

NOTE: This episode includes audio from the film *Clueless*. The segments in *italics* are audio clips from the film. They are also separated from the main discussion with three asterisks: ***

Episode 1.4 “Ugh, As If!” Jane Austen’s Emma and Clueless (pt. 1)

Angourie Rice

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that this work was developed and presented on the unceded territory of the Lenape people. I wish to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Hello everyone and welcome to The Community Library: a podcast, book club and discussion space. I’m your host, Angourie Rice.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Welcome back to another episode, everyone. This month’s theme has been book to film adaptations, and this is actually going to be the last episode on that theme! This week we're going out with a bang, and we'll be discussing *Emma* by Jane Austen, in comparison with the 1995 film adaptation *Clueless*.

Cher

Ugh, as if!

Angourie (host)

So, *Emma* is one of my favourite books of all time, and *Clueless* is one of my favourite films, so I'm very excited to be talking about these two texts today. I must admit that planning for this episode was quite hard, um, there's a lot to talk about, I've tried to be as succinct as possible – but, after much um-ing and ah-ing and cutting and writing and planning and all of that, I’ve decided that this episode is actually going to be split into two parts. Um, the second part of this episode is going to come out tomorrow, so you don’t have to wait very long! Make sure you tune in tomorrow for the rest of the discussion. It was also difficult because I love both this book and this film so much that I really wanted to do it justice, you know? So, hopefully you enjoy this episode. Let’s not waste any more precious time, without further ado, let's get into the episode.

Today we’re talking about *Emma* by Jane Austen, which was published in 1815, and *Clueless*, which was written and directed by Amy Heckerling, and released in 1995. So, these two texts are 180 years apart, but they are essentially the same, just different formats of the same story. *Emma*

follows the story of Emma Woodhouse, a young, rich and single woman who fancies herself a matchmaker, but has no interest in marrying herself. But as Emma's marriage plans for her friend Harriet become complicated, she begins to question her past behaviour. *Clueless* follows a young, rich and single high-schooler Cher Horowitz. When new girl Tai arrives at school, Cher decides to take her on as a protégée and educate her in becoming popular in high school. Drama – and, of course, fabulous outfits – ensue. So, for those of you who haven't read the book or seen the film, obviously there are gonna be tons of spoilers ahead. But before we go into character comparisons, I wanna talk about the context in which each of these texts was created.

So, Jane Austen first began writing *Emma* in 1814, when she was 38 years old. At this time, she had already published three other works: *Sense and Sensibility* which was published in 1811, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and *Mansfield Park* (1814). *Emma* was the last of her works to be published while she was still alive – Jane Austen unfortunately died in 1816. So, at this time, Jane Austen's name was not attached to her work. Legally, women did not have the power to sign publishing contracts, so, like most women at the time, Austen published her books anonymously. *Sense and Sensibility* was the first of her novels to be published, and was simply credited as being written, quote: “By a Lady”, end quote. After the success of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* was credited to, quote: “The Author of *Sense and Sensibility*”, end quote. The first edition of *Emma* was credited to, quote: “The Author of *Pride and Prejudice*.” You can see how this pattern went on. So, nobody knew that Jane Austen was the author behind these works until after her death, and her brother, Henry, published her two remaining novels – *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* – and credited his sister, Jane, as the author. In Jane Austen's time, it was very rare for a woman to be a full-time writer. Writing was considered kind of a “sweet hobby” for women, rather than a serious profession. The expected job for a woman was being a wife and a mother. Jane Austen never married, and never had any children. So her identity and just how she existed in the world was an act of rebellion: she was a bachelorette who wrote novels. And not only that, but her novels themselves critiqued the restrictions of high society, and the ways in which women were expected to marry to improve their social standing and economic security.

Clueless was released in 1995 and was written and directed by Amy Heckerling, and produced and distributed by Paramount. Apparently Amy Heckerling was approached by Paramount to write a new teen film, and she remembered a novel that she had loved when she was a teenager: Jane Austen's *Emma*. So, she decided to adapt the story into a modern-day setting in California. The film was released in the summer of 1995, the same year as *Sense and Sensibility* with Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet. Gwyneth Paltrow's true adaptation of *Emma* was released just a year later in 1996. It seemed to be the time of historically accurate Jane Austen adaptations. I mean, you had *Sense and Sensibility* in 1995, the BBC did a *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries in 1995, then you had *Emma* in 1996, and *Mansfield Park* in 1999. Also in the 90s and early 2000s, the trend seemed to be adapting classic novels and plays into teen films. For example, films like Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* which came out in 1996, or *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), *Cruel Intentions*, also 1999, *O* (2001) and, a little later, *She's the Man* (2006). While I was researching this it made me wonder: why this was a trend? I mean, adapting classic stories into modern contexts is hardly a new idea: the one that comes to my mind first is *Romeo and Juliet*. From gangs in West Side New York to talking gnomes living in rival back gardens, that story has been adapted into countless modern contexts. After doing much research, I believe that *Clueless* was the first modern interpretation of a Jane Austen text. Before I continue with this argument, I should put a little asterisk here and say that a Huffington Post article credited the film *Metropolitan* (1990), as an adaptation of *Mansfield*

Park, however even the author of the article says it, quote: "relies on more thematic parallels", end quote, rather than, quote "adhering to the plot", end quote. I haven't seen the film myself, but I watched the trailer and the plot appears to differ quite substantially to that of *Mansfield Park*. Also, the tone is quite different to the genre of teen and young adult films that I'm looking at here, so for these reasons, I have chosen to exclude it, but I thought I should mention it just in case anyone found this article and pointed it out. I see it, but I'm ignoring it. So, *Metropolitan* aside, Amy Heckerling was also a pioneer in her field, and, I think, has inspired many other writers and film-makers to follow in her footsteps. After *Clueless*, we got many more modern adaptations of Jane Austen's works. Films like *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), both based on *Pride and Prejudice*, and *From Prada to Nada* (2011), based on *Sense and Sensibility*. So I like the idea that the creators of these works were both pioneers in their field, and both coming up with new and interesting ways to tell stories that people hadn't really been paying attention to before.

Jane Austen's novels were well-liked, both by critics and by the general public. But in the critics' reviews, which were almost always written by men in that time, there is a certain air of that "good for a woman" attitude. In a review of *Emma* from 1815, Sir Walter Scott writes, quote: "The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand: but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision that delights the reader." End quote. So I think this quote is interesting, because it is quite complimentary, but it also downplays her cleverness and wit. And, to me, this suggests that though her novels were widely acclaimed, it seems as though it was treated as "chick-lit". Compared to later novelists like Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Mark Twain, Austen's work was seen as restrained and boring with not enough grandeur, action or adventure. But I think this is what makes her work so fascinating, and also what makes her a pioneer for future female writers. Austen didn't write like men wrote. She knew that style and that form would not work for her, because it had been created by thousands of men over thousands of years. Instead, she told her stories in a different way, with different themes and different sentence structure and different narratives. I'm gonna quote one of my favourite essays from Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own*, here. I've switched around the sentence order of this quote a bit to make it make sense, but I'll, um, have the full quote listed in the show notes if you wanna check it out. Quote: "A book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades of domes. And this shape too has been made by men out of their own needs for their own uses. [...] It was a sentence that was unsuited for a woman's use. [...] Jane Austen looked at it and laughed at it and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use and never departed from it." End quote. And that is why I find Jane Austen's writing so wonderful, especially when you consider the context in which it was written. It was kind of this act of rebellion. And it also explains why a lot of the critics said it was good, but still dismissed it as, quote: "chick-lit". I hate that term – I hate that term so much, but I'm using it here for the sake of an argument. It was dismissed because she didn't write in the style that had, over thousands of years, been decided as "good", if not "best".

So in terms of how *Clueless* was reviewed and received in the media: it grossed 10 million USD on its opening weekend, putting it in second place behind *Apollo 13*, which came out the same year. Overall it grossed 56 million USD worldwide, which was quite unexpected for a film of this genre and audience. It's Certified Fresh on Rotten Tomatoes with a rating of 79%, and the New York Times review from 1995 was overall very positive. It also made a big cultural impact, influencing fashion and slang of the 90s. Now, I think the film is mostly supported by its cult fan-following – either people who remember watching it when it came out, or people who found it on Netflix or iTunes and were sure they discovered some hidden gem. I'm definitely in the latter category, but as I was

researching the film, I found a lot of praise for it, especially as an adaptation of *Emma*. The general consensus seems to be that *Clueless* is not only the best adaptation of *Emma*, but also the best adaptation of any Jane Austen novel. So there you go.

Before I move into the real meat of this episode, I do want to give a final note on both texts and how they're received and viewed in the media. I think that both of these stories, when they were first released – *Emma* not so much now, because it's considered a classic, but – when they were first released, both of these stories hid under the mask of "chick-lit" and "chick-flick" that society labelled them. And originally I was gonna say that they're so much more than that, but I think that would be discrediting chick-lit and chick-flick genres and talking about these genres like they're a bad thing. Like books and films written for and marketed towards women are lesser-than, which is not what I wanna say. What I really wanna say is that these labels of "chick-lit" and "chick-flick" are intended to be dismissive, and intended to hurt, because – because films and books targeted at women are considered "fluffy", "trash", because that's just how the patriarchy works. But *Emma* and *Clueless* show that works in this "chick" genre actually explore very deep truths about love, and friendships, and growing up, and naivety, and status. And just because they are by, and for, and about women, and don't follow these male story conventions, it doesn't mean that they're any less valid or clever or interesting than, for example, Charles Dickens, or *Forrest Gump*, which won Best Picture in 1995.

Emma is set in 1810s England. This is considered the Regency Era, and at this time, George IV was on the throne. One of the things that I really like about Jane Austen is that she is very restrained when it comes to description of the setting. And she rarely mentions where characters are or what things look like – and when she does, the description is very minimal and she really doesn't dwell on it too much. Of Hartfield, she says, quote: "The grounds of Hartfield were small, but neat and pretty; and the house was modern and well built." End quote. And that's it! But her novels are character studies more than anything, and they focus on the intricacies of high society rather than the landscape of the English countryside, obviously. So, the setting and the context is instead evoked through the relationships between the characters. And through observing these witty exchanges and awkward interactions, we, the audience, can gauge a character's class, social standing, and also understand their future prospects. So this contributes to the social setting of the novel, and how we, as an audience, understand the context. As I mentioned before, this society was very constricting and had many rules about how to conduct oneself – especially when it came to the behaviour and expectations of women. And because women in this time couldn't legally inherit property or money, and so it was the plight of every woman to marry above her social standing. Even if women were rich, like Emma, there was a pressure to marry into a family of either equal or more wealth. When I was writing my notes for this, and thinking about the constrictions of this society, I was thinking: wow, this makes it sound so solemn and serious. But in Jane Austen's novel, it's anything but that. The society is just a small-town community that thrives on gossip. And Emma, who is at the centre of it all, is also vain and gossiping, but she isn't actively *mean*, she's just naïve. And I think that there's a certain objectivity and distance in the way that the story is told. Jane Austen's narrative voice is critical of the society that she lives in, but she also treats it quote lovingly, actually. She acknowledges the flaws and the silliness of it all, but – but it's still these characters' lives, and it's still Jane Austen's life, and so that means that's it's still valid and important, even if it is a bit silly.

So, *Clueless*, on the other hand, is set in California in the 1990s. Here we're dealing with two levels of adaptation: adaptation of medium and adaptation of context. Not only has the story changed from film to book, but it's also changed from high society to high school. So first off, the visuals are really different, and this is an interesting thing to look at because Jane Austen does not give us that much description of things in *Emma*. In the medium of film, however, you can't really choose to not address the visual components of a story. If you did, you'd probably just be left with ... I don't know, a radio play. So, because of the different medium, *Clueless* shows social setting through costumes and locations as much as it does through dialogue and character dynamics, just like Jane Austen. In one of the first scenes in the film, Cher chooses her outfit by browsing on a computer, which, in 1995 was a big deal. And the computer actually picks out her outfit for her. Her outfits are always coordinated and put-together and obviously expensive-looking. When we look at Tai, on the other hand, she shows up to school wearing oversized brown pants, a baggy t-shirt and a men's button-up shirt. So, obviously, the costumes make a statement about the wealth and class of these characters. And the locations do this as well. Cher's house is a beautiful, white mansion with a big staircase and a pool. So, while the historical contexts are completely different, I think the social context is very similar. High school is also a really insular and restricting setting, and it's full of bored adolescents who are hungry for gossip and ready to stir the pot. They also take things super seriously, and every break-up or a fashion faux-pas or a failed driver's test is, like, totally the end of the world. And this is just like the issue of where to hold the next ball, or Harriet's being too sick to Mr Elton at dinner. It's totally the end of the world! But, just like with *Emma*, I think *Clueless* has that objectivity. The audience doesn't take Cher too seriously, but we still sympathise with her and want her to succeed. Cher also grows out of her naivety and becomes a better person. Just like Emma realising she's been wrong about love all along, and Cher realises that she's the one who's clueless. Bet you didn't see that one coming.

So now I want to move into a more in-depth character comparison, because there's no denying that the plot has the same beats and turning points and twists. But both of these stories are really character-driven, and so I think by looking at the characters more closely, we will understand that story more. So, let's start out with, of course, Emma Woodhouse. Emma Woodhouse is vain, rich, and spoilt, and our hero. She has her follies and her flaws, but I think the great thing about her is that she's not meanspirited or smug. Jane Austen writes, quote: "The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself". End quote. I just want to point out this phrase: "real evils", here. I think this shows that her, quote: "real evils" are, in fact, not really "evils" at all. She's spoilt by her father and governess, and, as a result, thinks a little too well of herself. She is naïve and a little conceited, but generally well-meaning. And she is so charming because there are times when she, too, notices her flaws. When Emma has an argument with Mr Knightley, Jane Austen writes, quote: "Emma remained in a state of vexation too; but there was more indistinctness in the cause of hers than his. She did not always feel absolutely satisfied with herself, so entirely convinced that her opinions were right and her adversary's wrong, as Mr Knightley." End quote. So even in this early stage in the book – the sentence appears in chapter 8 – Emma is questioning herself and her identity and her decisions and her opinions. And this shows that she's not completely fixed in her conceited behaviour, and I think that's why I think the audience is so easily able to sympathise with her and cheer for her. Because we know that she has the room to grow, and she will get there by the time the book ends. We're waiting for her to have that moment of realisation, so that she can become the person we know she can be.

Cher, played by Alicia Silverstone. There is no doubt at all that Cher also has her flaws. She is self-centred, and quite ignorant, but she still pulls us in with this irresistible charm, and I think that this is also due to the casting. I think that Alicia Silverstone is perfect in this role. She plays that completely un-self-conscious naivety so well. And one of my favourite things about the character of Cher in the film is that Amy Heckerling, the script-writer, didn't make her stupid, which I think would have been a huge mistake. It could have been an easy direction to go down, you know, that classic trope of the girl who is kind and open-hearted, but ditsy, and really quite stupid and keeps messing things up. But Cher is obviously smart.

Heather

It's just like Hamlet said: "To thine own self be true."

Cher

No, Hamlet didn't say that.

Heather

I think that I remember Hamlet accurately.

Cher

Well I remember Mel Gibson accurately, and he didn't say that. That Polonius guy did.

But she's not smug about her knowledge, and she unabashedly admits that she knows the line from the 1990 film starring Mel Gibson. So I love that she is obviously intelligent and has a good memory, and is intuitive and insightful, but she's not smug about it, it's just another facet of her personality that she's quite confident about. And I really love that about the character, and I think it also matches up really well with Emma. Similarly to Emma, Cher wavers when she's challenged by Josh. She respects his opinion and values his judgement, but of course she appears to brush it off whenever he pushes her a little bit. There's a scene where Josh suggests that Cher should use her popularity for good, and make a contribution to society. And Cher counters him by saying that she already has.

Cher

Excuse me, but I have donated many expensive Italian outfits to Lucy. And, as soon as I get my license, I fully intend to brake for animals. And, I have contributed many hours to helping two lonely teachers find romance.

So she brushes him off, but in the very next scene, she asks Dionne if she thinks she's selfish.

Cher

Would you call me selfish?

Dionne

No, not to your face.

And straight away, Dionne knows that this is because of Josh. She's questioning herself because of something that Josh said. The next day, when Tai arrives at school, Cher decides to take her on as her "project", and give her a makeover so that she can become pretty and popular and sophisticated, just like Cher. And she believes that this is some grand deed that she's doing for the world – this is her using her popularity for good. Of course, she eventually realises that this has been the wrong way to go about things – and, just like Emma, she grows into herself and channels her bubbly and caring attitude into the environmental fair.

What I love about both of these characters is that there's a wonderful lightness to them, and a brightness, and you can't help but want to see if they're gonna succeed on their journey. And you really want them to become better people. According to Jane Austen's brother's biography of her, when she first began writing *Emma*, she said, quote: "I am going to take a heroine whom no-one but myself will much like," end quote. And I think that this is interesting, because I actually don't think that that's true. I think Emma is a very likable character, and we like her because she has flaws. When comparing her with someone like Elizabeth Bennet, Elizabeth Bennet kind of can do no wrong. She is almost the perfect character – she's almost too perfect. And so I think that's why I like Emma, because she's a little bit harsher, she's a little bit spikier, and she's a little full of herself, but we love her all the same. And similarly with Cher, there are so many things that we can easily hate about her: the fact that she's rich, that she's pretty, that she's popular, that she's ignorant. But she's so charming. Really, I think that these two characters have a fantastic coming-of-age arc. Even though coming-of-age stories usually happen, you know, around the 14, 15-year-old mark, I think you can still come of age when you're 17, like Cher, or 21 like Emma Woodhouse, or possibly even when you're 35. So I really like that coming-of-age story.

So, let's move on to Mr Knightley. Mr Knightley is Emma's next-door-neighbour and brother-in-law. He is rich, handsome, and 17 years older than Emma. He's set to inherit Donwell Abbey, which means he's very, very rich. His family has always been friends with the Woodhouse family, and his younger brother married Emma's older sister, Isabella, so now they're brother- and sister-in-law. Mr Knightley is very confident and comfortable in his social standing and in his power. But that doesn't mean that he is up himself, he doesn't flaunt his wealth. He's kind to everyone. And he's also pretty much the only character who really challenges Emma, and keeps Emma in line. 'Cause spoilt by her father, and worshipped by Harriet, and indulged by her former governess Mrs Weston. And so Mr Knightley is the only person of a higher social standing than Emma, and the only one who has the guts to stand up to her. There's a moment in the book when Emma makes fun of Miss Bates at a picnic, and he reprimands her very heavily. I won't read out his whole speech here, though it is pretty fabulous, and I suggest you read it for yourself, but here is a shortened version, quote: "Were she a woman of fortune, [...] were she your equal in situation – but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to;

and if she live to old age must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed! [...] This is not pleasant to you, Emma – and it is far from pleasant to me, but I must, I will - I will tell you truths while I can; satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now." End quote. Argh, I love that speech! Amazing! And this is just one example of how Mr Knightley keeps Emma in line. He criticises her discouraging Harriet from marrying Mr Martin, he disapproves of her flirting so much with Frank Churchill, and he scorns her so-called "matchmaking". Emma has a lot of growing up to do from the beginning of the book, and Mr Knightley definitely helps her along the way, he definitely guides her more than anyone else. And even though she doesn't always listen to him, he tells her the things that she really needs to hear.

Let's discuss Josh, played by Paul Rudd. So, instead of Josh being the brother of Cher's sister's husband – if you can keep track of that – um, making them in-laws, he is Cher's ex-step-brother. We'll get into the politics of this later, and why this change was made – but for now I want to look at Josh and Cher's relationship. So, similarly with Emma and Mr Knightley, they have a brother/sister thing going on. They've known each other from a young age, and they're comfortable being around each other. Cher and Josh definitely bicker a lot more than Emma and Mr Knightley do, you know, they tease each other and poke each other, but they don't really have those deep-cutting fights. And Josh definitely pushes Cher – he criticises her behaviour and her use of popularity – but he doesn't scold her in the same way that Mr Knightley does Emma. They never really have a really vicious fight where they hurl insults at each other that have deep truths and are about deep insecurities. So, maybe this makes it a healthier relationship? Possibly. I would think that there's less of a power imbalance this way, because Josh loves Cher just the way she is, and doesn't feel the need to constantly fix her, like Mr Knightley might with Emma. But maybe this is also because Cher is less vain than Emma – after all, we also don't get a scene parallel to the picnic at Box Hill where Emma insults Miss Bates. Cher and Josh never have a serious fight. The closest they get is when Cher is ignorant of the heritage of her maid Lucy's heritage. But it's resolved quickly, and Josh isn't very phased by it. Instead, the fight at the climax of the film is between Cher and Tai. This is when we get that iconic line, quote: "You're a virgin who can't drive," end quote – but we'll get into all of that later. I think it's fair to say that the characters of Mr Knightley and Josh are pretty similar in terms of how they serve Emma's character arc – minus the part about Mr Knightley being incredibly rich, of course. Josh doesn't appear to be rich, and so that layer of the match being advantageous is gone. But I do wonder about the power imbalance, and which of the two couples is the most equal, and which will last the longest?

I think out of the two men, Mr Knightley definitely criticises Emma in a more meaningful and harsher way than Josh does with Cher. But I also think that this is because Emma pushes the boundaries more than Cher does. I also – I want to bring in another couple for comparison very quickly: Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, another Jane Austen novel. I think they work so well because there's a great push and pull between them: Darcy challenges Elizabeth, in turn, Elizabeth challenges Darcy. But I don't think you get this same dynamic with Emma and Mr Knightley. And this isn't necessarily a bad thing, like, I don't want all Jane Austen couples to have the exact same dynamic, but I do think that it causes a power imbalance if one character – in this case, Mr Knightley – challenges another – in this case, Emma – but not vice versa. And even though Emma grows up a lot over the course of the novel, I don't think her core personality changes. So does this mean that Emma will always be toeing the line with Mr Knightley, and he'll always be keeping her in check? Because to me, that doesn't sound like a relationship that's built to last. But I

think maybe I should also consider the context: Jane Austen seemed to have a thing for older men. In every single hero and heroine coupling in her novels, the man is older. So the biggest age gap is 19 years, between Marianne Dashwood and Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*. She's 16, he's 35. The second biggest gap is actually between Emma and Mr Knightley. She's 20, and he's 37: 17 years. So it's clear that Jane Austen liked older men, and maybe she liked the idea that someone would take care of Emma, and someone would fill in that role that Emma never had, because she didn't have a caring mother, and everyone was a little bit too indulgent of her, so maybe this is exactly what she needs. And after all, this was the ideology at the time: the man takes care of the woman in the relationship. I mean, it's literally in Mr Knightley's name: he's the knight in shining armour that Emma needs. And there has been a long history of older men marrying younger women. So maybe it's that in Jane Austen's time, this relationship was ideal, and this equality and balance didn't really matter. But now, I think in a modern context, it seems a little off, at least to me.

So, back to Cher and Josh: would they really be better off than Emma and Mr Knightley? It's clear that Cher has grown up, but, like with Emma, her personality is still very much the same. But I think that there was less of that combative element to their relationship before. It was mostly banter and poking fun, rather than Cher doing something seriously wrong that caused Josh to fill in the role of the wiser, older, man and actively criticise her for it. I think that this dynamic is possibly more equal. But I would love to hear what you guys think! You can tweet me @angourierice using the hashtag #thecommunitylibrary, or you can send me a DM on instagram @the_community_library. I don't respond to DMs in the app, but I look through them and try and answer some of your questions in future episodes.

I next want to talk about Harriet Smith. So, Harriet is an orphaned nobody who is a star pupil at her boarding school. She's young and impressionable, she becomes Emma's best friend. Emma basically takes her on as her protégée. She follows Emma around like a lost puppy and asks for her guidance on literally everything. She doesn't have her own opinions or own decisions because she depends so much on Emma. In the scene in which Harriet comes to Emma for advice on what to do about Mr Martin's proposal, she says many variations of the same sentence. She says, quote: "What shall I do? What would you advise me to do? Pray, dear Miss Woodhouse, tell me what I ought to do." End quote. But even when she decides on what to do – after being heavily guided by Emma – she still questions herself. She says, quote: "I have now quite determined, and really almost made up my mind, to refuse Mr. Martin. Do you think I am right?" End quote. So, Emma encourages her to refuse Mr Martin's marriage proposal and convinces her to fall in love with Mr Elton. These are both very bad ideas, but Harriet doesn't know any better, so she follows her advice. She has so little personality or judgement, but again, she's so innocent and naïve that we don't – at least I don't – find her outright annoying or frustrating, I just feel sorry for her. She's a really sympathetic character, I think. And Harriet has really interesting character arc, but what makes it so fascinating is that it tells us more about Emma than it does about Harriet. Harriet is Emma's puppet, essentially, and so through Emma bestowing her prejudiced and biased opinions upon Harriet, the audience learns more about Emma's opinions. And this is also how Emma learns about herself. I mean, she turns Harriet into her clone, and she finally must be faced with the truth of her flaws. The moment where Emma realises all these things that she's done wrong, she thinks, quote: "Harriet was less humble, had fewer scruples than formerly. [...] Who had been at pains to give Harriet notions of self-consequence but herself? [...] If Harriet, from being humble, were grown vain, it was her doing too." End quote. So I think Harriet is kind of a stepping-stone for Emma to

come to her realisation about herself, and to learn to change and grow. And I think this poses the question: what if the story was told from Harriet's perspective? I think it would be really different, and I think Emma would become a lot less likable. I think it would be similar to *Northanger Abbey*. In *Northanger Abbey*, a young and impressionable and relatively poor woman called Catherine Moreland, goes to stay with her rich relatives in Bath. And she meets Isabella Thorpe, who is beautiful and rich and guides her to making some really bad decisions. And it's interesting because in *Northanger Abbey*, the audience hates Isabella, she's awful to poor Catherine. So, I wonder, if the story was told from Harriet's perspective, we would also get a very different perspective on the character of Emma.

So, let's talk about Tai, who is played by Brittany Murphy. Tai is a dorky and – as Cher describes her – "clueless" new girl who arrives at the school. Cher decides to use her popularity for good and help her. She gives her a makeover and teaches her how to behave in the social minefield that is high school. In contrast to Harriet, we actually get some inklings of Tai's personality and judgement – who she is before Cher gives her a makeover. We know from a scene that she has with Travis in the cafeteria that she's really into drawing. We know that she is *not* a virgin, and she misunderstands "coke" to mean cocaine, rather than coca cola. She also says, on her first day:

Tai

Wow, you guys talk like grown-ups.

Cher

Oh, well, this is a really good school.

Tai is humble and adorable and significantly lower class, and this is shown through her costumes and her accent. While these details aren't necessarily mentioned in *Emma*, it is important, I think, when translating into a visual medium, and into a modern context. What I like about Tai is that she seems to have slightly more personality than Harriet. We know she's into drawing, we know that she connects with Travis, that he gets her. But then as the film goes on and Tai becomes more self-assured, Cher begins to realise that she has, quote: "created a monster." End quote. And this is the great thing about Cher, or Emma, as a character: instead of blaming Tai/Harriet for becoming conceited and self-important, Cher/Emma realises that it's all her own fault, and she blames herself.

Cher

It all boiled down to one inevitable conclusion: I was just totally clueless!

This is also important to get Cher to her point of realisation. The fight that Cher has with Tai – the one where Tai says Cher is, quote: "a virgin who can't drive," is actually kind of a fight with herself.

She is faced with this clone, or mean caricature of herself, and she must change to redeem herself. And so this is when Cher decides that she needs a makeover.

Cher

Except this time, I'd make over my soul.

And similarly with Harriet, Tai's character arc is important, but only as a catalyst for Cher's self-realisation. Again, imagine the film if it had been told from Tai's perspective. Maybe it would be more like *Mean Girls*. And then, similarly with *Northanger Abbey*, by putting Tai's character in the protagonist role, the equivalent of Cher – in *Mean Girls*, Regina George – becomes a much less sympathetic character, and she actually becomes the villain.

This is where I'm going to leave today's episode, but make sure you tune in tomorrow for the rest of the discussion! Hopefully it won't be too long of an episode! Um, but, you can look forward to me talking about the rest of the characters. I'm gonna talk about Elton and Christian, and I'll also be talking about some of the most significant changes that were made from book to film. So, thank you very much for listening to this episode. I had a great time planning it, even if it was difficult! I would also encourage you to look at the corresponding blog post for this episode: I drew a lot of quotes and ideas from quite a few articles and interviews and blog posts. I've them linked all in the show notes for some extra reading, if you're interested. I also have a full transcription of this episode, which you can find on my blog: www.angourieslibrary.wordpress.com. If you enjoyed this episode, you can subscribe on iTunes so that you never miss an episode. You can also rate and review on your podcast platform of choice. You can follow The Community Library on Instagram @the_community_library, and you can use the hashtag #thecomcommunitylibrary on Instagram or Twitter. The podcast artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning. You can look at more of her work at ashleyronning.com, or you can go to helio-press.com, that's dash the symbol. Once again, thanks for listening, and I'll talk to you tomorrow. Bye!

[theme music]

Cher

Oh my God, I'm totally buggin'!