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The Immortal Jane Austen: Why Her Novels Remain Popular

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	2
Chapter Two: Money and Class	9
Chapter Three: Love and Marriage	25
Chapter Four: Identity	39
Chapter Five: Conclusion	53
Works Cited	59
Works Consulted	61

Chapter One: Introduction

What are our truths universally acknowledged? While "a single man in possession of a good fortune" may not necessarily "be in want of a wife" in today's world, Jane Austen's novels contain other truths that readers today still hold to be universally acknowledged (*Pride and Prejudice* 1). If the constant barrage of book, movie, and online video adaptations of Austen's writing tells us anything, it is that her novels hold within them something that has continued to resonate with audiences since she first put quill to paper. Though different audiences throughout history have responded to Austen's work in different ways, prominent Austen scholar Claudia L. Johnson in *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* claims that Austen has "never properly died" for readers (7). This thesis will analyze themes present in three of Austen's most famous novels that have had a persistent presence, and I argue will continue to have such a presence, in human lives throughout time. In doing so, this thesis will also provide insight into why a 19th-century English country woman has survived, and even thrived, in our 21st-century world.

In the academic world, it is easy to value a classic novel simply because it exists in the literary canon. Professors and students read such works because this is what they are "supposed" to do, and few ever question it. Scholars continue to uphold these works, meaning class after class of students keep reading them. That said, the general public is less inclined to read classic novels out of a sense of duty or tradition. Every once in a while, though, contemporary readers find an author who they deem relevant to modern sensibilities. Jane Austen is one such author who, going on 245 years old at the writing of this thesis, continues to be extolled by the general public. She remains a household name, the queen to Shakespeare's king of English literature according to John Wiltshire in *Recreating Jane Austen*, and recognizable mostly because her works are so frequently adapted (8). Even so, Johnson argues that Austen's work is more widely

known than Shakespeare's due to Austen's more accessible prose in comparison to Shakespeare's challenging blank verse and Renaissance prose (12).

Particularly, the last 25 years have seen a boom of Austen adaptations in the United States. In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, editors Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield note, "Between 1970 and 1986, seven feature-length films or television miniseries, all British, were produced based on Austen novels; in the years 1995 and 1996, however, six additional adaptations appeared, half of them originating in Hollywood and the rest influenced by it" (1). Austen's steady popularity in England spurred seven adaptations over 17 years, while the United States produced or inspired almost that many in 1/8 of that time in a period commonly known as "Austenmania." In an interview with *The New Yorker*'s Greg Crister, Doug McGrath, the director for one of the two *Emma* adaptations released in 1996, describes Austenmania: "first there is no Jane Austen and then it's raining Jane Austen" (55). The floodgates opened in 1995 with an unusual Austen adaptation that features heavily in this thesis: Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*. In another collection of essays edited by Troost, *Jane Austen Goes to the Movies*, she says, "This modernized *Emma* brought Austen's work to Hollywood for the first time since the 1940 MGM *Pride and Prejudice* and attracted an audience more attuned to MTV than Jane Austen" (iii). Despite the loose adaptation, the film spurred what most would consider more faithful adaptations set in Austen's own Regency England. The inundation of Austen adaptations in the nineties and since is a testament to the author's popularity, for the more "Janeites"—the name for fans of Austen—watch adaptations of her work, the more adaptations Hollywood produces.

Furthermore, while it is always an exciting experience for readers to see their favorite literary works reproduced (semi)faithfully on stage or screen, Austen adaptations that are not

explicitly advertised as such, like *Clueless*, still find significant viewership. These hidden adaptations are Austen "in disguise"; they take the basic storylines and characters of her novels and reimagine them in a modern setting. Throughout this thesis, I will be referring to them as modernized adaptations. One could easily use Regency adaptations—set in the same time and place as the source material—to argue Austen's sustained popularity. After all, according to *IMDb*, the most recent Regency adaptation of an Austen novel, *Emma.* (2020), grossed 25.6 million at the box office even during the COVID-19 pandemic, proving that Austen is still popular. However, as I mentioned above, Austen's place in the literary canon could be influencing whether people choose to see an adaptation out of some feeling of obligation to be knowledgeable about classic literature. Therefore, this thesis will utilize modernized adaptations of Austen's work, which are more separated from Austen's image and all the reputation that comes with it. Modernized adaptations are aimed at those who may not be fans of long, period-specific adaptations and who are not simply caught up in the "fantasies which surround the name 'Jane Austen'" (Wiltshire, *Recreating JA* 3). Much of the viewership is probably attracted to the films without even knowing they are adaptations of older works, thereby better showing that Austen's novels—her plots, characters, etc.—stand on their own and have objective value without the name recognition that the literary canon confers.

Surprisingly, a number of modernized film adaptations of Austen's novels exists in a variety of different media with varying levels of fidelity. Thus, instead of simply choosing any modernized adaptation, I had developed a list of criteria in choosing which adaptations to analyze for this thesis. First, the adaptation must be a film. Not only does this criterion allow for consistency in analysis—it would be difficult to properly analyze adaptations in different forms—but it also is a marker of wide popularity. While Austen's work has been adapted into

novels, stage plays, and online video, films are typically the most widely appealing medium among the general public. To adequately argue Austen's staying power, the adaptation first cannot be lauded only by a small sect, such as readers or thespians. Second, the adaptation must not be obvious. For example, the films *Scents and Sensibility* (2011) and Bollywood's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) advertise their connections to Austen's novels in their very titles, meaning the filmmakers are trying to attract an audience already familiar and enamored with *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* respectively. Third, upon watching the adaptation, a Janeite must be able to recognize the plot and characters as uniquely Austenian. A film that takes too many creative liberties with Austen's plot or characters are in danger of no longer being adaptations of her work.

Therefore, this thesis uses three of Jane Austen's novels and their corresponding modernized adaptations to show the universality and modern relevance of her work. The first book and its corresponding film are Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary*. In Austen's most popular novel, members of the Bennet family struggle against class discrimination and the threat of financial loss while trying to find husbands for the five daughters. Their hopes are foiled again and again as both their daughters and their daughters' suitors act contrary to societal expectation. The focus of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in the novel has captivated readers since the novel was published, causing it to be adapted multiple times for a myriad of audiences. Based on the 1996 book by Helen Fielding—which is in turn based on Austen's *Pride and Prejudice—Bridget Jones's Diary* follows a woman who decides to remake her life in order to escape singleness, keeping a diary as she goes. The protagonist must navigate objectification and humiliation before realizing love is not contingent on her reforming

her identity. As I mentioned above, I am choosing to analyze the movie over Fielding's novel in this thesis because movies reach wider audiences, all of whom may not be readers.

The second book and film combination is Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and the 2011 film *From Prada to Nada*. The novel focuses on sisters Marianne and Elinor Dashwood as they deal with the implications of their father's death. They must face issues such as class, finances, and secrecy, which make finding husbands for each of them much more complicated than they had anticipated. Though the transference of money to solely a male heir is no longer applicable in modern Western society, the fallout that can occur from losing family money definitely is. The film operates on this same premise of financial loss. *From Prada to Nada* is about a pair of spoiled sisters, Nora and Mary Dominguez, who lose their wealth and have to learn how to live without it as they move from Beverly Hills to East Los Angeles. Through the experience, they must reconcile two cultures and eventually reconnect with their Latina heritage.

The third book and film under discussion are Austen's *Emma* and the 1995 film *Clueless*. This novel follows a young woman named Emma Woodhouse who, though avowedly single herself, acts as a matchmaker for those in her village of Highbury. The character of Emma embodies traits that are present in people of every time period. In making a character that Austen thought would be unlikeable to her readers, she managed to create a character for the ages, relatable and timeless. Like its source material, the movie *Clueless* is about a wealthy teenager named Cher who is seemingly oblivious to the real world. She is a self-declared matchmaker determined to give the new student a makeover and pair her up with the most popular boy in school. The film is the most popular modernized adaptation of Austen; it is a cult classic that has resonated with viewers since its premiere.

While these films do not have identical plots or characters to the novels they are adapting, it is not solely the plot or characters that make an adaptation particularly Austenian; it is the themes. Narratologist Marc DiPaolo, in his book Emma *Adapted: Jane Austen's Heroine from Book to Film*, claims that, with the many concerns over costumes, set, speech, etc., period adaptations can take too much time focusing on historical accuracy and not enough time focusing on "the core themes of the text" (127-8). The result is a film that *looks* Austenian but does not *feel* Austenian. Instead, modernized adaptations "[play] fast and loose with the original[s]" in a way that "simply takes Austen for granted" (Wiltshire, *Recreating JA* 2, 57). Though some might consider such treatment dismissive or even offensive to Austen's work, Wiltshire, discussing Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, says, "[Fielding's] novels engage familiarly with their originals, treating them cavalierly as only those who are secure in their relation to the mother text can. . . . [T]hey are expressions of affectionate authorial consanguinity, having fun with, and even recreating Jane Austen" (139). Though the modernized adaptations may feature a single composite character for many of Austen's characters, cut characters or plot points entirely, or simply change the names of characters, these are simply all devices that "[find] different ways to meet similar ends" (2). The ultimate effect is an adaptation widely appealing for modern audiences and built on the foundation of Austen's themes.

This thesis explores some of those themes present in both Austen's work and the modernized film adaptations that remain universally relevant across class, continents, and time. In particular, each book/movie pair exemplifies the universal themes of **money and social class, love and marriage, and identity**. This thesis will analyze how these themes are presented in the context of each of the novels and films in order to argue for and explain Austen's continued relevance in the modern world. The presence of the universal themes described above in both

Jane Austen's original novels and their corresponding modern adaptations shows why audiences today still delight in her work.

Chapter Two: Money and Class

One of the most captivating themes in Jane Austen's novels is money and class. Though the average reader may not understand what it means to have a certain income of pounds per year—How do they make that money? What is the exchange/inflation rate? What is the average cost of living?—the excitement that the characters have over a person's income and the conflicts it causes let the reader know how important money was to this society. The effect is that readers of *Pride and Prejudice* can share Mrs. Bennet's excitement about the fact that Mr. Darcy makes six thousand pounds per year more than Mr. Bingley; after all, people are often just as excited today when a close relative marries a doctor or a lawyer due to the paycheck attached to those professions. In fact, each of the modernized film adaptations discussed in this thesis features lawyers to represent contemporary notions of wealth. The way we still care so much today over a potential spouse's income reveals that money and class are two universal themes—themes that have carried over from Austen's time to the present day—and there is no reason to think their significance will diminish any time soon. Because in Austen's work the themes of money and class are so often entangled with the themes of love and marriage—the primary subject of the next chapter—this chapter will address love and marriage, but only briefly. In this chapter, I will discuss money and class more as personal identifiers and less as influencers of love and marriage. Further, while class distinctions were stricter in Austen's time—today in the United States, we do not have the concepts of titles and gentry—the modernized film adaptations this thesis explores find other ways to portray the concept of class, such as through professions, as already mentioned, as well as through behaviors and attitudes. Ultimately, Austen's novels show how those with wealth and a good social standing control—either subtly or outright—the lives of those without. The films, though, portray how class manifests itself even in a so-called

"classless" society. Overall, both the novels and films foreground money and class, showing that these themes remain as relevant today as they were in Austen's time.

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* (*PP*) shows how money and class are the primary drivers of one's motives in life, whether coming from a wealthy or poor family. The financial situation of most everyone in these works is determined by the financial situation of one's parents, a fact which has not changed between the 19th and 21st centuries. Money and class are determining factors in the first few decades of one's life, whether "born to an independence" or not (*Emma* 30). Throughout *PP*, the Bennet family's financial situation remains an underlying conflict, one of "the driving motives of the plot," along with love and marriage according to the producers of the 1995 BBC miniseries adaptation of *PP* (qtd. in Wiltshire, *Recreating JA* 99). Though the Bennets own land, they do not make as much income from their land as others in their circle do. The family's financial situation is a sore spot for Mrs. Bennet, who is always trying to reinforce their position in society. She herself came from little money, entering her marriage to Mr. Bennet with only 4,000 pounds from her attorney father (*PP* 20). Though being an attorney is a respectable profession bringing in enough money for a family to live comfortably, it does not match the lifestyle of the landed gentry whose money is accrued from the interest "based on their investment in government funds" as Edward Copeland explains in his essay "Jane Austen and the Consumer Revolution" (77). This accrual means that landed gentry do not have to work for their money, separating the class from those whose money is earned directly in exchange for goods or services, Though it is not explicitly stated in *PP*, readers can assume that Mr. Bennet does work, if only by overseeing the goings on of the Longbourn estate. When the Bennet daughters marry, they will each accrue only an annual income of around forty pounds, given the interest on their inheritance of "one thousand pounds in the four per cents" (*PP* 81). While Mr.

Collins is unbothered by the low number—after all, he will inherit the whole of Longbourn anyway—such a low income does not make the girls desirable spouses. The girls are pressed to find husbands who will both not mind their small income and have a sufficient income to support them.

In fact, Mrs. Bennet's actions are driven by money. Not only are the Bennets concerned about their income socially, but they also face a looming threat of being destitute should Mr. Bennet die first. The Bennets, unfortunately, do not have a son, making Mr. Collins, "a distant relation," the next male of kin and inheritor of the estate in a time when male primogeniture was the custom (20). This is a touchy subject, especially for Mrs. Bennet, who calls Mr. Collins "that odious man" and "[continues] to rail bitterly against the cruelty" even when Jane and Elizabeth explain its inevitability (46). Not only does she believe her daughters can marry men whose wealth earns them thousands of pounds annually, but she is offended by Mr. Collins' inquiry as "to which of his fair cousins the excellence of [the dinner's] cookery was owing" (49). Mrs. Bennet immediately "assure[s] him with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen" (49). It is a show of gentility not to have to work even in one's own home, especially for women. Mr. Collins' comment offends Mrs. Bennet because he is suggesting that the family appears even less affluent than they are and therefore further reminds her that soon they might be destitute should Mr. Bennet die before her daughters are married. In the end, the conflict is not so much resolved as made irrelevant by the marriages of Jane and Elizabeth to wealthy men, an occurrence which illustrates, as María Teresa González Mínguez makes clear, "the predicament that women of [Austen's] class were in as they had nothing but marriage to . . . save them from starvation" (22-3). Though Mrs. Bennet may come across as superficial and frivolous, her motives are mostly—

if not strictly—a form of self-preservation for herself and her family. She is grounded in reality and strives to have her daughters married not for social reasons but for essential financial reasons.

In the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (*BJD*), money and class are shown more through individual characters than through strict social classes, indicating that the modern form of class is character. The Elizabeth character and namesake of the film, Bridget Jones, does not have a very classy lifestyle. Though the film does not explicitly comment on her financial status, she seems to be in the upper-middle class. She has a good-sized flat in London and a stable office job at an international publishing house called Pemberley Press. Though we see her and her friends eating at nice restaurants, her behavior when out with her friends is nothing like the relative behavioral class of "[her] mother's annual turkey curry buffet" on New Year's Day (1:14-1:17). The members of this "urban family" are crude thirty-somethings who drink too much and are wholly undignified (10:44). In one scene, Bridget falls out of a taxicab after a night of over-imbibing and stumbles back to her apartment. Later, the friends plan an impromptu trip to Paris to aid broken-hearted Bridget, saying, "Forget about everything—particularly, forget about Mark Darcy" (1:25:05-1:25:07). Unlike her earlier getaway with Daniel Cleaver, where we see her gracefully placing a packed bag in a shining convertible, in this instance Bridget scrambles to pack her "passport. . . . [a]nd pants" before piling into a cramped car with her friends (1:25:31-1:25:33). Her classiness wavers drastically, leaning hard towards the lack of it. Even when she is surrounded by classier people, she is incredibly awkward; when at a work event, in front of the gathered crowd, she struggles to comment on the "whole theory of short fiction" and instead asks where the restrooms are (18:34-18:37). Because of the various rules of etiquette in the 19th century, it would not have made sense for Elizabeth of *PP* to commit any of

these blunders; similarly, given the lack of modern formal class structures, it would not have made sense for Bridget to be involved in heavy class and financial politics in the 21st century. However, the writers and director of *BJD*, in an effort of what postmodern critic Meaghan Morris refers to as "strategic rewriting," strove to make the effect the same while remaining faithful to the ideas of the source text (qtd. in Wiltshire, *Recreating JA* 3). The average modern viewer can relate to awkward behavior and crazy friends more than they can understand the class politics of Austen's day.

Similar to his Austen equivalent, Mark Darcy in *BJD* is both wealthy and classy. He is a human-rights barrister, a "pretty nasty beast" in his field according to Bridget's father and "very well off" according to her mother (*BJD* 3:03-3:04, 1:48). Given this information from Bridget's parents, as well as the UK-based, Bar Council-certified website *The Lawyer Portal*, viewers can assume that Mark's "annual wages can reach as high as £100,000 per annum" ("Human Rights Law: How to Become a Human Rights Lawyer"). It is worth mentioning that though Elizabeth Bennet's lawyer uncle is seen as evidence of the family's poor connections, being a lawyer today is greatly praised because of the intelligence required to practice law and the large paycheck it usually yields. Mark's classiness is underscored by the fact that he is nearly always seen wearing a suit (never mind the reindeer sweater, a gift from his mother, at the beginning of the film); further, he gives off the same aloof air that Mr. Darcy does in *PP*, which suggests classiness and composure when contrasted with Bridget's fumbling chatter.

In contrast, a modern example of low class can be seen in Daniel Cleaver, the Wickham character. Daniel is like Bridget in the sense that though his wealth is not explicitly mentioned, his behavior suggests he lacks class. The boss of the London branch of Pemberley Press, Daniel likely makes an ample sum of money. Though his position as boss of a publishing house does not

carry the same social weight as being a barrister, Daniel is still able to afford the same chateau that Mark and Natasha reserve for their weekend getaway. Like Bridget's friends, though, Daniel is incredibly crude, as is evidenced by his recitation of limericks: "There was a young woman from Ealing / who had a peculiar feeling. / She lay on her back / and opened her crack / and pissed all over the ceiling" (33:29-33:39). Contrastingly, Mark and Natasha review a law case in a canoe adjacent to the ones occupied by Bridget and Daniel, which is a classier way to spend one's time than reciting lewd limericks. (Bridget once again is in the middle, reciting Keats, but very badly.) His lying and cheating on Bridget also show his lack of class. Not only does he tell Bridget that Mark "ran off with his [Daniel's] fiancée" when "it was the other way around," but he also cheats on Bridget herself with a woman from the New York office of Pemberley Press (1:19:15-1:19:23). Like Wickham, Daniel has the opportunity and means to be classy, but he squanders it through ill-chosen behavior.

For both *PP* and *BJD*, class becomes not necessarily irrelevant, but less important than the characters had first perceived. In *PP*, Mrs. Bennet is hyper-focused on making sure her daughters' fortunes and futures are secured through advantageous marriages. Upon Mrs. Bennet's discovery that Mr. Collins, the inheritor of Longbourn estate, is marrying Charlotte Lucas instead of one of her own daughters, "[n]othing could console and nothing appease her" (*PP* 97). Her worry at being left destitute should her daughters not marry overtakes her life, indicating a strict focus on the importance of class. However, any marriage at all becomes acceptable to Mrs. Bennet later in the novel. Though Lydia's marriage to Wickham is not so advantageous as Mrs. Bennet would hope, her joy in "know[ing] that her daughter would be married was enough" to put out of her mind "any remembrance of [Lydia's] misconduct" (227). Neither Wickham's past nor Lydia's disgrace to the family overshadows Mrs. Bennet's

happiness at having "[t]hree daughters married!" by the end of the novel (284). Though she retains her excitement that Elizabeth and Jane will be extremely wealthy, her relief at Lydia's marriage suggests a diminishing focus on money and class than Mrs. Bennet had at the beginning. As for Mr. Collins, his marriage to Charlotte Lucas is no longer an issue either. Any threat to class or reputation is eventually less of an issue than at the beginning of the novel. As for *BJD,* Bridget's wavering behavior is left unresolved. Neither matching the class of Mark nor the crudeness of Daniel, Bridget remains her awkward self at the end of the film, a fact which will be explored in chapter four of this thesis. In this way, the "class" of the characters only matters up to a point. While Daniel's lack of class is too much to accept, Bridget learns to accept her own level of class even if it does not measure up to Mark's.

The financial situation of the main characters in *Sense and Sensibility* (*SS*) is more pressing than in *PP,* caused chiefly by the greed of the already-wealthy upper class. Instead of a looming issue that appears in the future, *SS* opens with the sentencing of the Dashwood women, three sisters and their mother, into relative poverty. As with *PP,* male primogeniture affects the surviving females' situation. The girls' half-brother, John Dashwood, inherits the estate of the recently-deceased Mr. Dashwood and promises "to do every thing in his power to make them comfortable" (7). However, John's wife Fanny convinces him that the promise does not require more than keeping the girls and their mother alive. Luckily, their connections are good. Sir John Middleton, "a relation of [Mrs. Dashwood's], a gentleman of consequence and property in Devonshire," offers them a cottage on his own estate, Barton Park (25). They end up moving to Barton Cottage with "altogether . . . five hundred a year amongst them" (14). Austen herself writes that her family was only able to keep "a steady Cook, & a young giddy Housemaid, with a sedate, middle aged Man" on that same income (qtd. in Copland 82). The Dashwood sisters, like

the Bennet sisters, are left with an inheritance of “a thousand pounds a-piece" (*SS* 6). With a high interest rate, “each of the Dashwood girls is left with a potential income of only £50 per annum” (Copeland 83). The rest of the 10,000-pound inheritance will pad the pockets of John and Fanny Dashwood. While the combined income of Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters may be enough to live on, the mother and sisters are sentenced to a life of frugality unlike the lifestyle they were used to before Mr. Dashwood’s death.

Furthermore, the whole of the Ferrars family exhibits a level of greed that does not align with their supposed gentility. The Ferrars family falls under what Copeland calls “the wicked, the stupid, and the selfish [who] are rewarded financially, exercise power without control, and are by their own lights successful without check” (83). As the previous paragraph mentioned, it is Fanny’s successful manipulation of her husband that cheats the Dashwood women out of thousands of pounds of their rightful inheritance. Also, the—completely warranted—fear of Mrs. Ferrars’ disapproval of low connections keeps her eldest son, Edward, from marrying Lucy Steele. Even this hesitancy on Edward’s part could be considered greed. Though “[s]ometimes . . . [Lucy] think[s] whether it would not be better for [them] both to break off the matter entirely,” Edward is stubbornly gridlocked between the loyalty of his promise to Lucy and fear of his mother, a greed which has caused misery on both sides (*SS* 127). Finding no way forward, Edward remains in the most comfortable place he can fathom, in the good graces of both Lucy and his mother. The issue is overturned by Edward’s brother Robert, who marries Lucy against his mother’s wishes and behind his brother’s back. Though he had “first sought her acquaintance . . . with the view of persuad[ing] her to give up the engagement” with Edward, both Robert and Lucy developed a liking to each other (350). Both parties are at fault, but Robert reveals a deeper betrayal when he feels “proud of his conquest, proud of tricking Edward, and very proud of

marrying privately without his mother's consent" (350). This pride further shows that he has not married her solely for love; the triumph over his brother and mother have also been motivating factors. The Ferrars family is the perfect example of a family whose wealth breeds greed and selfishness beyond their financial needs.

SS's modernized adaptation, *From Prada to Nada* (*FPN*), shows that, though the U.S. isn't based on rigid class structures, classism still exists in subtle, stereotypical, often racist ways that are more directly connected to wealth than in Austen's day. Unlike the behaviorally-driven definition of class that appears in *BJD*, class in *FPN* is more traditionally rooted in snobbish bias, a distinction most exhibited by Mary, the Marianne character, who displays her prejudice against the lower class overtly. After moving from her mansion in Beverly Hills to her aunt's house in East L.A., a predominately-Hispanic *barrio*, she walks around with a disgusted look on her face and whines about her aunt trading her BMW for a lemon. She cannot accept the fact that she is now technically in the same class as those around her. In response to her snide remark to Bruno, a tattooed *barrio* native, asking him, "You homeless?" he quips, "No. Are you?" (*FPN* 18:08-18:13). She is shocked to realize that the answer is "yes." Mary's observations about Bruno are based in class stereotypes; having lived in an affluent neighborhood where any homeless person she saw would have had similar traits to Bruno—Hispanic, tattooed, etc.—she assumes he too must be homeless. Embarrassed by her new class status, Mary will not even let her boyfriend Rodrigo drop her off at her aunt's house in order to keep up the high-class façade. When she finally reveals that she "[doesn't] even know who lives" at the house he has been dropping her off at and brings him to her aunt's house, she admits that she has "lied to [him] because [she] really like[s] [him]" (57:28-57:29, 57:44-57:46). "You can go if you want," Mary tells Rodrigo, expecting him to leave her because of her actual low-class status (58:00-58:02). She is projecting

her own feelings onto Rodrigo, knowing that if the situation had been reversed, she would have left him as soon as she discovered he was not wealthy, showing how important class still is even in the modern age.

Though money and class are challenged in both *SS* and *FPN*, they are not overturned in either. Instead, one or both of the sisters accept their new class in both the novel and film. Elinor in *SS* contentedly marries Edward though his income will be the modest one of a clergyman. While Marianne in the novel and Nora in the film both marry men with moderate incomes, Nora decides to stay in the *barrio*. When Edward asks if Nora "would . . . stay if [she] had the choice," she, in the honest state of drunkenness, answers in the affirmative (1:02:11-1:02:13). Indeed, she does have the choice since Edward, the man she marries, is a supervisor in a law firm, assumedly making a large annual salary. Mary, too, accepts her new class by falling in love with Bruno, whom she spends most of the film avoiding or criticizing for his low-class status.

While *Emma* (*EM*) includes more mingling of different social classes than in any other Austen novel, it shows how condescending the upper class can be to the lower class. Not only is an orphan one of the main characters, but the servants and people living in poverty are often discussed. When arguing over whether the carriage should be called to go to Randalls, Emma reminds her father that their driver James "will always like going to Randalls, because of his daughter's being housemaid there" (*EM* 10). The pair continues the conversation, discussing how nice the girl is and saying, "it will be a great comfort to poor Miss Taylor to have somebody about her that she is used to see" (10). The servants are people with whom the main characters have a relationship, people who can have preferences and be familiar faces. Sheryl Bonar Craig, in the journal *Persuasions On-Line*, claims that although Emma "learns that her wealth has blinded her" in regard to Harriet's situation, "[f]rom the beginning of the book, Miss Emma

Woodhouse is well aware of the grinding poverty of the obviously poor." The "obviously poor" are those who are unable to work or are likely to starve, in contrast to the more nuanced "privations and struggles of the lower middle class, the working poor" (Craig). Part of Emma's exercise is spent paying "a charitable visit . . . to a poor sick family, who lived a little way out of Highbury" (*EM* 81). This offhand mention suggests that the occasion is nothing unique to Emma; it seems she often embarks on "charitable visits" to those outside her social circle, which is uncommon in Austen's other novels.

Even so, the high-class characters can be condescending and self-aggrandizing toward the lower class. Because the novel does not describe James' side of the story, the reader cannot be sure that Mr. Woodhouse's actions were welcome. Neither James nor his daughter have any dialogue or much description of character besides a brief description of the daughter being "a civil, pretty-spoken girl" (10). It is quite possible that the servants put on grateful airs in the presence of the Woodhouses while considering them differently behind their backs. Also, the characters use "the poor" as evidence of their own good character. "Mr. Elton is so good to the poor!" declares Harriet after her and Emma's conversation on "what the poor must suffer in winter" (145). Here, the poor are commodified as evidence of Mr. Elton's goodness, demonstrating more concern for Elton than those he is helping. In a section of free indirect discourse concerning the charitable visit mentioned in the previous paragraph, Austen describes Emma as Emma would describe herself, as the passage has a tone of confidence in Emma's character that Austen's usual stinging commentary on her characters would not otherwise hold. Through this passage, the reader learns that Emma views herself as "very compassionate" towards the poor, as "she understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, [etc.]" (84). Though these members of the lower class get a place in the text that

they do not have in other Austen novels, they remain voiceless, used as devices to inflate the egos of the main characters.

Two contrasting characters who exemplify the ways the upper class views the lower are Harriet Smith and Robert Martin. Unlike the steady income of the high-class characters in the novel, "Harriet's being openly acknowledged throughout Highbury as 'the natural daughter of somebody' points out her financial insecurity. . . . The very fact that not even Harriet knows the identity of her benefactor should be worrying; who knew where the money came from or how financially secure or insecure the source might be?" (Craig). Unlike Emma's wealth with its steady accrual and abundance, Harriet in a sense lives paycheck to paycheck. Given the economic instability at the time Austen was writing *EM*, Harriet would have been acutely aware of the possibility that her allowance could disappear (Craig). Showing Emma's ignorance about the situation, she and Mr. Knightley argue heatedly over Harriet's place in the social structure compared to Martin's and over what kind of person she is because of her upbringing. Emma believes that "though in a legal sense [Harriet] may be called Nobody. . . . [t]here can be no doubt that her father is a gentleman . . . of fortune" (*EM* 61). After all, "her allowance [at Mrs. Goddard's] is very liberal; nothing has ever been grudged for her improvement of comfort" (61). Though Harriet is nominally an orphan, Emma believes that the circumstances of her life at Mrs. Goddard's proves that she belongs in a higher class. At the same time, Knightley claims that Harriet's "indifferent education" and movement in "Mrs. Goddard's line" prove that her parents had no "plan to introduce her into what [Emma] would call good society" (61). Indeed, Knightley considers Emma "no friend to Harriet Smith" at all for the ambition and discontent she has created in Harriet's character (61). Though Emma believes wholeheartedly that she is doing Harriet a favor, she is effectually telling Harriet that she is too good to stay in the lower class.

In further contrast to the wealthy aristocrats, the novel also features a young farmer named Robert Martin who is in love with Harriet (their relationship will be discussed more in the next chapter). While Robert Martin is a perfect match for Harriet in Knightley's opinion, Emma vehemently opposes the match because of her perception of Martin's lower class in comparison to Harriet's. The Martin family already has a good deal of money, shopping in the same places "where Frank Churchill buys gloves and Emma and Harriet purchase cloth for a gown" (Craig). Their lower class does not hinder them from frequenting the same establishments as the high-class characters. Though Emma admits that she has "no doubts that he *will* thrive and be a very rich man in time," in her eyes his income cannot compensate for his being an "illiterate and coarse" farmer of the lower class (*EM* 33). Emma would rather Harriet marry a cash-poor member of the upper class than a yeoman with ready cash. The way Emma treats Martin upholds the class system, revealing that class often trumps fortune in her society.

In *Clueless* (*CL*), writer and director Amy Heckerling modernized nineteenth-century class politics the only way she knew how: set the novel in an American high school, showing how the formation of class groupings is a natural part of human society. Marc DiPaolo claims in his book Emma *Adapted*, "Heckerling drew upon Austen's 'sense of class and social dynamic' for inspiration and used *Emma* as the 'structural tree' for *Clueless*" (125). As in *FPN*, the area of affluence is Beverly Hills. In the school, the "upper class" are popular, the "lower class" are stoners, and the "Nobody" Harriet is the new girl Tai. With this modernized setting, viewers are able to understand "how modern nineteenth-century social concerns such as wit, physicality, human relationships or the power of money still occupy our minds" (González Mínguez 21). Like the village of Highbury, the students in the high school associate with those of their same "class." Cher (the film's Emma) and her friend Dionne let Tai and the viewer know the various

groups of their high school and where each group congregates on the school's campus. Those who habitually do drugs, whom the students call "loadies," "generally hang on the grassy knoll," while the popular kids sit at the outside lunch tables (*CL* 25:35-25:37). Other groups include those in charge of the school's TV station and the "Persian Mafia." There is very little inter-class mingling, and in an ideal world, Cher would prefer there be no mingling at all. Instead of the classed society of Regency England, though, the students form their groups based on interest, and while the same discrimination against various groups does still occur, few students actively try to change groups, showing the ultimate contentment the students have in the classed society of high school.[1]

Similar to the situation with Harriet and Martin in *EM*, Cher strives to direct Tai toward the popular kids and away from where she seems to naturally fit in with the skateboarding stoners. When Tai reveals to Cher that she "met a really cool guy"—Travis, the Robert Martin character—Cher tells her that "no respectable girl actually dates" guys like Travis. Today's viewers do not have to strain to understand why Emma would dissuade Harriet from marrying Martin because they can understand Cher, *CL*'s Emma character, when she says, "It is one thing to spark up a doobie and get laced at parties, but it is quite another to be fried all day." Concerning Martin, having money does not make one high class; likewise, smoking weed does not make one a stoner. Though in Cher's eyes it is acceptable to occasionally do drugs in social situations, the habitual way Travis and his group do drugs is not respectable. Tai's reference to an "herbal refreshment" and her mistaking Coke the beverage for cocaine show that Tai's true place is with the loadies (22:38). Even though Tai does associate with the popular group for a

[1] Though the demarcation of richer and poorer students does exist in high schools—indeed, Cher's large house and extensive wardrobe are status signifiers—*CL* chooses to emphasize interest over income in regard to class differences. As the next paragraph discusses, Cher directs Tai away from Travis not because he is poor, but because his interests (skateboarding, drugs, etc.) are not respectable to Cher.

majority of the movie, her initial reluctance to do so at the beginning and her eventual relationship with Travis at the end show the natural draw people have toward members of their own class.

Similarly to *SS* and *FPN*, class in *EM* and *CL* is challenged but far from subverted. At the ends of both the novel and film, each character is married to or dating a person in the same class, whether that be the classes of Regency England or the cliques of modern American high schools.[2] The change comes from a growing appreciation of other classes by Emma and her film equivalent, Cher. Both have the revelation that Harriet/Tai will be happiest as the partner of someone of her own class, not Emma/Cher's class. Both feel "a most unreasonable degree of happiness" "when [she] [sees] the sparks between [Harret/Tai] and [Martin/Travis]" (*EM* 442; *CL* 1:26:36-1:26:39). Though Emma and Cher try to manipulate class initially, they both ultimately accept the systems in place.

Surprisingly, Austen's novels and their modernized film adaptations posit distinct yet similar messages concerning money and class. The broad message of the novels is that those with wealth and a good social standing control the lives of those without. In *PP*, money and class are the primary drivers of one's motives in life, whether coming from a wealthy or poor family. In *SS*, greed begets greed among members of the upper class. In *EM*, members of the upper class uphold the class system through their condescending dealings with the lower class. Though separated by centuries and even cultures, class manifests in the films in various ways even in a "classless" society. For example, in *BJD* the modern form of class is character, while classism still exists in *FPN*, even though the United States is not based on explicit class structures. *CL*

[2] *EM* is rare among Austen's novels in that it only depicts marriages where both the husband and wife are from the same class. Among other Austen heroines, Jane and Elizabeth in *PP* marry up as well as Anne Elliot in Austen's *Persuasion*.

shows that the formation of class groupings is a natural part of human nature, so moving among classes is difficult and often undesirable. Undeniably, money and class play starring roles in both the novels and films.

By and large, money and class are prominent parts of Jane Austen's work, and the fact that they translate so well into modernized adaptations of her novels shows how money and class remain two of the ways we relate to each other, whether we recognize this or not. The modernized adaptations help to contextualize or reframe situations of class conflict present in Austen's novels in order to underscore their importance or else better explain the severity of risky "class" situations in the novels. The films invite the viewers to become more connected to Austen's characters, whether they realize it or not, by revealing the constant human traits that persist across centuries. This invitation is especially important when dealing with money and class as modern audiences have no experiential frame of reference for navigating a rigidly classed society. Tied up in "money and class," too, are aspects of the other themes of this thesis. "Love and marriage" and "identity" all relate to this important theme, just as they will connect back to "money and class" in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three: Love and Marriage

The primary expectation when picking up a Jane Austen novel or watching a Jane Austen adaptation is that there will be swoon-worthy love plots. Though it seems counterintuitive that Austen would still be popular given that, as John Maurice Forde puts it, her novels contain "no nudity, no sex scenes . . . [and that] love and respectability are achieved with nary the rattling of a teacup," readers and viewers alike still fawn over Austen's male protagonists with the same fervor as they do today's more promiscuous heartthrobs (13). The politics of love in Austen's novels are mirrored and updated in the modernized adaptations, letting readers connect all the more to her characters. This chapter will cover only the most prominent of Austen's love plots, focusing mostly on the main pairings of each novel and film. It will also refer to and build on the previous chapter on money and class, for those themes are inherently tangled up with love and marriage in Austen. Overall, the novels show that love is difficult in a society that values it so little in comparison to money and class. However, the films underscore the ultimate realities of Austen's novels by showing that love's agenda is more powerful than the desires of individuals or society.

The opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* (*PP*) contains perhaps the most famous line in all of Austen, and it shows how matters of money often eclipse matters of love. The line perfectly articulates how the themes of love and marriage are so tightly bound to money and class: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (*PP* 1). This very first line of *PP* sets the reader up for the novel's driving plotline, which is further underscored by its implication, for, according to González Mínguez in "Discussing Jane Austen in the Twenty-First Century," it then follows that "a single woman without a fortune is forced to find a husband to support her" (22). Both the line from the

novel and its corresponding inverse suggest that marriage is less the end result of love and more the result of any financial situation, good or bad. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the single women of *PP* risk eviction and poverty if they do not find husbands, and Mrs. Bennet wishes that the fortunate, single men in town would look to her girls for the wives they must be seeking. Though I will return to *Emma* later in this chapter, the titular protagonist underscores the connection of fortune to marriage that is also seen in *PP*. Emma declares to Harriet:

> I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid! the proper sport of boys and girls, but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as any body. . . . [F]or a very narrow income has a tendency to contract the mind, and sour the temper. Those who can barely live, and who live perforce in a very small, and generally very inferior, society, may well be illiberal and cross. (*Emma* 83)

Though this quotation includes points on all three themes of this thesis—money and class, love and marriage, and identity—Emma's insistence that income is connected to one's disposition should she remain unmarried aligns with the beginning of *PP*. Emma believes that because she is wealthy, and because she wishes to stay single, she will not fall into the trope of being a "poor old maid." Though the primary subject in both the quotation from *PP* and the one from *EM* is marriage, the secondary subject is money, not love.

Similarly, in *PP* the married women's primary focus is on marrying their young female relatives well. Mothers tend to consider a man of good fortune "the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters" without considering "the feelings or views of such a man . . . on his

first entering a neighbourhood" (*PP* 1). Without any scientific study, the characters, John Wiltshire emphasizes, are "assuming a voice in order to expose how widespread is the attribution to others of what we ourselves wish" (*Recreating Jane Austen* 101). In other words, if marriage is what the women want, they believe it *must* be what the men want. The characters are taking their personal thoughts and wishes and calling them truth. Though most people expect women to be the ones emphasizing a loving marriage, in Austen the women direct their thoughts toward economically beneficial marriages. Mrs. Gardiner tells Elizabeth that "if [Wickham] had the fortune he ought to have, I should think you could do no better. But as it is—you must not let your fancy run away with you" (*PP* 108). While most of the young women strive for love when looking for a husband, the married women press rationality by asking their young relatives to consider the financial aspect. Though the goal for both the young and married women is marriage, the motivation for the latter is strictly financial.

Nevertheless, love occasionally does triumph over issues of money and class, but not without a fight. Mr. Darcy upon finding himself falling in love with Elizabeth, whose "want of connection" he considers a "great . . . evil," attempts to suppress his feelings (*PP* 148). Though he has the financial means to support them both, the idea of the social repercussions of their union causes him to resist. Always aware of her family's inferior status relative to the society they associate with, Elizabeth takes it to heart when Darcy, in a fit of emotion, tells her, "Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?" (144-5). Darcy's own fortune—"ten thousand a year"—does not supplant his hesitancy to marry Elizabeth, for his connection to titled aristocracy is too precious, he thinks, to marry someone with such low connections as Elizabeth (6). However, as chapter four will further address, Darcy overcomes his

pride, Elizabeth overcomes her prejudice, and the couple does marry despite the difference in class. Against the advice of their aunt and mother, Elizabeth and her sister Jane would "do anything rather than marry without affection" (280). While the girls' sentiment could be simply youthful naivety, it also shows the small hope that some marriages may be grounded in love rather than the dictates of class.

While marriages based on love are most desirable for the Bennet sisters, transactional marriages are expected and even beneficial for other characters in the novel. When Mr. Collins visits Longbourn to unite with one of the Bennet girls, he first seeks a wife based on "his strictest notions of what was due to seniority; and for the first evening [Jane] was his settled choice" (53). However, when Mrs. Bennet makes it known to him that Jane is expected to soon be spoken for, "Mr. Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth" (53). Readers can assume that this change was not difficult for Mr. Collins. In accordance with his plan in coming to Longbourn, "if one attractive and marriageable young woman is not available, then another will fit the bill just as well. . . . The young women he courts have no real existence for him: what matters is how they suit his schemes" (Wiltshire, *Recreating JA* 101). Mr. Collins does not expect to marry for love; while his motive to save the Bennet women from their fear of him leaving them impoverished is good, his desired execution—marrying one of the sisters—disregards the other person's feelings in the transaction. In short, he objectifies the women. Charlotte Lucas, on the contrary, understands quite well Mr. Collins' desire for marriage, and she capitalizes on it. As a 27-year-old unmarried woman, she views Mr. Collins as the man whom she could marry "solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment," believing that her "chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (*PP* 93, 95). It is a perfect match for two people who expect little love in a marriage. Elizabeth expects

too much from marriage to marry Mr. Collins, but Charlotte recognizes the benefit for herself of a marriage without love.

The main focus of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (*BJD*) is the titular character's remaking herself in order to avoid adding more time to her "thirty-second year of being single," but she eventually learns that the pressures of love in the modern age are not conducive to reality (1:06-1:09). Similarly to Austen's time, though not as intensely, women today are expected to marry within a few years of entering adulthood. She must endure her parents' annual New Year's Day party where "every year [her mother] tries to fix [her] up with some bushy-haired, middle-aged bore" (1:17-1:20). Though she is initially attracted to this year's "bore," Mark Darcy, he is not in turn attracted to her. Instead of *PP*'s Darcy not liking Elizabeth for lack of proper connections, Mark initially does not like Bridget because she is a "verbally incontinent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish, and dresses like her mother" (4:46-4:50). This comment by Mark, overheard by Bridget, spurs Bridget's formation of her diary, in which she writes her New Year's resolutions: to, among other things, lose weight, stop smoking, and "find [a] nice sensible boyfriend to go out with" (7:48-7:51). In an interview with Indian media site *Firstpost*, *BJD* writer Helen Fielding says that these "pressures of the external" are what "makes Bridget so relevant even today" (Gauri). Bridget plans to "take control of [her] life," which align with modern societal expectations of what a desirable woman does (*BJD* 7:30). In *PP*, Elizabeth has no power to make herself more desirable since her fault is familial, not personal; it is only through a series of events that she and Darcy come together. However, Bridget, as a woman of the 21st century, has the privilege and the curse of taking actionable steps that she perceives will enhance her appeal. While throughout the film she struggles to meet societal standards of attractiveness, in the end Mark reveals that though "there are elements of the ridiculous about

[her]," he "like[s] [her] very much just as [she is]" (55:31-55:33, 56:23-56:26). The self-improvement that Bridget strives for is ultimately unnecessary. She attains a good and loving relationship without conforming to modern expectations of women.

But before the film doles out this sweet resolution that elevates love, it focuses on the pressures of love in the modern age, which are wholly unrealistic and lead to surface-level relationships. By trying to become more desirable, Bridget ends up in a relationship wholly reliant on sex. Though the Mr. Collins plot is entirely omitted from *BJD*, the objectification of women remains as it most often happens in the modern sense: via sex. Though the dominant equivalent of Daniel Cleaver in *BJD* is *PP*'s Wickham, Daniel also objectifies Elizabeth as Mr. Collins does in the novel. Daniel is always skirting Bridget's questions about the development of their relationship, questions which usually occur before or after the couple have sex. Since it's a workplace relationship, Bridget asks, "What happens at the office?," suggesting she wants to know how to deal with their relationship while on the clock in front of other employees (26:57). Daniel pretends the question is literal and answers, "You see, it's a publishing house. So that means that people write things for us and then we print out all the pages and fasten them together and make them into what we call a book" (27:00-27:10). Later, as Bridget sees their relationship progressing, she asks, "Do you love me?," to which Daniel replies by distracting her with sex (34:45). He does not intend to make their relationship public nor even for it to go beyond sex and weekend getaways. The modern equivalent of a marriage without love is a relationship based solely on sex. Though Bridget embarks on her personal journey in order to secure a long-term relationship, the result is a surface-level fling, showing that modern expectations do not lead to the types of healthy relationships that society promises.

The conflicts the sisters face in *Sense and Sensibility* (*SS*) show how individuals cope with internal and external pressures of love in a society that values it so little. Gao Yishen, in *What Makes a Happy Marriage? A Study of Choice in Four Jane Austen Novels*, claims that "trapped in an imprudent engagement . . . for four years," Edward holds to a strong belief of love as loyalty (8). Though Elinor has only a thousand pounds, "it would have been far preferable" to Edward's mother, Mrs. Ferrars, for Edward to marry Elinor than Lucy, who "was undoubtedly inferior in connections, and probably inferior in fortune to [Elinor]" (*SS* 134). Still, out of loyalty to his original betrothed, Edward chooses to stay with Lucy despite having fallen out of love with her some time ago. He admits that the past four years, "which if rationally spent, give such improvement to the understanding, must have opened his eyes to her defects of education . . . [and] had perhaps robbed her of that simplicity which might once have given an interesting character to her beauty" (134). Because love in marriages was relatively rare in Austen's time, to have fallen out of love with one's spouse would not have seemed much of an issue compared to breaking the sacred promise of a marriage. Edward, though, takes the promise a step beyond as he considers engagement to hold just as strongly as matrimony. Edward has remained faithful to Lucy and plans to continue to do so even as he grows to consider the engagement "an entanglement which [has] long formed his misery" (336). There are a multitude of reasons why he should not marry Lucy—threatened loss of his family, loss of fortune, and a missed opportunity to marry his new love, Elinor—but he persists in his original promise for longer than one would think natural. Ultimately, it is Edward's brother's surprise marriage to Lucy that frees him to marry Elinor. The fact that Edward loves Elinor more than Lucy has no bearing on his decision-making while under the promise of engagement, showing that fierce loyalty is one way to traverse love and marriage.

Contrastingly, another way lovers at the time dealt with societal pressure was to choose the most financially beneficial option. Though Edward chooses loyalty over fortune, Marianne's initial love interest, John Willoughby, does the opposite by "choos[ing] money over love" (Yishen 8). John Willoughby cuts off contact with Marianne and only later explains that he cannot marry her for financial reasons. Further indebted "every year since [his] coming of age," Willoughby decides to "re-establish [his] circumstances by marrying a woman of fortune," which Marianne is not (*SS* 299). He later confesses to Elinor his "still ardent love for Marianne," but his debts, he explains, are too large to do anything but marry a woman whose "money [is] necessary to [him]" (306). A marriage of love would have gained him nothing in a society that prizes financial stability more than love in marriage. Edward would have been willing to live in unhappy poverty with Lucy, but Willoughby requires the comfort of an affluent life even if his marriage to Miss Grey is itself an unhappy one, revealing two ways of navigating marriage in a society where love is not required.

Just as love flourishes in inconvenient times in *SS*, love also acts in *From Prada to Nada* (*FPN*) despite the best-laid plans of the characters, showing that love has no regard for one's plans. Though Edward in the film is briefly engaged to a woman named Lucy, it is seemingly only in response to Nora's denying Edward's advances in favor of her ten-year plan. Nora's choice to "leave a game even when [she] know[s] [she] can win" is directed toward furthering her career; she does not think she can "be a good lawyer and set up . . . a community service and legal practice" while being in a relationship with her current boss (1:06:56-1:06:59, 1:04:24-1:04:29). The rift between Edward and Nora is not about old promises as it is in the novel; instead, it is about conflicting goals. Nora claims she "resisted [Edward], not for lack of love, but because [she] was afraid of losing [herself] in it" (1:26:09-1:26:18). Nevertheless, Nora does

eventually find herself further in love as the film ends with Nora and Edward's wedding. Edward's suggestion that Nora would need to "decide . . . where to put [her] office" in the house he bought for the two of them suggests that she can reconcile her career goals with her love for Edward (1:38:14-1:38:18). Though Nora had not planned for love in her ten-year plan, it appeared just the same.

Additionally, Mary's love plot redirects her agenda-driven love toward a purer love that, too, goes against her plans. Mary dates her college teacher's assistant Rodrigo so that she can "go back to Beverly Hills," which she believes he will do because "he has lots of money. He loves taking care of things. Why not [her]?" (1:11:16, 1:11:27-1:11:31). Sadly for Mary, this falls through, as Rodrigo, though not in debt and needing to marry someone wealthy, does turn out to be as seedy as Willoughby: He is actually already married. Mary later learns to love her life without money and falls in love with a *barrio* resident, the Colonel Brandon of the film named Bruno. While Marianne in *SS* initially dislikes Colonel Brandon for being "on the wrong side of five and thirty," Mary in *FPN* dislikes Bruno for looking like a "homeless . . . gang member" and representing the life she wishes to escape (*SS* 36; *FPN* 18:08-18:26). Love has no regard for Mary's plans for affluence, though she is able to attain happiness anyway.

Both the endings of *SS* and *FPN*, while attempting to offer happy endings, fail to offer what Janice Radway, in her classic study *Reading the Romance*, calls the "'utopian' moment." According to Radway, most romance novels achieve their climax in a moment of bliss, when the heroine feels completely understood and comforted by the hero. In this moment, "men are neither cruel nor indifferent, neither preoccupied with the external world nor wary of an intense emotional attachment to a woman" (Radway 215). However, the final pairings in *SS* and *FPN* portray no such pleasures: there is no Mr. Darcy character who denies his status and family in

order to marry the woman he loves. Rather, Edward, as we have seen, does the exact opposite, marrying Elinor only after the conflicts with his family and Lucy are resolved. *FPN* weakly attempts to mimic the concept of a utopian moment by ending the film with the marriage of Edward and Nora, but it falls short. While the scene does follow Radway's observation that "women . . . seek out ideal novels in order to construct such a [utopian] vision again and again," the marriage seems unrealistically sudden considering Nora's personality and the modern timelines of dating and marriage (215).

Emma (*EM*) is unique among the Austen novels because the heroine is so starkly *against* marriage, which shows that marriage is most useful as a means of increasing social standing. While Austen's other heroines range from desperate to get married to simply going along with the system, Emma, the 21-year-old protagonist, declares herself solely a matchmaker for others, never to be married herself (a topic which will be explored more in the next chapter on identity). Eljvira Kica, writer of "Perceptions of Marriage and Human Relationships in Jane Austen's Novel *Emma*," makes it clear that unlike the Bennet sisters in *PP*, "Emma [is] not a girl who [has] to find a husband as the only escape from poverty" (65). She has a large inheritance, and she "believe[s] few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as [she] is of Hartfield" (*EM* 82). Though other women view marriage as a way up the social or economic ladder, Emma views herself as already at the top. Therefore, she has "very little intention of ever marrying at all" (82). She does not see what benefits a husband could give her beyond what she already has. With her sister married and her mother deceased, Emma is the mistress of the estate. She has a good relationship with her father, her social circle is lively, and she lives comfortably. In fact, Emma's male counterpart in the novel, Mr. George Knightley, is in a similar situation, living comfortably in social and economic affluence and in no rush to marry, though his brother

is married—to Emma's sister, no less. Emma is unique among Austen's characters because she is uninterested in marriage and at the top of the social order. These two qualities together show how marriage is often desired for its usefulness as an avenue to heightening one's social standing. Because Emma is already at the summit of the social order, marriage is unnecessary.

Because marriage is best used to climb the social ladder, Emma spends the novel directing Harriet not toward the man she loves, but toward the man who can secure her social standing. Love is only secondary. When Harriet first comes to Highbury, she receives a marriage proposal from a farmer named Robert Martin which Emma believes will "sink [Harriet] for ever" from any kind of high society (28). Given that Harriet "desir[es] to be guided by any one she look[s] up to," Emma decides to direct Harriet's attentions to Mr. Elton, "the very person fixed on . . . for driving the young farmer out of Harriet's head" (27, 34). Though marriage in Austen's novels is seen primarily through the female lens, there is no doubt that marriage is a man's game; however, in John R. Greenfield's reading of the novel, "Emma's overriding fantasy . . . is that she has the male capability to confer power on the economically or socially threatened women in her community" (37). Most of Austen's heroines face pressure to marry well in order to secure a fortune, a comfortable life, and social standing. Because Harriet has no known parentage for most of the novel, Emma takes it upon herself to secure Harriet's future. When Emma first fixes on Elton for Harriet, she notes that "Elton's situation was most suitable, quite the gentleman himself, and without low connections" (*EM* 34). Only after Emma decides that Elton would be the perfect match for Harriet does she embark on joining the pair in love, which emphasizes that one of the prime goals of marriage is to raise a person socially.

In *Clueless* (*CL*), the draw to have a significant other is unavoidable. While 16-year-old Cher, the "Emma" character, does not vow to remain single forever, writer and director Amy

Heckerling modernized the situation by translating marriage into virginity. For late 20th-century teenagers, marriage would have been a decade or more away, so it would not have been pressing for a high schooler to make decisions about marriage. However, at Cher's age modern teenagers are pressed to engage in sex. Like Emma who "must see somebody very superior to any one [she has] seen yet, to be tempted" to marry, Cher is "not interested in doing it until [she] find[s] the right person" (*EM* 82; *CL* 46:21-46:23). According to Marc DiPaolo, both "Cher and Emma . . . proceed as if they are experts in the very subject of which they know next to nothing" (136). Though Cher and Emma have not experienced sex or marriage, each holds strong convictions against either sex or marriage throughout the majority of her respective story. Cher reasons that since she is "picky . . . about [her] shoes" which "only go on [her] feet," why should she want to have sex with high school boys who are "like dogs. You have to clean them and feed them and they're just like these nervous creatures that jump and slobber all over you" (*CL* 46:24-46:27, 4:00-4:06). As young women in Austen's day were expected to marry, so did Cher experience peer pressure to be in a sexual relationship in high school. While initially, both Emma and Cher are set apart from their peers based on their decisions about love, both inevitably do end up in relationships, Emma with Mr. Knightley and Cher with Josh. This reversal of personal beliefs shows that love is unavoidable.

Alternatively, the way Tai falls in love with multiple boys too shows the unavoidable nature of love and relationships. Just as Emma directs Harriet away from Martin and toward Elton, Cher directs Tai away from Travis and toward the film's Elton, the only character whose name remains the same between the novel and film. Tai's love life is very much influenced by Cher, who wants her to hang out with the right crowd. In the beginning of the film, Cher constantly maneuvers Tai away from Travis, who is part of the skate-boarding, weed-smoking

group called the “loadies” (25:35). Though Elton does not love Tai like Cher believes he does, Tai easily falls for him. Similar to Harriet, Tai even has a box of items that remind her of Elton. However, as soon as she “burn[s] it because [she’s] so over him,” Tai admits to having fallen in love with Josh (1:14:46-1:14:48). In the interim between Elton denying her and her falling for Josh, Tai claims she “listened to [the tape with her and Elton’s song] . . . every single night” (1:15:17-1:15:19). Even when Cher and Josh start dating, Tai returns to loving Travis. Not once in the film is she content in her singleness, suggesting that the desire to be in a relationship is inescapable.

In conclusion, Austen’s novels and their modernized adaptations have similar messages about love and marriage. The novels specifically show how love is difficult in a society that values it so little in comparison to money and class. This message is exemplified in *PP* where matters of money often, though not always, eclipse matters of love. Likewise, *SS* shows how various attitudes about marriage result from how individuals cope with the external and internal pressures of society; while some, like Edward, hold tightly to the promise marriage represents, others, like Willoughby, use marriage as an opportunity to gain the most socially or financially. Meanwhile, Emma shows that marriage is most useful as a means of increasing social standing. In the end, the novels as well as the films exemplify how love’s agenda is more powerful than the desires of individuals or society. The protagonists of all the novels and films marry who they truly love despite societal conflicts. Specifically, *BJD* underscores this message by showing that the pressures of love, more specifically the standards placed on women, in the modern age are not conducive to reality; in other words, one is not forced to conform to society’s standards of beauty or respectability in order to find a partner. Also, *FPN* shows how love has no regard for

one's plans. Finally, *CL* shows how the draw to have a significant other is unavoidable in our society.

Austen lovers and Austen haters often cite the same reason they love or hate Austen's writing: love. Fans will cite Austen's love stories as timelessly swoon-worthy while haters cite the same as proof of her being average or else derivative of the same types of love plots that have been written for years before and after her time. Each film incorporates the love plots of its corresponding novel in different ways, though most are simplified in order to fit neatly into a 90-minute film plot structure. Though Austen is also often criticized for being repetitive from novel to novel, each film brings her work to unique contexts, away from the confines of Regency England and into the diversity of modern life. Ultimately, even with the various modernizations of the plots, the romantic pairings of Austen's heroines both in the novels and films show love as the chief desire in a relationship despite one's original plans or societal proscriptions.

Chapter Four: Identity

Identity is hard to pin down. The ways humans work to create or even discover our individual identities has been the source of art for centuries, if not millennia. Even the progress of the 20th and 21st centuries has not made identity any easier to uncover and establish. For the purposes of this chapter, identity is defined as a combination of one's class, personality traits, and world view. This can be self-assessed or perceived by others, and it is not an inherent quality that identifies a person from birth to death. Because, as Sheryl Bonar Craig puts it, "[a]ll of Austen's novels are stories of young women growing up, learning about themselves and about other people through trial and error," it is no surprise that in the novels addressed in this thesis, identity is complex and malleable, changing based on characters' situations or experiences. However, whereas the novels share a common perspective on identity, the films under discussion do not have one common theme; each film has its own message about identity. *Bridget Jones's Diary* shows us that it is unnecessary to change one's identity for others, while *From Prada to Nada* represents identity as more complex than simply one's geography or cultural surroundings. Lastly, *Clueless* presents identity as ultimately dependent on a single moment's knowledge and experiences. Together, though the novels and their corresponding film adaptations have differing messages about identity, both forms of media show that modern questions of identity remain as strong and compelling as those of Austen's day.

In *Pride and Prejudice* (*PP*), the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy reveals that one's first impressions, based on behavior or social standing, do not always reveal the intricacies of another's identity. This idea is evident in the first iteration of *PP* that Austen wrote, which is called *First Impressions*. Even the new title, though, shows the idea of mistaken first impressions. Gao Yishen explains how "pride" and "prejudice" are attributed to Darcy and

Elizabeth respectively, with "Darcy's pride stem[ming] from his reserved manner to those people he is unfamiliar with" and Elizabeth's "prejudiced mind lead[ing] her to dislike Darcy" with his evident "proud and arrogant manners" (32-3). Elizabeth and Darcy form assumptions on each other's identity based on first impressions and do not consider the ways in which the other might not always fit that impression.

Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy's identity is based on a series of unfortunate initial impressions, which takes the entirety of the novel to undo in Elizabeth's mind. Before she can go to Pemberley herself and hear the praise given to Darcy by his housekeeper, Elizabeth first meets him at a ball where he "decline[s] being introduced to any other lady, and [spends] . . . the rest of the evening walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party" (*PP* 7). It is at that moment that "[h]is character [is] decided," by Elizabeth as well as all the other women of the community (7). Despite Darcy being "tall, dark, handsome, brooding, witty, intelligent, and with an income of 10,000 pounds a year," his initial behavior immediately puts Elizabeth off from Darcy (Forde 16). Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy is underscored by Wickham, who tells Elizabeth that though "the late Mr. Darcy bequeathed [him] the next presentation of the best living in his gift," his son denied Wickham the inheritance (*PP* 60). Because Elizabeth's first impression of Wickham is positive, and her first impression of Darcy negative, she is inclined to accept Wickham's story without question, a decision which causes more hurt than necessary throughout the rest of the novel. These impressions of Darcy are fixed in her mind. When she meets the housekeeper at Pemberley, who gives Darcy "praise . . . most opposite to her ideas," Elizabeth has a hard time believing her (184). Having heard and experienced nothing but the negative aspects of his personality, she cannot revise Darcy's identity in her mind: She cannot

see, let alone accept, his true identity. Instead, time and a series of remedies are required for Darcy's identity to be changed in Elizabeth's mind, showing the strength of first impressions.

Darcy's prideful identity predisposes him to not understanding the identities of those he does not already know. As chapter three on love and marriage discussed, the insular society he keeps allows him to be prejudiced (in addition to prideful) against Elizabeth due to her family. As discussed in the money and class chapter, one's birth determines one's financial status for the first few decades of one's life. In many ways, this is prolonged for members of the upper class, whose marriages are often arranged, such as Darcy and Miss de Bourgh, whose mothers planned their union "[w]hile in their cradles" (265-6). Marrying Elizabeth would disrupt the identity that Darcy's family had expected him to maintain, not only because he would not be marrying the woman they chose, but because he would be marrying a woman of lower status. Thus, identity is interwoven with class and even marriage. The identity of Elizabeth's family makes Darcy hesitate, thinking her as undistinguished as her father's finances suggest. However, he eventually accepts "how ardently [he] admire[s] and love[s] [her]" (142). Darcy's first impressions and assumptions about Elizabeth based on her family are incongruent with her true identity.

Bridget Jones's Diary (*BJD*) posits a simpler and more contemporary message, showing that it is unnecessary to change one's identity for others. Though the film has been criticized for being sexist—after all, Bridget spends most of the film trying to remake herself for men—her character arc actually brings her away from the woman who Gayatri Gauri of *Firstpost* says has an "obsession with her weight, and [a] propensity to chase the wrong men." No doubt the beginning shows the sexist propensities ingrained in twenty-first century women as she dodges questions of family asking about her love life—"You career girls. Can't put if off forever, you know."—and her mother making her change clothes because she will "never get a boyfriend if

[she] look[s] like [she has] wandered out of Auschwitz" (*BJD* 2:47-2:50, 2:00-2:03). She muddles through the comments that happen every year, a seemingly necessary evil of the annual holiday party. However, none of these jeers press her toward remaking her life until she believes she has met the "mysterious Mr. Right [she'd] been waiting [her] whole life to meet" (3:19-3:23). After embarrassing herself in small talk, she overhears Mark insulting her to his mother. As the song "All by Myself" starts up, Bridget via voiceover says, "Right there. That was the moment" (5:03-5:05). Despite the barrage of rude comments made by her family, Bridget is spurred to change only by Mark Darcy's rude comments about her. She believes that she must change her identity in order to be attractive to men because the attractive man at her parents' party insults her.

In spite of this opening sequence, Bridget's character develops over the course of the film in ways that keep all the "negative" qualities she wanted to change in the beginning, showing that changing her awkward personality was not necessary for someone to love her. As chapter three discusses, despite Mark's initial comment about her to his mother, he later admits that he was "unforgivably rude" (55:51). He does not even expect her nor want her to change her identity in order for him to love her. In the end, the Bridget that runs pants-less down the street after Mark is the same one who—while simultaneously tipsy and hungover—flirts with him at the beginning of the film. Unfazed by Bridget's behavior, Mark buys her a new diary, saying, "Time to make a new start, perhaps" (1:30:40-1:30:41). Mark's buying Bridget a new diary at the end of the film represents a new Bridget that the completion of her old diary would not have shown. To have successfully remade herself would ironically have been no change at all, for she would still be the same woman who believes that her love life is contingent on altering her identity. Therefore, the actual change in her character is that she made no change at all and

instead accepts that someone could love her just the way she is. She changed in the way that neither she—nor society—wanted her to, and she still managed to get the guy.

The large changes in the Dashwood sisters' lives at the beginning and end of *Sense and Sensibility* (*SS*) show that identity is not fixed; rather, it must be adaptable depending on circumstances. In a time when one's identity was so tightly interlinked with his or her status and lifestyle, the Dashwood women are effectively forced to change their identities when they move from their own estate to one belonging to a relative. In contrast to their way of living at Norland, the Dashwood women will now "live so cheap. . . . have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants. . . . keep no company, and can have no expenses of any kind" (*SS* 14). While it is true that people lived on much less in their time than the Dashwood women, they were accustomed to a certain lifestyle that had to shift once they were left with so little money and no way to support themselves. This change is furthered by their transplant to a new place, "a removal from the vicinity of Norland beyond [Mrs. Dashwood's] wishes" (26). Not only will they have to live more humbly, but they will have to do it while growing accustomed to a new area with new acquaintances, forming an identity different from the one they had at Norland.

Marianne undergoes the biggest identity shift, eventually thinking and doing exactly what she thinks impossible for herself at the beginning of the novel. The middle Dashwood sister, sixteen years old, believes that "the more [she] know[s] of the world, the more [she is] convinced that [she] shall never see a man whom [she] can really love. [She] require[s] so much!" (20). She believes she is firm in her identity, citing how much she knows about the world and using words like "never" to suggest an unchanging state. Furthermore, she judges quickly and holds unmovable opinions about those around her. Her first impression of Colonel Brandon, which she holds for the majority of the novel, is that he is "an absolute old bachelor, for he was on the

wrong side of five and thirty" (36). She cannot fathom marrying a man so aged and undoubtedly sickly. As with the shift in identity at the beginning of the novel, Marianne suffers a breakup and sickness that cause an identity shift at the end as well. Despite all the declarations she had made about her personality and her life, Marianne "discover[s] the falsehood of her own opinions. . . . [S]he [finds] herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patronnes of a village" (352). She learns that her identity is not static like she thought it was, for she marries Colonel Brandon and becomes all these identities that she never thought she would be.

Likewise, identity is a significant theme in *From Prada to Nada* (*FPN*). Nora and Mary Dominguez are confronted with what they see as conflicting identities when they are forced to move from their mansion in the predominately white area of Beverly Hills to their aunt's house in the Hispanic *barrio* in East L.A. The culture they are accustomed to participating in is strictly white, and they mock their father for wanting to "dance to tacky ranchero music" (5:18-5:20). Their father's participation in Hispanic culture is nothing more than a quirk to them, and the sisters do not actively choose to engage with the culture while in Beverly Hills. When they first move to East L.A., they don't even know enough Spanish to introduce themselves or understand the conversations on public transport, a surprising fact to those they meet: "You live in L.A. and not speak Spanish? [sic]" (36:12-36:15). Most of the characters are shocked that Spanish is not part of the sisters' identity, both for the fact that they are Hispanic and that they live in L.A. Similarly, Nora is surprised that Edward, a white man, speaks Spanish. For him, the explanation is simple: "Of course. I grew up in L.A." (45:32-45:34). He understands that being bilingual is a useful tool though most of his correspondence is English, and it does not encroach on other aspects of his identity to speak Spanish. Edward embraces the complexity of his identity in a way

Nora and Mary cannot. The sisters believe their identity lies in white, Beverly Hills culture, and only throughout the course of the film do they recognize the complexity of their own heritage and expand their identities.

Though Hispanic herself, Mary represents the ways racism and stereotypes play a role in establishing one's identity. Both sisters know little Mexican culture, but Mary is defiantly against that part of her identity and is initially unaccepting of nuance. Mary also makes it clear to Rodrigo that she does not consider her Mexican heritage to make up a large part of her:

> Rodrigo: So, you're Mexican, too?
>
> Mary: No, my parents.
>
> Rodrigo: Okay. And what are you?
>
> Mary: American, of course. Well, and Mexican. So, Mexican-American. American-Mexican. My dad was more Mexican. (40:50-41:08)

She emphasizes the American part of her, and though she cannot blatantly ignore her heritage, she claims the Mexican part of her identity only as a side effect of being born to Mexican parents. Being Mexican to Mary means fully participating in Mexican culture, which she neither does nor wants to do for most of the film. Therefore, her identity is, in her mind, not Mexican.

Additionally, *barrio* native Bruno presses Mary's assumptions about identity. Most of their dialogue in the first half of the film is a snappy back-and-forth as Mary makes a stereotypical statement and Bruno rebuts it by prompting her to reconsider to her flawed logic:

> Mary: Don't steal anything.
>
> Bruno: You think all Mexicans steal?
>
> Mary: I don't know. I'm not Mexican.

> Bruno: You're not Mexican? You should take a look at yourself in your new mirror because with a poncho and *huaraches*, you can make a killing selling tamales. (34:39-34:52)

By questioning the bases of the stereotypes Mary puts forth, Bruno urges her to rethink her identity. To Mary, a person is Mexican if he or she aligns with the Mexican stereotypes she believes Bruno aligns with (after all, she does not accuse Rodrigo of being a thief). He refutes her thinking by describing a stereotype, selling tamales in traditional Mexican clothing, that she would fit given the color of her skin. By describing this, he effectively asks her to consider how and why she would fit the Mexican stereotype; since she would align with the stereotype in this hypothetical situation, she must consider why she insists she is not Mexican. Eventually, through spending time with Rodrigo, she learns that if someone like her old self—wealthy, classy, and Mexican in heritage—can embrace the same culture she sees in the modest *barrio*, then maybe she can too. She admits that she is "finding Mexican culture . . . intoxicating" and even tells Bruno, "I really love your world" (49:35-49:38, 1:35:53-1:35:55). At the end of the film, she accepts the complexities of her own identity and the identities of those around her, identities that are not solely dependent on physical geography, race, or social class.

The East L.A. area, and most of its current residents, is the ideal melting pot of identity that the sisters ultimately achieve. Nora notes that the neighborhood has been a place of shifting identities throughout the years, having been "Jewish, then Japanese, then Mexican" (19:34-19:38). Though the physical geography of the place has stayed the same, the cultural geography shifts with the types of people inhabiting the space. Consequently, the area becomes a cultural embassy. The residents hold an annual "*fiesta loca"* celebrating *el Día del Grito*, or Mexican Independence Day (52:00-52:01). Though they reside in the United States, the residents still

consider the holiday important to their society and corporate identity. Furthermore, the undocumented immigrants who run a sewing shop out of the aunt's house have an idea of the stereotypical American identity. When they believe an immigration officer is at the door, the women display what they believe to be proper assimilation into the American identity by switching the television from a Spanish-speaking channel to baseball. The gesture will not change their location or race, but it displays an identity they believe is best associated with American citizenship. Still, it is not just Mary and Nora who have difficulty reconciling their identities. Bruno teaches local kids how to make street art, painting murals "to use [the] *barrio*'s walls as a canvas to tell [their] stor[ies]" (1:34:59-1:34:02). A prominent mural, shown in the background throughout the film and then at the very end of the credits, says "*Soy mexicano? Soy americano? Que soy?* [sic]".[3] The residents of the *barrio* cannot say which side of themselves they should give their whole allegiance to, but the film teaches that the answer to the question of identity can be "both/and" instead of "either/or."

Emma (*EM*) shows that a longstanding identity (declared by oneself or perceived by others) is not necessarily one's ultimate identity. Emma naively believes her identity is fixed forever, and that belief causes her much confusion in the novel. Because her identity revolves around her never marrying, she is reluctant to admit that she "must be a little in love with [Frank Churchill], in spite of every previous determination against it" (*EM* 244). Even when she does admit her feelings, she remains confused at *how much* she loves him, for "[a]t first, she thought it was a good deal; and afterwards, but little" (245). Though Emma believes herself to be an expert in others' love lives, what she views as a natural knack for matchmaking does not work on herself. On the one hand, John Wiltshire considers the novel's plot a "disciplining of Emma's

[3] Translation: "Am I Mexican? Am I American? What am I?" [my translation]

errant imagination" as she realizes that her ideas of love are often not grounded in reality (*Recreating Jane Austen* 56). On the other hand, Douglas Murray, in "Donwell Abbey and Box Hill: Purity and Danger in Jane Austen's *Emma*," claims instead that the novel depicts "Emma . . . becoming more and more comfortable in her own skin" (970). Either way, Emma has difficulty letting go of her self-proclaimed identity of singleness, and because she is always fixated on divining the feelings of others, her own feelings of love are foreign to her. She cannot fathom "[w]hy it was so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley. . . . Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return?" (*EM* 382). She is finally able to reason, "Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!" (382). It is a revelation to Emma, who at the young age of 21, had falsely imagined her identity to be forever what she declared as a naïve young woman.

Harriet's unknown identity, which she has held for twenty years, is presented as permanent, but its solution at the end of the novel underscores the message of changeable identities. Harriet is introduced as the "natural daughter of somebody," which she has been for seventeen years as she has lived orphaned at Mrs. Goddard's boarding school (23). Since one's family is a large aspect of identity, the fact that Harriet does not have a family allows Emma to create Harriet's identity, imagining her to be the daughter of "a gentleman of fortune" and trying to marry her to those closer to Emma's own class (61). Harriet's identity for most of the novel, and for her whole life up to this moment, is that she does not have a sure identity. The reveal of Harriet's parentage at the end of the novel—"daughter of a tradesman, rich enough to afford her the comfortable maintenance which had ever been her's"—means that, according to Yishen, "her 'blood of gentility' equals Mr. Martin's social rank" (*EM* 450-1; Yishen 21). Thus, her marriage

to Robert Martin is the perfect alignment of class identities. This revelation is not only a way of truly wrapping up all of the plot's loose ends, but it shows that Harriet's identity was never fixed.

Matching the film's unabashed transitory nature, *Clueless* (*CL*) portrays identity as a series of snapshots of a subject in motion, with each image depicting something different based on that moment's knowledge and experience. The film itself, twenty-five years old at the writing of this thesis, would require perhaps more footnotes than the scholarly editions of the novel it is based on. From Cher and Dionne's names—"great singers of the past who now do infomercials"—to the high-school jargon—"As if!"—the film is overflowing with cultural references (2:39-2:41). The identity of the film itself is a snapshot of 1995, a time capsule of American high school culture at that time. Though Marc DiPaolo in Emma *Adapted* says some viewers criticize the film for the volume of pop culture references "that place the narrative squarely in the past," others believe that the care with which Heckerling weaved slang and references into the dialogue, as *Cinema Blend's* Corey Chichizola claims, "helped make *Clueless* such an iconic and beloved movie" (127). Even the film's title represents a brief period of identity: the cluelessness of adolescence. Both Cher and Tai, the main focuses of the film, are called clueless due to the various aspects of life in which they do not have knowledge or experience, making the film a "domestic Bildungsroman" as the characters ultimately grow out of their cluelessness (DiPaolo 131).

Like Emma, Cher's character arc shows her becoming more aware of herself and others, which causes alterations in her identity as she learns more. Throughout the course of the film, she develops more knowledge about the world around her. In the beginning, she suggests that the United States should aid Haitian refugees like she handles guests who do not RSVP to her parties: "get to the kitchen, rearrange some things . . . [and] party with the Haitians" (*CL* 4:57-

5:01). Though she has good intentions, Cher does not have enough knowledge to act correctly on those intentions. Like Emma visiting the poor without truly grasping their plight, "[c]ertainly Cher begins the film with her heart in the right place, expressing liberal sentiments without boasting any real knowledge of social and political issues" (DiPaolo 134). However, this cluelessness can also be seen as rudeness. She asks the family's Hispanic maid, Lucy, if she "speak[s] Mexican" (*CL* 1:11:43). The woman leaves in anger, and when Cher asks Josh what she did wrong, he says, "Lucy's from El Salvador. . . . You get upset if someone thinks you live below Sunset [Boulevard]" (1:11:48-1:11:56). Cher meant no harm by her original comment to Lucy, but her ignorance made her offensive. She takes active steps to improve herself, to "makeover [her] soul," once she discovers she is in love with Josh, an idealistic college do-gooder (1:21:45). At the end of the movie, the Cher who is taking up items to help the fictional Pismo Beach disaster acts nothing like the one who suggested the United States deal with Haitian refugees like she deals with a packed dinner party. Both are equally kind-hearted, but the Cher at the end has "learn[ed] the importance of supporting sentiment with knowledge" (DiPaolo 135). Her identity can be only as good as her knowledge and experience, and her ignorance on important issues affects how people view her throughout the film.

Additionally, Tai undergoes many changes in identity throughout the film based on all she learns upon moving to Beverly Hills. The "adorably clueless" Tai that the audience and characters are introduced to dresses frumpily in clothes that one character notes would be fit for farming (a sly reference to Harriet's eventual marriage to the farmer Robert Martin in *EM*) (*CL* 22:15). With doe eyes, clutching her books, Tai looks up to Cher to teach her about her new school. After her thorough instruction, having been molded by Cher and Dionne, Tai starts dressing more like her new friends as evidence of her change in identity. The final significant

change in identity Tai undergoes also presents a shift in dress code. After progressively alienating Cher from her own group, Tai realizes that Cher "[has] been nothing but super-duper nice to [her]" and that she herself is in the wrong (1:25:44-1:25:46). At this point in the film, she is dressed nicer than her initial style but less formal than Cher's style. Sitting side by side at the skate park, Cher is dressed in a silky pink shirt with a white button-up shirt on underneath while Tai is wearing a striped t-shirt with her hair in French-braided pigtails down each side of her head (1:26:06). Tai has taken on her own style instead of mirroring her friends' style like she does for the majority of the film. Through Tai's multiple shifts in identity, she has finally settled on one that best encapsulates all the knowledge and experience she has gained throughout the school year.

In sum, questions of identity puzzle Austen's characters both in her novels and in their modernized adaptations. On the whole, the novels have a common message that identity is complex and changeable. This message is shown in *PP* as Elizabeth and Darcy realize that their first impressions of each other do not reveal the other's true identity. In *SS*, identity is adaptable depending on the shifting circumstances of the characters. *EM* shows that a longstanding identity is not necessarily one's ultimate or true identity. While each of the novels portrays identity in a similar way, the film adaptations do not. Each of the modernized adaptations has its own message about identity. Bridget's character arc in *BJD* reveals that it is unnecessary to change one's identity for others, whereas *FPN* presents identity as a various combination of many elements, including *both* one's geography and cultural surroundings. Finally, identity in *CL* is like a series of snapshots, dependent on a person's knowledge and experiences in a single moment. Identity defines each of the characters, and the lessons they learn as their stories play out present unique messages to readers and viewers alike.

Overall, each of these messages of identity from both the novels and films invites its audience to discover their own identities and be open to ever-changing identities. Claiming an identity is an inherently human pursuit, a task which retains meaning no matter what point in history, no matter what point in one's life. As the novels and films show, the characters do not hold to the identities they had at the beginnings of their stories, nor should we expect their ultimate identities to be permanent. Readers and viewers can learn lessons about their own pursuits of identity from each of the novels and films regardless of the time in which they were produced. The question of identity is universal, retaining a human relevance regardless of background, regardless of time period.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In an experiment conducted by doctoral student M. Casey Diana, half of the students in a college English class watched the film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), written by and featuring Emma Thompson, then read the novel while the other half did the reverse (49). At the end of the course, the students were asked a series of questions about how either viewing the adaptation before or after reading Austen's original novel affected their reading experience. The students who read the novel first reported feeling very confused about the plot, characters, and even the setting of the novel. Those who watched the film first were able to recall better the names and attributes of the characters as well as specific details about the plot and setting. "[S]tudents who viewed the film first . . . looked forward to reading the novel," leading Diana to conclude that she hopes film adaptations "ignite in young scholars a greater desire for Austen that only the literary text can quench" (53, 55).

From the students' responses about the clarity an adaptation brings, to Diana's conclusion that adaptations are gateways to the novels on which they are based, this experiment begs the question: Why do we as a culture make and demand (and better comprehend) adaptations of our favorite literary works? While it may seem like the entertainment market in the last couple of decades has been unduly flooded with reboots, remakes, and adaptations, John Wiltshire of *Recreating Jane Austen* reminds us that "every age . . . adapts, modifies and remakes" (2). Even the originals do not exist in a vacuum, for there is a chain of influence with an infinite number of links, going back to the beginning of human civilization. Shakespeare himself wrote very few wholly original plays, and his literary queen, Austen, took influence from the bard to varying degrees. In his article "'A Hartfield Edition': Jane Austen and Shakespeare," Wiltshire "propose[s] that Shakespeare's impact on Jane Austen is not to be discovered on the surface, but

is structural"; he also notes how Austen scholar Jocelyn Harris has argued that "*Emma* is a reimagining of *A Midsummer Night's Dream"* (215). This influence is clear from the text itself, as Emma quotes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—"'The course of true love never did run smooth'"—and then ponders how "[a] Hartfield edition of Shakespeare would have a long note on that passage" (*Emma* 73). Even our classics are not safe from outside influence, so it is irrational to demand that our modern media be original.

Besides what is seemingly a natural human tendency to openly allow other stories to influence our own, one must consider how adaptations of so-called "classic" literature are seen in society. Diana's experiment may cause teachers to shudder due to the countless times students have opted for watching a film adaptation rather than reading a dense classic for an assignment. Adaptations can be seen as cop-outs for those too lazy to read, even with contemporary novels and their adaptations. "The book was better," though a commonly true declaration, is also used by bookworms to look down on those who see the movie before reading the book or dare to see the movie *instead* of reading the book. We must ask, then, if there is any benefit to be gained from book-to-movie adaptations beyond satisfying readers' collective imagining of a novel, or else satisfying film producers' capitalizing on interest in popular books. Perhaps the answer lies in the conclusions Diana drew from her experiment; for her, Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* "provides a gateway to a positive reading experience," instead of simply "[deactivating] [a student's] imagination" (54). A film adaptation has the power to spark interest that was not there before, prompting viewers to pick up the book when the credits say, "Based on the novel by Jane Austen." By taking in a story in a medium one is used to—film—the viewers have the opportunity to recognize how the themes present in the story are relevant enough to today to read it for themselves in the original.

For the purposes of this thesis, I sought to see how Austen's themes are present in films that may not advertise explicitly to whom the debt of their plots is owed; in fact, *From Prada to Nada* (*FPN*) is the only film in this thesis that references Austen in the opening credits. Regardless, all three themes I have explored in these pages feature heavily in each of the novels and films: money and class, love and marriage, and identity. While the films present the themes with varying degrees of faithfulness to the original novels, each theme is keenly relevant to both Austen's 19th-century society and the films' 20th- and 21st-century societies.

Though many people today prefer to believe society has escaped the class structures of Regency England, the films show an overwhelming number of examples of how money and class still play important roles in our lives. In all three of Austen's novels explored in this thesis, money and class are almost main characters, driving the lives and decisions of the actual characters. In most cases, those in the upper class with wealth and land manipulate—intentionally or unintentionally—the lives of lower-class characters who lack wealth and land. Likewise, such classism appears in the films *FPN* and *Clueless* (*CL*) with the main characters looking down on those not of their "class." Social class is supplemented with behavioral class in the films as well. Even in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (*BJD*), in which social class does not seem to play a large role, the characters' behaviors suggest who is upper or lower class. For example, wealthy lawyer Mark Darcy is an upstanding gentleman, but most of the other characters act in crude ways unbecoming to Mark's level of class.

Furthermore, with the consistent popularity of romance in entertainment, it is no surprise that the theme of love and marriage is present in both Austen's novels and their modernized adaptations. Though the etiquette that governs matters of love and marriage has changed drastically over the last 200 years, characters in the modernized adaptations still face desires and

obstacles to love. Austen subverts the traditional function of marriage as a means of securing one's standing or increasing one's wealth by allowing her protagonists to marry whom they love, through which she shows the difficulties of love in a society that devalues emotion in marriage. In many ways, the pressures of love and marriage in the modern world, if not exactly similar in situation, are comparable in intensity to those of Austen's time. The films, therefore, posit a similar message, showing how love's agenda is more powerful than society's agenda about love as the characters obtain partners despite class, social or behavioral, or despite their own life plans.

The third and final theme under discussion in this thesis is identity. The quest for identity is perhaps why we enjoy reading novels or watching films, for in showing how characters' identities grow and change over the course of a plot, we can discover what might help us in our own processes of discovering identity. None of the identities presented in the novels or films are static, meaning the characters in each grow and change once their original identities are called into question. This message is most poignant in the novels since the characters thoughts are better known to the reader. Though the idea of changeable identities is present in the films as well, they do not have one overarching message about identity as the novels do. Instead, the protagonists of each film learn their own personal messages about identity. While Bridget in *BJD* learns that it is unnecessary to change her identity for men, Cher in *CL* learns that her identity *can* change based on growing knowledge and experience. Additionally, identity for the sisters in *FPN* stretches in a way that incorporates their Mexican heritage, leaving them with more complex identities than they have at the beginning of the film.

Moreover, to say, as John Maurice Forde does, that "Austen works well with her limitations"—as if to suggest that modern filmmakers do not—does not do justice to the ways all

entertainment is inherently influenced by the restrictions and freedoms of society (Forde 18). While it is tempting to say that the modernized adaptations work *without* limitations, we must consider how these films will be viewed hundreds of years from now. Perhaps the pressure that Bridget faces as a woman in the workplace will feel awkwardly outdated, or maybe the poverty of East L.A. compared with the affluence of Beverly Hills—in both *From Prada to Nada* and *Clueless*—will be a horrible reminder of a society hyper-focused on wealth (or the lack of it). Surely viewers of these films in the 24th century will say that filmmakers of the 20th and 21st centuries worked within their limitations as well.

Just as Austen did not write uninfluenced by the society around her, filmmakers today do not work in a bubble apart from society. Though the novels and films contain the same themes, they hold different messages, in many ways catering to the world in which they are made and considering what would be popular, acceptable, or edifying to readers or viewers. In the same way that Austen could not write the situations the film characters find themselves in—both because of her sphere of knowledge and societal restrictions on women—the filmmakers of the modernized adaptations cannot write exactly the situations the novel characters find themselves in—due to the outdated nature of situations such as male primogeniture and marriage etiquette. Instead, both work within the limitations and freedoms, the structures and cultures, of their respective societies.

Still, Jane Austen's plots and characters have a timeless appeal that allows people today to enjoy her work, whether in its original form or remade for modern audiences. The final question the students in Diana's experiment were asked to ponder was why *Sense and Sensibility* still has appeal today. Many students mentioned the "timeless desire for love and romance," citing the fact that "the technology may have changed but the emotions certainly have not"

(Diana 54). We can certainly apply those statements to all the novels and adaptations of this thesis. This sentiment is reiterated by 19th-century author and editor Oscar Fay Adams whose position on Austen's novels Claudia L. Johnson describes as "[eclipsing] the past and present equally" (76). Johnson claims that for Adams, though Austen's plots and characters are fictional, having "never lived at all," they are nevertheless immortal and timelessly real in every age. As if plucked out of time itself, or else obscuring it completely, Austen remains a staple in the world of romance and character study, lauded for her crafting of timeless emotions and themes, such as money and class, love and marriage, and identity. Janeites need not fear that subsequent centuries will see Austen outdated or even "cancelled," for the world she created goes beyond any specific time, place, or social structure. Indeed, her work is distinctly inward, looking to those specifically-human emotions that never expire.

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