, as most of the rest of the casting is excellent, particularly Prunella Scales's Miss Bates — a much more convincing and touching portrait than the too-young Sophie Thompson could manage for McGrath.

Sue Birtwistle and Susie Conklin, *The Making of Jane Austen's Emma* (Penguin, 1996).

Emma's fertile imagination is represented wittily by fantasy sequences, usually starring Harriet, of romantic encounters, shot in soft focus with extravagant gestures and accoutrements — scenes that could conceivably have been found on the cutting-room floor of McGrath's editing suite. The film thereby suggests that Emma is not as firmly in control of the real world as she likes to think, and that emotionally she is little more than an adolescent. But Davies has a wider agenda than that of charting the emotional adventures of the eponymous protagonist: he is much more interested in representing the historical moment of the novel's writing.

Settings (and indeed costumes) are well-researched and accurate to the period of approximately 1815. Like Nick Dear in *Persuasion*, Davies is determined that the audience shall have the wider (i.e. male-oriented) historical context of the novel spelt out very clearly. So his film both opens and closes with a violent scene of the attack on the hen-house — not as a gesture of comic deconstruction of the conveniences of romance, but as a stern reminder of the realities of class conflict that surrounded the small world of Austen's novel. On several occasions we are shown servants labouring to support the easy lifestyles of the gentry; most notably in the strawberry-picking scene, where uniformed and bewigged footmen move cushions for the ladies to kneel on as they indolently pluck the fruit (the focus is rightly on Mrs Elton in this scene). Against these images of unthinking exploitation Davies constructs that of the good landowner, Mr Knightley, who is seen as the story draws to its close in a shot which exactly reproduces George Stubbs's painting of 1794, a scene of harmony between landowner and workers on a quintessentially English summer day.[8] (This scene

[8] 'Donwell Abbey in the background. Knightley looking at his men harvesting ... the hay being hoisted high, natural rhythms, the poetry of work, all that...' (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma,* p. 151). Davies's flippancy does not disguise his profound desire that this conservative image should be presented in all its seductive power. Elsewhere in the script he registers his discomfort at finding himself telling such a reactionary story with such pleasure: 'Respectful villagers on the road are raising their hats. Emma acknowledges them graciously too, rather

perhaps represents Emma's patriotic musings in chapter 42 at Donwell: 'It was a sweet view, sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive' (p. 297); it is significant, though unfortunate, that Davies should choose to deprive her of this moment of vision, and replace it with a patriarchal perspective.)

George Stubbs, 'The Reapers', 1794

Davies's longest invented scene is a gratuitous spelling-out of what he takes to be the political perspective of the novel. The terms in which he claims the scene is merely artistic convenience are significant:

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like royalty ... when they've passed, the villagers [as you or I might] look at each other, as though to say 'All right for them.'.... Now they're going past a couple of ramshackle cottages of extraordinary squalor. A couple of ragged barefoot children have come out to gawp at them.' (*The Making*, p. 79) Little of this social commentary comes through in the film at this point: it is generalised 'period' detail only.

> I wondered if it wouldn't be possible to think of some kind of event, other than a wedding, which would bring all the characters together and tie up all the loose ends. I then imagined a kind of harvest supper, like in Hardy's or Tolstoy's novels — all that lovely stuff of bringing the harvest home and the haymakers and the good gentleman farmer.... We show Knightley as an ideal old-fashioned landowner who wanted to share and celebrate with his tenants.... Though England didn't have a revolution, I think it must have been quite a narrow thing. The Georgians depended quite a lot on the Knightleys of this world, though few were probably as enlightened as he was.... I wanted to do something in the screenplay that gave a sense of this wholeness in the community.[9]

This scene, a combination of harvest festival and engagement party, takes place at Donwell: hearty servants prepare the harvest supper, and all, gentry and workers alike, mingle in a medieval great hall aglow with russet and gold colourings. Mr Knightley makes a speech pointing out that although he is moving to Hartfield, 'There will be stability, there will be continuation' — idioms more redolent of Leavis and Raymond Williams than of an early nineteenth-century gentleman. In such a utopian atmosphere, it is natural that Emma's snobbery towards the Martins should dissolve — she is heard inviting Harriet and her new family to visit her. Only the perennially unsettled Frank Churchill is unredeemed: Davies makes good use of his final lines in the novel, where he speaks of Jane's beauty as a commodity that he has bought and will decorate with the family jewels.

This invented scene represents a reading generated by the literary criticism fashionable in Davies's undergraduate days: a view of the classic English novel as grounded on a vision of the regenerative powers of the country. Davies shies away from the romantic image of personal happiness presented by the novel's last paragraph: the wedding, even though Austen famously deconstructs that sentimental moment with Mrs Elton's intrusions about 'very little white lace'. The love scene between

[9] Andrew Davies, *The Making*, pp. 57-8.

Emma and Mr Knightley, however, still has to be played, and Davies uses it to expand his literary-critical reading of the novel, here in the direction of an emphasis on the possibly perverse nature of the relationship. Emma's reply to Mr Knightley's anxious query if she might one day return his feelings is, 'I can — I do return them — I do love you. I believe I've always loved you.' He then says, 'I held you in my arms when you were three weeks old,' to which she pertly replies, 'Do you like me as much as you did then?' This leads to a chaste kiss; though Davies had 'wanted a bedroom scene .... There's a bit of a question mark about Emma right the way through the whole thing, which is why I wanted a bed scene ... you do sort of wonder whether she's grasped what all this boys and girls stuff is about'.[10] Fortunately Birtwistle vetoed the idea, so that viewers were not subjected to the vulgar signalling of things sexual which Davies inserted into *Pride and Prejudice* via Darcy's watery exploits. Instead he is forced to work with some hints from Jane Austen: in the scene in which they explain their plans to Mr Woodhouse, Emma says 'We see him every day, but we are alone at night,' and the lovers exchange looks fraught with sexual awareness.

The film's last image is the same as its first: night, the anonymous chicken-thieves caught on a hand-held (security?) camera. Davies's film is not, finally, a romance: it is more concerned to register both nostalgia and anxiety about the England in which Austen's novel is so firmly set — an England which is the ancestor of the Thatcherite environment in which the film was made, a world in which there are undoubtedly two nations, the articulate rich and the voiceless poor.

Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*, 1995

[10] Interview, *Radio Times*, 23-29 November 1996. Davies goes on to say, 'At one point in the novel he says he thinks he's been in love with her since she was about 13, and you think *hello, hello*, because he would have been a bloke of about 30 then.' The fact that Mr Knightley waited honourably to act on his attraction till Emma was 21 seems to have bypassed Davies's notice.

For Cher, the Emma-like but all-American girl of Heckerling's witty modernisation of the story, the poor are at the very limit of her intellectual imagination: when she decides to turn over a new leaf and become socially-conscious, late in the film, she donates her skis to a disaster relief fund with the justification, 'Some people lost all their belongings: don't you think that includes athletic equipment?' The film's Mr Knightley figure, Cher's ex-stepbrother Josh is, however, genuinely informed about and interested in the world's human problems (particularly environmental issues, a nice updating of Mr Knightley as good landowner), and we are led to feel that Cher's post-film relationship with him will eventually put her good-hearted but ignorant charitable impulses on the right course. She is, after all, still only a schoolgirl in an extremely privileged environment.

One of the many strengths of Heckerling's adaptation of *Emma* is its neat sidestepping of the issue of how to present the past to a modern audience. Neither a period romance nor a historical drama, *Clueless* is to the modern audience what *Emma* was to its contemporaries: the story of a privileged young woman's moral and emotional education, with assistance from a number of other cleverly observed social types. Because of America's cultural dominance in world film and television, Cher's Beverly Hills life is instantly recognisable as 'a modern equivalent of the codified social conditions that prevail in Highbury'[11] — Austen's 'three or four families in a country village', 1990s-style. Its foibles and solipsistic excesses are affectionately satirised in what is clearly going to be an enjoyable romantic comedy.

Unhampered by the need to present a seductive image of the past, Heckerling is able to produce a subtle equivalent of Austen's ironical narrative voice. The film is 'narrated' by Alicia Silverstone's Cher, in voice-over, thus presenting her point of view as primary, while at the same time the visual

11 Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*, 5 August 1996.

material — the work of the true narrator, the camera — provides the ironic contrast of reality in a complicity with the viewer who, it is implied, is neither as solipsistically young nor as absurdly privileged as Cher. For example, in the long opening sequence which establishes Cher's status as excessively 'handsome, clever and rich', and in affectionate control of her hypochondriacal widowed father, Cher announces 'I lead a *way* normal life'. She shows us a shot of her house — a mansion in cod-eighteenth-century style, with the enthusiastic comment, 'Isn't it great, a classic — the columns date all the way back to 1972.'

On the other hand Cher is not stupid; she has a natural verbal facility and wit, and she makes creative use of the education she has managed to get: arguing her way from grades of C+ to A-; setting up the teachers' romance (the equivalent of 'poor Miss Taylor' and Mr Weston) with lines from a Shakespeare sonnet lifted, as she proudly points out, from Cliff's Notes. Her cultural experience of Shakespeare also stands her in good stead when she is able to put down a complacent college girl by pointing out that 'To thine own self be true' is not Hamlet's line but 'that Polonius guy.... I remember Mel Gibson accurately and he didn't say that.' Emma's own self-educative projects have the same random quality. And like Emma, Cher has imagination and a desire to do 'something good for humanity': it is just that her Beverly Hills rich-girl life offers so few opportunities (though her care for her father is strongly emphasised in the film).

Perhaps the chief pleasure offered to the adult audience of this film is an intellectual delight in spotting the 'clues' to Austen's originary story. Heckerling does not mention the novel at any point in the film, including the credits; but the more it is viewed the more subtle parallels are discovered — in the same way that Austen's text invites us into a knowledgeable re-reading. For example, the Frank Churchill figure is called Christian — which sets off fantasies in the schoolgirl fans of film star Christian Slater (who *is* mentioned), but which also has the same misleading resonance as *Church*-ill has for Emma

(and her readers). Frank and Christian both have secret sex lives — the clues are there for us to see, but Emma/Cher doesn't. In the film, there would be no point in having Christian secretly in love with a girl, since heterosexuality is quite uncircumscribed in Cher's social world; but to have him a closeted homosexual is to make a point about the difficulties still surrounding the free expression of young people's desires. Much is made in the film of Cher's virginity — she is waiting for the 'right person', and is considered to be cold and inexperienced by her peers: 'Kitty, a fair but frozen maid' *redeviva*. It is Josh, her college-student ex-stepbrother — thus a quasi-relative who has known her for a good deal of her life — who gently educates her into emotional growth, by setting an example of concern for the underprivileged and by 'lecturing' her in ways that no-one else in her world would dare to. Cher discovers true love through the same sort of emotional roller-coaster that Emma does, fearing that after all Josh (played by Paul Rudd) has fallen for her protegée Tai. The film ends with a wedding — not *her* wedding, as Cher scornfully points out: she is still at school and that grown-up world is yet to be encountered. There are many more careers for women, uses for their abundant energy, than marriage to a good man. Significantly, the wedding is that of the two hard-working middle-aged schoolteachers whose romance Cher and her friend Dionne had engineered.

Amy Heckerling's film has no agenda (as the films of the male scriptwriters have) beyond its focus on the emotional and spiritual education of a privileged young woman, depicted via the genre of comedy. Though Cher may be clueless, she is 'dear' to us (just as Emma is 'two letters [that] express perfection', p. 306) because of her charm, wit, and vitality. Further, the audience, through attention to the visual and narrative details of the film, is encouraged to be anything but clueless; we are invited to enjoy the self-reflexive pleasure in the artist's craft that mature or second-time readers take in the novel. Jane Austen might have been astonished at this translation of her story to the bold New World and a society which reproduces the complacent superiority of the landed

classes in early nineteenth-century England — but I do not think she would have been shocked by the result.