

“Exploring the connections between Jane Austen’s *Emma* and Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* leads to a deeper understanding of the individual strength required to overcome social expectations.”

Discuss this statement in relation to two texts set for study.

Jane Austen’s Regency romance *Emma* and Amy Heckerling’s post-modern Bildungsroman film *Clueless*, explore the value of the need for individual strength in order to overcome societal expectations that one has been ascribed. Both texts satirise the societies in which they have been set, allowing for audiences of all scopes to gain a deeper impression of the texts. The focus on overcoming social norms gives readers the ability to understand the values that have continued over the time difference between the two texts.

Austen’s novel *Emma* highlights the societal expectations of young women, which transcends Heckerling’s *Clueless*. The description of protagonist, Emma, seen in accumulation, “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, rich...” indicated the expected characteristics of women within Regency period, a feature of society that has continued to the modern day. Emma’s disposition, however, was the reason for her downfall as seen throughout foreshadowing, “she has a disposition to think a little too well of herself,” highlighting ability for an individual’s good nature to transpire into a fatal flaw despite being a conformity to expectations. Austen’s exploration of the Regency belief of dissociation with those of the lower class is depicted through Emma’s defiant tone, “I would not have Mrs Robert Martin of Abbey-Mill Farm,” signifying the discourse it could bring one, as a highly regarded error of conduct. Thus, the depiction of harsh Regency expectations are prevalent within *Emma* as a flaw that requires intense growth in order to overcome.

Heckerling outlines the modern Beverley Hills’ expectations through Cher, as a transcendence of Austen’s protagonist, Emma. The opening scene begins with the diegetic sound of the song “Kids in America” by Kim Wilde, depicting the characteristics of the wealthy adolescents, and the common lifestyles they lead. Snapshots of Cher and her friends poolside and at malls display the exclusive lifestyle and lavish spending habits one falls into when mingling with the rich, an uncommon position for those of the lower class. Cher’s own acknowledgement of the restrictive nature of these characteristics during the rhetorical question “is this a Noxema commercial or what?” satirising the “perfection” that wealth was strongly believed to achieve, an expectation which can cause significant pressure and stress in upholding. Conclusively, Heckerling’s portrayal of wealthy 90’s teenagers satirises the belief for the exclusive lifestyle of the well-off to have been the be all and end all of modern American society.

Austen displays the strong will one needs in order to overcome societal pressures, as Heckerling also does, within her film. The high modality “she did not deserve this, she had often seen negligence perverse,” signifies the self-actualisation of flaws that can hinder one’s freedom of expression within Regency society. Additionally, in realising her detriment towards others, Austen’s use of epiphany for Emma, “how shocked I had been at my behaviour towards Miss Bates,” catalysed the maturation process for breaking away from restrictive expectations. The final acknowledgement of Emma’s prior conformist nature, “for at that time I was a fool,” indicates the strive for repentance for the past mistakes that one must perform in order to gain approval from others as an exit from high expectations.

Therefore, Austen's illustration of the way one must break free from the restrictive nature of Regency society, is a notion transpired within Heckerling's Clueless.

Similarly, within Clueless, Heckerling furthers Austen's notion of overcoming harsh societal expectations with a forethought of her love for Josh shown through accumulation "slug who hangs around the house," and "hideous dancer," depicting the strong sense of denial and immaturity that must be overcome in order to gain a more mature outlook on life. Cher's epiphany of her attraction to Josh is seen through the diegetic sound of trumpet fanfare and the lighting of the water fountain in the background, signifying the moment of change and realisation which breaks the mould of expectation. Her final achievement in freeing of herself from restrictive values is seen through her taking on Josh's humanitarian aspects, "I need a makeover, but this time for my soul," a belief for one to need to create a new beginning in order to achieve an enhanced identity. As a result, Heckerling's portrayal of her protagonist's maturation process aligns with Austen's depiction of the freedom from a restrictive regency era.

Despite more than a century difference, both Jane Austen and Amy Heckerling have displayed the satirising of their respective eras' societal expectations, in order for audiences to gain deeper understandings of the individual willpower needed to overcome external pressures. The continual values of higher status equating to superiority and the need for maturation to break free from conformist moulds have been depicted in the same way, despite significant contextual differences.