

From Classical into Modern: The Adaptations of Jane Austen’s Emma And Pride And Prejudice.

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to show how the classical works of Jane Austen, namely Emma and Pride and Prejudice were adapted to the screen in such a way that modern concepts like modern day language, slangs, zombies, and the like is widely showcased. The scriptwriters had a hard time trying to incorporate all these modern – day concepts without losing the original essence of the classic. Emma was published in the late 1815 or early 1816. This was adapted to the 1995 movie Clueless by Amy Heckerling; a 20th century romance – drama about college education, college students using mobile phones, etc. In the other work, zombies have taken over a picturesque English countryside. The task of putting an end to the living dead falls to Mr. Darcy, a skilled zombie killer, and martial arts prodigy Elizabeth Bennet. Both the movies showcased a different side of the classic; yet sticking to the original story. Even when zombies, martial arts, etc. are entirely new concepts as far as the original novel is considered, all these ideas were incorporated into the movie in such a way that it doesn’t look awkward at all; it appears as an inevitable part of the movie.

Keywords: *Jane Austen, adaptation, classical literature, modern – day changes.*

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Amy Heckerling presented to the public one of the most beautiful movies, a contemporary period romance-comedy film, Clueless, which was an adaptation of the classical masterpiece of Jane Austen, the novel titled Emma. The movie came out in 1995, but was a 20th century adaptation of the novel, which was first published in December 1815. This is actually a very effective means to introduce a literary classic to the contemporary youngsters; especially the fashionable youth. The day – to – day communication in the movie includes a lot of usual phrases that the teenage or youth makes use of, like “whatever,” “totally buggin,” “as if!” etc.

Jane Austen describes in detail about youthful, pride, arrogance, romance and romantic misunderstandings in her novel Emma, which was first published in December 1815, even though its cover page carries 1816 as its year of publication. It is set in the fictional country village of Highbury and deals with the relationships and misunderstandings between the characters from a small number of families. Emma is a comedy of manners, and depicts issues of marriage, sex, age, and social status as is evident in most of the novels by Austen. She is a master in depicting the plight of the fragile women of the Georgian – Regency England, and of course, this novel is not different from the others.

As Austen’s novel famously begins: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.” (Emma, pp.3)

There were many positive reviews about the novel than many of Austen’s other works. Early reviews of Emma were generally favourable, and were more numerous than those of any other of Austen's novels. One important review that appeared anonymously in March 1816 in the Quarterly Review, although the date of the journal was October 1815 is:

The author is already known to the public by the two novels announced in her title page, and both, the last especially, attracted, with justice, an attention from the public far superior to what is granted to the ephemeral productions which supply the regular demand of watering- places and circulating libraries. They

belong to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel...Emma has even less story than either of the preceding novels...The author's knowledge of the world, and the peculiar tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognize, reminds us something of the merits of the Flemish school of painting. The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand: but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision which delights the reader. (www.reviewsonemma.com)

In this movie, we can see the transformation of the wealthy Emma Woodhouse of the Regency-era to the 16-year-old valley girl, Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone). She is very popular among her schoolmates at Beverly Hills high school. She too has the same conceited nature and snobbish attitude as Austen's original protagonist. Silverstone's portrayal of the vain, blemished and level-headed Cher is appealing to the viewers and helps to develop a positive attitude towards the character.

A lot of current props like the use of cell phones instead of letters for the sake of communication, miniskirts instead of corsets of the earlier period, her unwillingness to 'date' high school boys, and the like are highly innovative as well as sticks to the original situations in the novel. Similarly, the male lead of the novel, Mr. Knightly, here appears as the 'intellectual boy' named Josh, who is the sneaky, former step-brother of Cher. According to some of the critics,

Ms Heckerling does not just forgive, she obviously adores Cher, just as Austen adored Emma. The filmmaker must even have attended night classes in Beverlyspeak to get the insane lingo right. Heckerling's sharp eye for the wallpaper of high school life -- a background strewn with nose-job bandages, preternaturally baggy pants, cell phones -- and her sharp screenwriter's ear for teen-speak make *Clueless* rich, affectionate fun. (www.rottentomatoes.com/m/clueless)

Even when *Clueless* exclude elements like the picnic at Box Hill, Mr. Knightly sending the pianoforte to Ms. Jane Fairfax, etc. elements of satire and witty dialogues that Austen makes use of in her work to satirize the landed gentry can be seen in this movie also, where the boredom and luxurious lives of spoiled rich kids are showcased. With the 'punch dialogues' and ironical situations Heckerling was able to portray that witticism that Austen tried to convey through her original work. *Clueless* is the best movie adaptation of *Emma* because even when it is a loose adaptation, it sticks on to the basic theme or idea that Austen is trying to express; or in other words, even when the script transforms many aspects of the novel, it still sticks on to the original concept as well as the characters, even though they appear in a slightly modified manner. Some other critics are of the opinion that

One might not expect an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* to be just so... pop. *Clueless* is exuberant, funny, loving, and delights in the possibilities of its title. Writer-director Amy Heckerling has pulled off an amazing sleight-of-hand by turning a story full of vacuous, overindulged California teen-agers into a light-hearted comedy of manners. (www.rottentomatoes.com/m/clueless)

Clueless makes use of a close, third person narrative, in order to bring out or pull out the narcissism that is evident in Silverstone's character, Cher.

More than any other *Emma* adaptation, *Clueless* nails the central appeal of Austen's difficult character by embracing her devastatingly narrow point of view. And that's part of the pleasure of Heckerling's adaptation, too: It represents a heroine who seems like she was basically born yesterday. In the 1990s, Cher Horowitz was the only modern-day Austen heroine who was, well, actually modern. Recall Cher's voiceover while walking up to her house for the first time: "Isn't my house classic? The columns date all the way back to 1972." And her next line after entering the front parlor, which displays a massive portrait of her mother in 1970s dress: "Wasn't my mom a total Betty? She died when I was young—a freak accident during a routine liposuction." (www.rottentomatoes.com)

Clueless is full of contemporary cultural references, and it clearly sticks on to exhibit in detail the cultural preferences and behaviours of the wealthy, especially the lifestyles of those of the 1990s LA.

In doing so, it remains surprisingly true to Austen's novels themselves, which focus largely on England's high-bourgeois society, and especially *Emma*, which features Austen's richest heroine by far. As critics from postcolonial scholar Edward Said to Marxist critic Raymond Williams have noted, world history in Jane Austen's novels largely take place offstage.

Austen's fiction doesn't document Britain's colonial expansion per se, though it does express the material consequences of its imperial takeover: Think of the snuff box in *Emma*, the Indian shawls from *Mansfield Park*, or anytime someone describes property (acres, estates, parks) or imported goods (muslin, mahogany). Austen excels at depicting a certain milieu of monied elites, yet "money of other kinds, from the trading houses, from the colonial plantations, has no visual equivalent..." (Williams, www.viciouscircle.com)

In spite of being in entirely different eras, these are so similar in their capability to create a world of their own that is in a way similar to each other. The adaptations were able to draw the viewers out from the world of the novel to the mid-nineties successfully.

The film was well received by critics. Review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes gives it a score of 81% based on reviews from 115 critics, with an average rating of 6.8/10. The site's critical consensus reads:

"A funny and clever reshaping of *Emma*, *Clueless* offers a soft satire that pokes as much fun at teen films as it does at the Beverly Hills glitterati." On Metacritic, the film has a 68 out of 100 rating based on 18 reviews, which indicates "generally favorable reviews". (www.rottentomatoes.com)

In short, we can say that Amy Heckerling has produced an entirely new work by adapting the unquestionably classical novel, *Emma*, into the movie *Clueless*, which is both entertaining as well as relatable to the modern audience or viewers. The characters, the plot, the settings and even the situations were changed so that the modern viewers could assimilate all of these without any question or doubt.

Although both the novel as well as the adaptation represented or belonged to an entirely different cultural milieu, one to the 18th century English society and the other to the 20th century Los Angeles high school scenario, the theme and concepts showcased are the same.

"*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*" is an action - comedy horror, based on Seth Grahame-Smith's 2009 novel of the same name, which parodies the 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. The film is directed by Burr Steers, who wrote the adapted screenplay, and stars Lily James, Sam Riley, Jack Huston, Bella Heathcote, Douglas Booth, Matt Smith, Charles Dance, and Lena Headey. The film "*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*" differ from the other retelling in a number of aspects. Although the movie is the adaptation of a parody novel. The core theme has been retained. The adaptation has brilliantly laid out in the time and space. The aspects, which is different from the classical text, is to be noted.

According to the critic Bernard Boo the movie is something that requires more of a balance "there's a balance to be struck between respecting the integrity of *Pride and Prejudice* while having fun with the wacky experiment of throwing zombies into the mix, and Steers' attempt is decidedly wobbly". Another critic Allen Adams has opined that "it's a fun movie that lends a wonderfully weird new energy to a literary classic".

The portrayal of zombies is the newest adaptation to the classical text. Zombie is often termed as an undead creature which crawls for human flesh. Apart from the traditional concept of evil, *Zombies* are often less associated with supernatural elements. Vampires and Werewolves are depicted with supernatural capabilities and peculiarities. The normal depiction of zombie is more or less like an illness. This illness is contagious in nature so that it will spread at a quick pace. The nature of a zombie is that it craves for human brain and flesh. The only way to exterminate a zombie is to torch it alive or decapitate it. The amputated body part of a zombie will be alive. There has been a whole season of zombie-dominated movies. The common theme of these zombie apocalypse movies are the survival of human race in middle of a zombie infested world.

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies are no different from these set of movies. The time and space in the movie is important when it comes to adaptation. The parody novel does not delineate from both time and space. It was set in the early 19th century England. The typical of the backdrop. The language and costume equate with time and space. *Zombies* are also presented as an Alter ego of every human being. England was under the attack of the zombies. Zombie invasion was stopped into the suburbs of London by digging a deeper canal with bridges. A buffer zone called "in between" acts as no man's land between the human inhabitation and zombie infested lands. *Zombies* are violent and hungry. They try to raze down the human inhabitation by infesting the others. Apart from the classical rendering of *Zombies* there is a reference to the civilized zombies in the movie. Wickham leads Elizabeth to a new group of zombies who are tend to be nonviolent and civilized. Wickham convinces that *Zombies* can coexist with everyone. These new type of zombies feed on pig's brain rather than human brain. It was shown that they are keeping their behaviour by acting normal. In the scene, it was shown that the zombies are attending a mass at the St. Lazarus church. St Lazar is also a symbolism of the undead. According to the gospel of John. Jesus restored Lazarus of Bethany after four days of his death. The name Lazarus is frequently used in science and popular culture in reference to apparent restoration to life; for example, the scientific term Lazarus taxon denotes organisms that reappear in the fossil record after a period of apparent extinction. There are also numerous literary uses of the term. The holy Eucharist is celebrated with Pig's blood instead of wine followed by prays to St. Lazarus. A mythical backdrop is given to the *Zombies*.

Seth Grahame-Smith's novel brings a modern classic bang up to date while always maintaining respect for the original material, and it looks as though this adaptation will do it justice [...] Makes the best of its one joke, the mashup of Austen romantic fiction with zombie realism, deftly (and ridiculously) blending the sublime with the ultraviolent. (www.rottentomatoes.com)

The gender roles in the movie differ considerably from the classical text. The Bennet sisters are an exception from the version of the classical text which satisfies the womanly attributes and requirements of the early 19th century England. The five Bennet sisters are trained in martial arts from china. Learning martial arts from the orient is often shown as mechanism of defending the zombie invasion. The Bennet sisters exhibit courage and valour in hunting zombies. Their well-mannered attributes are also protruding in the film. They often shown as shifting from a comfort zone to conflict zone where they exhibit praiseworthy combat against undead. Mr. Darcy who had prejudice against Elizabeth. However, was flattered with her warrior skills. He quickly changes his mind and asks her hand in marriage. Darcy himself have been trained in Japan. The overall

setup of the movie is still patriarchal. The Bennet household is ruled by its patriarch Mr. Bennet. However, Mr. Bennet is shown as a fluid character who never stand in the way of his daughters. Mrs. Bennet on the other hand is always worried about the marriage proposals of her daughters. The requirement of a male heir to inherit the property is prompting her to search for grooms. She even arranges her daughters at Bingley's ball with the intention of finding a groom. However, due to some of the comments made by Mrs. Bennet drunk, Mr. Darcy forbids his friend Bingley from having a relationship with Jane. This infuriates Elizabeth. Here the choice of the woman is not given importance although Jane and Bingley like each other. The patriarchal law setup has always favoured men. Parson Collins, a clergyman and cousin to the Bennet sisters proposes each one of sisters. However, all of them rejects him owing to his comical appearance. When the sisters were off to fight the zombies they are shown in warrior suits differ from the heavy women attires, which would be uncomfortable in fighting with zombies.

The popular culture and the concept of zombies are incorporated into the filmic adaptation of classical text. The alignment of the concept of Zombie is brilliantly laid out with the apt time and space. The adaptation normally caters to the interest of the younger audience. Infusing popular culture is an important mechanism in attracting the contemporary audience. The current socio political trend have to be taken into consideration while analysing the adaptation. Movie being an art with widespread audience have the capability of propagating classical text through a different version. Both "Clueless" and "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" are the varied exemplifications of modern adaptations of an established literary canon.

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