

**FROM Highbury to Hollywood and Back Again:  
Jane Austen's Materialization in  
Popular Culture**

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

REBECCA ELIZABETH HEINEMANN

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs  
& Academic Scholarships  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE  
RESEARCH FELLOWS

April 2001

Group: Humanities

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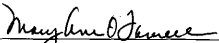
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**ABSTRACT**

From Highbury to Hollywood and Back Again:  
Jane Austen's Materialization in  
Popular Culture. (April 2001)

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Within the past several years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Jane Austen's life and works. She and her novels have become a part of popular culture through films, written adaptations, and Austen-related commodities. This thesis is an evaluation of the mechanisms (specifically a Jane Austen clock, a Jane Austen pendant, a Regency figure trinket box, the film *Clueless*, and the novels *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*) through which interest in Jane Austen has permeated popular culture and the ways in which she and her works have been translated into other media. The project's main focus is not what these films, written adaptations, and objects tell us about Jane Austen, but what they reflect about modern-day commodity culture, about current notions of class and culture (especially "high" culture versus popular/"low" culture), and about how Jane Austen functions as an idea within modern-day notions of culture.

Most people seem to understand culture to be divided into high culture and popular/low culture. An evaluation of Jane Austen reveals that she and her works can

be considered representative of high culture. Because she and her works can be seen as symbols of high culture, the market for popular culture items related to her and her works is created, at least in part, by people's desire to be attached to her and her works and to the high culture she represents. Jane Austen's existence in popular culture through these objects, films, and texts provides easier access to her and her works and to society's perception of high culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

Upon the completion of her film *Sense and Sensibility*, lifelong Jane Austen admirer Emma Thompson remarked, "Five years ago, there wasn't a sniff of Austen. And suddenly it's everywhere" (qtd. in Masters G1). The past several years have seen a resurgence of interest in Jane Austen's life and works. After nearly 200 years, Jane Austen has jumped from page to screen and into popular culture by means of film, print, and the production of Austen related paraphernalia.

Over the past decade, there has been a proliferation of film and television adaptations of Austen's novels, six in 1995 and 1996 alone. These productions range from the faithful BBC versions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* to Hollywood's star-laden adaptations of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma* to Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*, a modern day version of *Emma*. Not only have these movies and television programs been produced, but they have been critical and box office successes.

In addition to screen adaptations, Austen continues to be successful in her original medium, print. Austen's novels continue to sell well and many sequels and supplemental texts have been written to satisfy the public's hunger for Austen. Among the numerous authors taking advantage of society's passion for anything Austen, Joan Aiken has written a biographical sketch of *Emma's* Jane Fairfax and a sequel to *Mansfield Park* while Jane Dawkins has penned an epistolary sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*. Other books include *The Diary of Henry Fitzwilliam Darcy* by Majorie Fasman, *The Third Sister: A Continuation of Jane Austen's "Sense and Sensibility"* by Julia Barrett, and Natalie

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This thesis follows the style and format of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Fifth Edition*.



Tyler's *The Friendly Jane Austen: A Well Mannered Introduction to a Lady of Sense and Sensibility*. This reader's guide contains biographical highlights of Austen's life, quizzes, guides to each of Austen's novels and their characters, an extensive bibliography, and a filmography. Even the recently published *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, which have just been made into a film, can be read as interesting takes on *Pride and Prejudice*.

Avid fans have even formed societies devoted to the study of Austen's life and her works. The Jane Austen Society of North America, founded in 1979, is one of these organizations. Its current activities include the publication of a scholarly journal, *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, and conventions in which people dress in period costumes and gather to discuss Austen's life and her works. They also maintain a website from which one can follow links to *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal Online* and to websites devoted to the retailing Austen related products such as T-shirts, Post-It® notes, recordings of music from Austen's time, bookplates, postcards, coasters, mouse pads, cross-stitch kits, magnets, card games, stationery, bumper stickers, clocks, brooches, and posters.

The purpose of this project is to undertake an evaluation of the mechanisms through which interest in Jane Austen has permeated popular culture and the ways in which she and her works have been translated into other media. In light of the numerous reworkings of Jane Austen's novels in various media, I have selected specific objects, a film, and two texts to evaluate in greater detail: three Jane Austen objects (specifically a Jane Austen clock, a Jane Austen pendant, and a trinket box decorated with a Regency period fashion plate), the film *Clueless* (a 1995 modernization of *Emma*), and Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (both of which borrow portions of the *Pride and Prejudice* story line). This project's main focus is not

what this set of objects, particular film, and these two written adaptations tell us about Jane Austen, but what they reflect about modern-day commodity culture, about current notions of class and culture (especially "high" culture versus popular culture), and about how Jane Austen functions as an idea within modern-day notions of high culture and popular culture.

With assistance from the numerous adaptations of her novels, Jane Austen has become a part of popular culture. Raymond Williams defines popular culture as that which is "well-liked by many people" (*Keywords* 237). By that criterion alone, Jane Austen is an ingredient of popular culture. It is evident that Jane Austen enjoys a mainstream popularity in modern society because the number of people interested in her life and in her works is sufficient to warrant the production of large and varied amounts of Austen related paraphernalia. While it cannot be said that everyone, everywhere knows who Jane Austen is and enjoys her works, it is safe to say that a large number of people do, judging from the number of products and written and film adaptations available. One might know who Jane Austen is and buy these objects and adaptations, even without having read any of her novels. Consequently, her popularity is not sustained through her original works alone, but with the assistance of the mass production and consumption of items related to her and her works. As a result, Jane Austen is not just confined to educated, intellectual circles of scholars and to English classrooms, but her image and her works reach a larger portion of society through these numerous and varied adaptations.

The widespread popularity of Jane Austen and her works has not caused them to become so well known that they have become common in the sense that "common can be used to affirm something shared or to describe something *ordinary . . . low or vulgar*" (Williams, *Keywords* 71). The modern perception of popular culture as the culture of the

people "still carries two older senses: inferior kind of work . . . and work deliberately setting out to win favor" and a "strong sense of 'simplification'" (237). The implication is that what is not popular is culturally superior to that which is. No, the representative film, texts, and objects I have chosen to evaluate are not "pure" Jane Austen in the sense that her novels are, but that does not necessarily mean that they are inferior to her works or degrade them in any way. These adaptations of Austen's works entertain them in complex and varied ways and are not simplistic or subordinate to the originals simply because they exist in the realm of popular culture. The means through which Jane Austen has permeated popular culture has not caused her to lose her distinction as a great author nor have her works suddenly failed to be considered a part of the literary canon as a result of her widespread popularity. Jane Austen occupies a space in popular culture through these numerous adaptations and objects. Because of her association with them, she and her works do not fall from the realms of high culture that are considered to be superior to popular culture.

Since literature is commonly considered to be a component of society's notion of what constitutes high culture, the aforementioned adaptations provide a strong link between Jane Austen's works and high culture, with its association with intellectual enlightenment, economic privilege, and sophistication. I argue that the production and consumption of items related to Jane Austen have come to indicate an association with what is perceived to be learned or high culture, in contrast to "low" or popular culture. Through the production and consumption of these items, films, and texts, people may feel as if they are achieving the "Austen experience" and becoming intimately associated with what they perceive to be high culture without necessarily reading Austen's novels. In a sense, these Austen objects, films, and texts have a high cultural capital,<sup>1</sup> meaning that the production, consumption, distribution, and exchange of these items denote a desirous

relationship with high culture. I propose that the market for these Austen-inspired items is created out of an intense, envious desire to be associated with the notion of high culture that people identify with Jane Austen and with the world of civility, elegance, and sophistication she recreates in her novels.

The following section, "Notions of Culture: The Construction of High Culture versus Popular Culture," explores the notion of culture and the construction of high and low/popular hierarchies within it. This section also raises the question whether high culture can be acquired through commodities that seem to be connected to the notion of high culture. The next section, "Theories of Consumption: Consuming Culture through Jane Austen Objects," discusses the emergence of modern consumer culture, the act of consumption as means to satisfy the desire to be acquainted with high culture, and the ability of commodities to signify that acquaintance by considering the Jane Austen clock, pendant, and Regency Period trinket box. "Class Distinction in Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*" is a discussion of the ways in which Heckerling, through her film *Clueless*, asserts that the possession of commodities is not indicative of a relationship with high culture and of the ways in which she maintains the existence of class-based hierarchies. Helen Fielding collapses the notion of class-based hierarchies in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, as discussed in the penultimate section, "The Collapse of Cultural Hierarchies in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*."

## NOTIONS OF CULTURE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH CULTURE VERSUS POPULAR CULTURE

In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams asserts that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language . . . partly because of its intricate historical development . . . but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought" (87). Originally, the word culture meant the tending or cultivation of something, in particular crops or animals. Beginning in the eighteenth century, the idea of culture as cultivation was associated with the moral and spiritual progress of humanity and its striving for perfection. This interpretation of culture as a process also included the creation of end products, such as music, artwork, literature, and theater, which were also defined as culture. Beginning in the nineteenth century with the emergence of nation states and the Romantic interest in folk art, the word culture was made plural in order to distinguish between the cultures of different nations and the "specific and variable cultures of social and economic groups within a nation" (89). The establishment of anthropology as an academic discipline in the early years of the twentieth century added another dimension to the concept of culture with its sub-branch of cultural anthropology, which is understood to be "the comparative study of preliterate people' in which culture is defined as the whole way of life of a particular society" (Giles and Middleton 10). This use of the word was also extended to describe the way of life in literate societies. As a result of its complex development, there are three broad categories of definition for the word culture, which Williams identifies as:

- (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development

- (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group
- (iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. (*Keywords* 90)

These three categories alone, however, do not adequately define culture. What makes an activity "intellectual" or "artistic"? In describing culture as "the general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development," Williams implies that culture is continually in motion and always changing. Who determines the nature of this change? How does change begin and end, if it does at all? Are all end results of this process culture? Are all forms of culture the same? Considering these questions is essential to understanding the construction of cultural hierarchies and the ways in which Jane Austen can be linked with both popular culture and high culture.

Mid-nineteenth-century poet and Oxford professor Matthew Arnold provides an ineffable definition of culture in his book, *Culture and Anarchy*. In it, Arnold defines culture to be the "best that has been thought and known" and the medium through which "real thought and real beauty" can be given to "the masses" (69-70). Arnold believes that "[culture] does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes . . . [i]t seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely,--nourished, and not bound by them" (70). Implicit in Arnold's definition is the sense that culture should not be available only to an educated elite, but should be democratic and accessible to all economic classes. His definition, however, is problematic in that what is "the best" and what is "real" is highly subjective, and that determination should be left to the interpretation of the educated and upper economic classes. Only their notion of culture should be available to the masses.

Arnold's perspective on culture also limits its scope to include only scholarship and the arts. Culture is not what is popular and is enjoyed by the masses but stems from the education and knowledge situated in the upper classes of society. He demarcates culture as "literature and art and all the creative power of genius" instead of the inferior "intellectual food" in the form of "ordinary popular literature" that is offered to "the masses" in a way that is "proper" to their social status (69-70). Arnold is clearly saying that culture is what is passed down from the upper economic classes provided that it is in its pure, unabridged form. He is concerned that the upper classes and established authority (religious and political organizations, for example) may manipulate culture only to further their own "set of ideas and judgments" and economic interests without any regard to the interests of the masses but maintains that the upper classes and established authority should be the ones to determine what constitutes culture (70).

Arnold's definition of culture, however, is problematic in that he excludes that which is enjoyed by the masses in that definition and distrusts the ability of the lower economic classes to determine what constitutes culture. He maintains that what constitutes true culture is the preserve of the wealthy, and that which originates among the masses is not really culture at all. In light of his view of culture, Arnold would not consider the Austen objects, *Clueless*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* to be culture, regardless of their relation to her. In contrast to Arnold, British Marxist critic Raymond Williams offers an alternative definition of culture that does not delineate between "good" and "bad" culture and allows for the inclusion of the aforementioned objects, film, and texts in what is held to be culture. In his essay "Culture Is Ordinary," Williams states that

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society

expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and direction, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact and discovery, writing themselves into the land. . . . We use the word culture in . . . two senses: to mean a whole way of life--the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning--the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or others of the senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about our general and common purposes, yet also questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. (6)

Williams, unlike Arnold, sees culture as embodied in both the masses and the arts. Culture is no longer just artistic production and specialized knowledge but is in the experience of the everyday. It is the whole way of life (language, ideas, customs, practices, institution of power) and the entire range of artistic practices. It is "both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings" (6). Culture is not just high culture, or what is usually called art and literature, but is the everyday practices and cultural productions of people and societies. Culture is both expressed in and drawn from the language, ideas, customs, practices, arts, and institutions of power and learning that make up society. Thus, culture is society and vice versa.

How do things become meshed into the fabric of society? In his essay, Williams states that "culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to" and "the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested" (6). Williams sees culture as a continuing process, and asserts that cultural



formation can be grouped under three headings: emergent, dominant, and residual (Giles and Middleton 164). Emergent cultural forms are those that are new. These emergent forms become dominant when they have grown to be accepted and are duplicated by others. Eventually, they are no longer the dominant form, but remnants of them linger within a culture. For example, when the Impressionist movement first emerged, it did not fit society's conception of what constituted art because it was radical and different. Gradually, it grew to become accepted as the dominant art form and was duplicated by other artists. Now, there are endless reproductions of Impressionist paintings on everything ranging from postcards to tote bags. Nineteenth-century Impressionism is currently an influential, but residual art form, meaning that it remains in culture despite the emergence of other art forms (165).

Not every cultural movement or practice becomes dominant. "Culture is shaped by patterns of social power, and its divisiveness is part and parcel of the social milieu in which we find ourselves: one in which difference carries with it social meanings that can shape our interaction with the world" (167). If culture is what is endorsed by those in social, political, and economic power, then what about cultural forms that exist and enjoy popularity in society but do not receive the support from those aforementioned mentioned groups? In *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske asserts that popular culture is what does not have the sanction of state or semi-state organizations, and "everyday life is constituted by the practices of popular culture, and is characterized by the creativity of the weak in using the resources provided by the disempowering system while refusing to finally to submit to that power" (47). Popular culture is "the product of a sequence of skirmishes with a dominant and official 'high' culture" which is enforced by social hierarchy and state sanctioned and semi-state sanctioned institutions such as the educational system (Giles and Middleton 168). Jane Austen and her works, for example,

enjoy hegemony over so-called popular literature because they are taught in high school and university classrooms. Consequently, she and her works can be labeled as high culture. In contrast, popular culture is that portion of culture that does not receive strong support from systems of power but enjoys popularity just the same. Subsequently, high culture has become conflated with wealth and power, while popular culture has not.

The association of culture with class distinction and the controversy generated from Arnold's views of culture have created hostility towards the word (Williams, *Keywords* 92). Not surprisingly, "virtually all the hostility . . . has been connected with uses involving claims to superior knowledge . . . , refinement . . . and distinctions between 'high' art . . . and popular art and entertainment" (92). Arnold's definition of culture makes this distinction between high culture and popular culture, while Williams's definition of culture in his essay "Culture Is Ordinary" implies that culture encompasses both. In spite of Williams's democratic definition of culture, most people perceive culture to be that which produces a quality of enlightenment, refinement, and improvement of the mind that is achieved through an acquaintance with what is considered to be the best in the areas of art, literature, and music. In widespread use, culture denotes music, literature, painting, sculpture, theater, and film (90). To most people, however, culture in this sense indicates high culture, and the term popular culture describes inferior, simplified forms of art and entertainment available to everyone. In contrast to the lofty, exclusive notion of high culture, popular culture is the everyday experience which is readily available to everyone and does not seem to possess any extraordinary attributes.

Most fans and readers of Jane Austen would contend that Jane Austen depicts the extraordinary in her novels. Beatrice Arthur once said, "When I think of Jane Austen I think of opulence and sophistication" (qtd. in Tyler 1). Many people would agree with Arthur's association of Jane Austen with wealth and culture. In her works, Jane Austen

recreates a world of refinement, civility, elegance, manners, and good breeding that is beyond the realm of the everyday experience. Jane Austen's invocation of Regency England and its wealthy upper classes gives her works an aura that lends itself to high cultural status in the eyes of many because the world she depicts is not the ordinary. In addition, she is commonly viewed as an author of great literature. In his book *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, F.R. Leavis asserts that Jane Austen is a great novelist because she was "the first modern novelist" and "is the inaugurator of the great tradition of the English novel--and by 'great tradition' [Leavis] mean[s] the tradition to which what is great in English fiction belongs" (16). In Leavis's opinion, she is a great novelist because of her "intense moral preoccupation" with life and the "formal perfection" of her novels (16-17). Because of her status as a great author and her association with what is considered high culture, many see her and her works as symbols of high culture.

This binary construction of high culture as a separate entity from popular culture seemingly prevents any form of culture from occupying both spheres. Would one say that because Jane Austen's works enjoy widespread popularity that they cannot be considered high culture? I think not. Culture is what Raymond Williams suggests in his all-inclusive definition, but most people do not seem to perceive it as such. But like Matthew Arnold, most people, it appears, seem to understand culture as being separated into two parts: popular culture and high culture. To many people, culture is high culture, not that which is popular. Consequently, it is necessary to think about the reception of Jane Austen and the objects and adaptations related to her and to her works in light of society's construction of culture. She and her original works are situated in the realm of high culture, while the adaptations of her works are understood to be a part of popular culture. The desire that many may have to be acquainted with that which is beyond the realm of

popular culture and the ordinary may be satisfied through the consumption of popular culture representations of her. The next section explores consumption as a means to become acquainted with high culture and to display that relationship to others.

## THEORIES OF CONSUMPTION: CONSUMING CULTURE THROUGH JANE AUSTEN OBJECTS

In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu opines that one's acquaintance with and knowledge of high culture is determined by one's level of formal education and position in the social class structure. He points out that those people who are wealthier and better educated generally have a better knowledge and appreciation of high culture. Bourdieu perceives high culture to be conflated with education and wealth, and he suggests that the most common routes to high culture are through those two avenues. Carla Freccero, however, offers a different route to high culture by way of the consumption of goods. She asserts that commodity culture is "[p]ostmodern culture in which commodities and 'art' have become intimately associated, such that commodity production and consumption come to determine other aspects of culture" (151). According to Freccero, art/culture is embodied in certain commodities. Therefore, by producing and/or consuming goods related to aspects of culture (i.e. music, literature, painting, sculpture, theater, and film), people may feel as if they are becoming acquainted with the sense of lavishness and elegance associated with high culture as well as its qualities of enlightenment, refinement, and improvement of the mind.

To comprehend Freccero's assertion, it is necessary to understand modern commodity, or consumer, culture. Consumer culture refers to the emergence of the consumer as a distinct social role that came with the rise of present-day, capitalist economic systems. Before industrialized mass production, a commodity, which is "a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another," was produced for immediate use or to be exchanged for other goods (Marx 41). In pre-capitalist societies, the production of commodities (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) was either for their

consumption by the producer or for the producer to exchange for other goods necessary for survival. Workers in modern capitalistic societies produce goods in return for wages, which, in turn, are used to acquire other goods. Since the worker produces only certain goods, he or she must purchase additional goods in order to survive. Therefore, commodity production becomes detached from survival and becomes more about the production of goods for profit. This profit is returned to the workers through wages, which are used to buy commodities (Storey 113-14).

In this process, consumption becomes detached from the simple human needs related to survival. With individual workers specializing in the production of certain goods, an expanded variety of goods has become available to the consumer, which allows a greater opportunity for consumption. The goods that are produced and subsequently consumed, however, are not always those essential to survival but are sometimes those intended to satisfy other needs. In this context, a commodity's use-value, or its "utility," becomes less important than its exchange value (Marx 42). A commodity's use-value is determined by its useful qualities and "become[s] a reality only by use or consumption" (42). In contrast, exchange value "presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place. Hence exchange value appears to be something accidental and purely relative, and consequently an intrinsic value" (43). Exchange values "do not contain an atom of use-value" (44). Therefore, exchange value is determined arbitrarily and generally translates into the monetary cost of a commodity.

In his book *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Mike Featherstone argues that with the vast production and accumulation of goods in modern culture, the memory of commodities' use-values has virtually been done away with by the dominance of exchange value. This dominance of an object's exchange value over its use-value is

manifest in the Jane Austen clock, which features a black and white portrait of the author on a gold-rimmed china plate (see fig. 1). Normally, the value of a clock would be tied to its use-value, or its ability to keep accurate time and to convey that time clearly.

Indicating time, however, is not this clock's only function. The clock's gold hands and small dots which represent numbers do not catch one's gaze. Instead, it is the portrait of Jane Austen that becomes one's focus, not the time indicated by the hands.

Therefore, the use-value of this clock is not only determined by its capacity to keep and to indicate time but is determined by its display of Jane Austen. One can assume that a consumer's reason for purchasing this clock is not for its time-keeping abilities but for its invocation of Jane Austen. Any ordinary clock would satisfy a consumer's need for a time keeping instrument. Because this clock's utility is to satisfy the consumer's desire to possess something associated with Jane Austen, its use-value is determined mostly by its display of Jane Austen's image, which also determines this clock's exchange value. Presumably, this clock's exchange value is decided partly by its invocation of a high cultural icon, which confers cultural capital upon the object. Originally developed by Pierre Bourdieu and articulated here by Mike Featherstone, the concept of cultural capital

. . . points to the way in which in parallel to economic capital which is immediately calculable, exchangeable and realizable, there also exists modes of power and processes of accumulation based upon culture in which the value of the latter, the fact that culture can be capital is often hidden and misrecognized . . . it can exist in the *embodied* state (style of presentation, mode of speech, beauty, etc.), *objectified* state (cultural goods like pictures, books, machines, buildings, etc.), and in the *institutionalized* state (such as educational qualifications). (105-6)



Fig. 1. Jane Austen Clock.



According to this concept, an object which displays some relationship to high culture becomes elevated in value because of that relationship. The object is assigned more value in the eyes of the consumer because its relationship to high culture invokes images of enlightenment, refinement, and intellect that are thought to stem from exposure to or from knowledge of high culture, or that which is considered to be superlative in the areas of art, literature, music, theater, and film. It is people's desire to be associated with the notion of high culture as something extraordinary and elevated above the everyday experience of popular culture that bestows capital value upon objects that allude to high culture.

With respect to the Jane Austen objects, the objectified state of cultural capital is of particular interest. Through the use of Jane Austen's image, the clock, in a sense, makes high culture a physical reality that is able to be consumed through the purchase of the clock. Consequently, the clock's exchange value becomes elevated because of its association with high culture. This intimacy with high culture also erases the memory of its original use-value. The original use-value of the clock becomes overshadowed by the exchange value so that the commodity becomes free to take up a secondary use value, which in this instance is the display of Jane Austen and of high cultural knowledge.

This consumption and display of high cultural knowledge through the Jane Austen clock serves to satisfy a particular desire of the consumer while simultaneously indicating something about him or her. The desire of the consumer to be linked to Jane Austen and to the high culture she represents is satisfied through the consumption of the clock. By possessing the clock, the owner may feel a close association with the notion of high culture Jane Austen represents. The clock also serves as a means to display one's knowledge of and admiration for Jane Austen and her works. The consumption of the clock connotes a knowledge of Jane Austen that can be conveyed to others through the

possession of the clock. The clock's connection to Jane Austen is made even more explicit with the words "Jane Austen Society of North America" that are emblazoned beneath her image. Not only does this identify the picture of Jane Austen to others who might not recognize a visual representation of her, but it could also indicate the clock owner's membership in a literary society, both of which confer a sense of high culture on the owner in the eyes of others.

In terms of commodities acting as signs and a means to satisfy desires, the Jane Austen pendant works in much the same way (see fig. 2). Unlike the clock, however, the pendant's original use-value is the display of Jane Austen to others. The pendant features a black and white portrait of Jane Austen fired onto fine, glazed, white porcelain set into an 18K gold brooch, which can be worn as a pin or worn as a choker or necklace using the included black satin ribbon. Once again, both the object's use-value and exchange value are determined by the pendant's invocation of high cultural capital. In a manner similar to that of the clock, the pendant satisfies the desire of the consumer to be identified as having high cultural knowledge through Jane Austen and indicates that knowledge to others.

The consumption of both of these objects is consistent with Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption. After studying the consumption patterns of newly affluent North Americans, Veblen came to the conclusion that people are able to assert their social status through the display of the goods they purchase with the wealth they accumulate--a phenomenon he termed conspicuous consumption in his book *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Commodities, regardless of their function or necessity, can be seen as a markers of status and of affluence (Giles and Middleton 221-22). Therefore, the more a person possesses, the more successful he or she is perceived to be. The same can be said for the nature of those possessions. If the possessions are associated with high culture,



Fig. 2. Jane Austen Pendant.



Fig. 3. Regency Figure Trinket Box.

then the owner may be also. As with the Jane Austen clock and pendant, the purchase and display of such goods is a means to exhibit one's knowledge of high culture.

Unlike the other two items, the black lacquer Regency figure trinket box is not emblazoned with Jane Austen's image and is therefore less obvious in its invocation of Jane Austen and high culture (see fig. 3). Marketed as Jane Austen related merchandise and alongside other explicitly Austenian items, the box is decorated with a reproduction of a nineteenth-century fashion plate. The trinket box's relationship to her depends upon a connection between Jane Austen and Regency England. In order to make this connection, one must know that Regency is the name assigned to a period in British history from 1811 to 1830 when the Prince Regent ruled Great Britain in his father's (George III) place and then as king. One must also know that, during the early years of this period, most of Jane Austen's books were published for the first time.

Making the connection between these boxes and Jane Austen requires quite a bit of knowledge. Without this information, the box can be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities, its use-value (which is determined by its capacity to hold trinkets), and its high cultural capital. Its cultural capital is determined both by its association with Jane Austen and its use of Regency decoration, which is a kind historically formed taste. While it can be said that some persons purchasing this box are doing so because of its appearance, it can also be asserted, as in the case of the clock and the pendant, that its purchase by a consumer is because of its relation to Jane Austen. The box is not consumed because of an implicit connection to her but because it invokes images of the upper class of Regency England and, subsequently, of Jane Austen.

What creates the desire that propels the consumption and accumulation of these Austen-related objects? In his book *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx explores the concept of commodity fetishism, which is "a definite social relationship

between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (83). He goes on to assert that commodities have a mythical character that comes from the relationship between men, and the value of a certain commodity is not determined by its physical materiality, but is assigned arbitrarily. Marx attests that one of the evils of capitalism is that "[m]en and women are denied identity in (uncreative) production, and are therefore forced to seek identity in (creative) consumption . . . But this is always little more than a hollow substitute (a fetish)" (Storey 113-14). Marx's assertion is that, since a person's identity is not formed by what he or she produces, many people construct their identity from what they consume in terms of both quality and quantity. Marx's theory provides an explanation for the desire for objects related to Jane Austen. Possession of these objects in comparison to those who do not possess them provides the owner with a means to be identified as a person who has some relation to high culture, even though he or she is unable to produce it or to be a part of it himself or herself.

Consumption of these objects related to Jane Austen satisfies a consumer's desire to be linked to high culture, but these objects also work as signs that indicate something about that consumer. In this case, possession of these Austen-objects satisfies the need of a consumer to display his or her admiration of Jane Austen and her world of high culture. The association of these objects with Jane Austen also confers a sense of high cultural knowledge on the owner. Consumption of these items seemingly indicates to others that the consumer has a relationship with high culture and serves to elevate his or her economic and social status in comparison to those who do not consume them.

Consumption serves as a means to satisfy desires and to signify certain things about a consumer. In the case of the Jane Austen clock, the Jane Austen pin/pendant, and the Regency figure trinket box, the consumption of these items satisfies the consumer's desire to be associated with Jane Austen and the high culture she represents.

Possession of these items can signify knowledge of Jane Austen and an association with high culture to others. In her film *Clueless*, Amy Heckerling, however, does not perceive commodities related to high culture as indicators of actual possession of high cultural knowledge. Her assertion is that consumption is a means through which to satisfy desires, but consumption is not always conspicuous in terms of possession of high cultural knowledge nor is it indicative of one's social status.

### CLASS DISTINCTION IN AMY HECKERLING'S *CLUELESS*

Taken at face value, Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* is a humorous film depicting the intellectually vacant and decadent lifestyles only enjoyed by the economically advantaged and social elite of Beverly Hills. The film's language, appearance, and attitude lend themselves more to a depiction of contemporary teenage life than to an adaptation of an early nineteenth-century literary work. Heckerling, however, cleverly updates Jane Austen's *Emma* by translating Highbury society into the Beverly Hills high school culture of the 1990s. The film's main character, Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone), is a parallel of Austen's heroine, Emma. Like Emma, Cher is "handsome, clever, and rich" and has "too much of her own way" along with "a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (Austen, *Emma* 1). As in *Emma*, one of the main themes in *Clueless* is the danger of matchmaking. When Cher schemes to "makeover" a new student, Tai/Harriet Smith (played by Brittany Murphy), turning her from a grungy Bronx teenager into a culturally aware fashion queen in an attempt to match her with the socially superior Elton/Mr. Elton (Jeremy Sisto), she fails because she is ignorant of the status difference between them. Cher's failure to secure a match between Elton and Tai and her rejection by Christian/Frank Churchill (Justin Walker) cause her to reevaluate her pretentious presumptions and ignite a new sense of moral responsibility and a desire to makeover her soul. This awakening of values ultimately leads her to the recognition of her romantic feelings for her father's stepson Josh/Mr. Knightley (Paul Rudd).

The literary parallels between the novel and the film's setting raise questions about how the film "works" in modern culture. Is the film simply a watered down version of Austen's classic novel or is it a modernization that also provides a witty commentary on modern consumer culture? Is high culture becoming low culture or is low culture masquerading as high culture through the film's literary foundation? To complicate

matters, not only is the film making use of a work of high culture, but its characters frequently make literary allusions and other high cultural references. Possession of this high cultural knowledge is displayed and flaunted to such a degree throughout the course of the film that it becomes a means of capital exchange between the characters.

When Cher schemes to match two teachers in hopes of making better grades, she leaves a copy of one of Shakespeare's love sonnets in Miss Geist's mailbox. Cher's friend Dion (Stacey Dash), who has no parallel in *Emma*, is quite taken with the poem: "Phat. Did you write that?" "Duh," Cher replies, "it's like a famous quote" -- "From where?" -- "Cliffs Notes." Dion is obviously impressed with the quality of the quotation and is open to the possibility that Cher may have penned it herself. Judging from Cher's response to Dion's query, Cher considers knowledge of literary quotations to be important and to have a high degree of value. While Cher is somewhat shocked that Dion is unable to recognize the famous passage, she too is unable to attribute it correctly to Shakespeare. Instead, she identifies the source of the verse as Cliffs Notes.

Both girls are able to appreciate and to assign value to a piece of fine poetry, but they each do so by different criteria. Dion's initial appreciation of the passage is based purely on the merits of the verse itself, while at least some of the literary merit Cher attaches to it comes from the verse's source. Cliffs Notes, with their distinctive yellow and black striped covers, are marketed as "your key to the classics." Cher has made so strong a connection between classic literature and Cliffs Notes that she has deleted the original author from the equation. Supposedly meant to supplement the text and class lectures but not to replace them, the Cliffs Notes on Shakespeare's sonnets have done just that for Cher. From utilizing these study guides, she has come to believe that Cliffs Notes are the source for famous Shakespearean quotations, not his sonnets themselves.



Regardless of the source, however, both Cher and Dion assign value to the passage and to the possession and utilization of high cultural knowledge.

At another point in the film, Cher displays her knowledge of Shakespeare again. As in the previous scene, Cher's knowledge of Shakespeare is not from the original text but was acquired through another medium. In this case, it happens to be a film version of *Hamlet* and specifically the actor portraying Hamlet, Mel Gibson. When Josh's college-aged girlfriend attributes the quotation "To thine own self be true" to Hamlet, Cher correctly identifies the line: "I think I would remember Hamlet," retorts Josh's girlfriend. "Well," Cher declares, "I remember Mel Gibson, and he didn't say that. That Polonius guy did." While Cher revels in her intellectual triumph, Josh's girlfriend is angry and embarrassed about having been corrected by Cher. Both of these women have attached some sort of value to knowledge of this line from the play. Josh's girlfriend is attempting to utilize this reference as part of a larger philosophical argument meant to impress Josh. When Cher proves her wrong and calls into doubt her working knowledge of the Western literary canon, Josh's girlfriend appears less intelligent at that moment in the film. To Cher, it seems just as important to know that Mel Gibson did not speak that line as to know that Hamlet did not. Cher is able to utilize what she has learned from paying close attention to popular culture by putting it to use in a more intellectual arena.

In both instances, Cher's knowledge of Shakespeare did not come directly from his works but from "shortcuts" to his texts. In the scene with Dion, she unknowingly has quoted Shakespeare by quoting Cliff's Notes. Her ability to attribute the line to Polonius has more to do with the movie adaptation of *Hamlet* and with her fixation on Mel Gibson than with a working knowledge of the play itself. Regardless of the popular culture sources of high cultural knowledge, there is a certain value placed on knowledge of high culture in the film. Ignorance of high culture is frowned upon. Even though she is wrong

about the source herself, Cher is quick to point out that Dion should know that the portion of the sonnet is a famous citation, and she corrects Josh's girlfriend just as swiftly about the line from *Hamlet*.

The display and incorporation of one's possession of high cultural knowledge into conversation continues throughout the film. When acting in the role of narrator, Cher misquotes a line from Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* as "it is a far, far better thing doing stuff for other people" in support of her schemes to match Tai with Elton and Miss Geist with Mr. Hall. She also shows off her knowledge of fine art by describing beautiful young women as "Botticelli chicks" and women who look good from a distance but not upon closer inspection as "Monets." When Murray explains to Cher and Dion that Christian is gay, he combines his knowledge of both high and popular culture to describe him as a "disco dancing, Oscar Wilde reading, Streisand ticket holding, friend of Dorothy." In the world that Cher and her friends inhabit, high cultural knowledge is just as important to belonging to the popular crowd as having a working knowledge of popular culture and wearing the right clothes.

The capital value placed on high cultural knowledge is especially seen in Cher's quest to transform Tai into a member of the popular crowd. Even though she attends a high school in Beverly Hills, Tai does not belong to the same economic class as Cher and Dion. The quickest way to compensate for this economic difference is to change Tai's appearance so that she looks as if she enjoys the same level of material comfort as Cher and Dion. Cher's makeover, however, not only includes a new hairstyle and fashion sense, but attempts to furnish Tai with the same level of intellectual sophistication that Cher and her friends possess. Tai's previous education has left her at a disadvantage, and she is in awe of the intelligence exhibited by her new classmates. When Dion's boyfriend Murray justifies his decision to address her as "woman," he intelligently supports his

choice of words: "Street slang is an increasingly valid form of expression. Most of the feminine pronouns do have mocking, but not necessarily misogynistic undertones."

"Wow!" Tai remarks, "You guys talk like grown-ups!" The social difference between Tai and her new friends is not caused only by the economic gap that exists between them but by her weak grasp of high cultural knowledge as well.

To bridge this intellectual gap, Cher suggests that they work on Tai's accent and vocabulary and that they read one "non-school" book a week. For their cultural improvement, Tai chooses *Fit or Fat* and Cher selects *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*. Ironically, these popular culture books would generally not be read for improvement of the mind but to satisfy desires to be thin or to acquire insight into relationships. Even though Cher and Tai choose to read popular culture books, value is still being placed on the acquisition of knowledge. In addition, part of Cher's reasoning about why Tai cannot date Travis Birkenstock/Robert Martin (Breckin Meyer) is not only that he is not a member of the popular crowd but that he is a "Loadie" who comes to class only sporadically and says "bonehead things." Cher realizes that the social hierarchy among her friends and classmates is a combination of style and culture. In order to succeed at her mission, she must not only makeover Tai's appearance so that she fits in visually, but she must transform her mind so that she fits in intellectually as well.

The importance of possessing some amount of cultural knowledge and behaving in an intelligent manner, however, does not replace the necessity of being stylish in order to obtain popularity. While *Clueless* understands the currency of high cultural knowledge, it does not fail to emphasize that modern culture is dominated by consumption and material availability. The consumption of goods and product placement is rampant throughout the entire film, and the teenage characters are heavily invested in the possession and consumption of goods. Cher and her friends frequent shopping malls

to maintain wardrobes large enough to fill revolving closets, teenagers drive BMWs, and name brands such as Starbucks, Contempo Casuals, Tiffany & Co., McDonalds, Snapple, Snickers, Diet Coke, Minute Maid, and Noxema are displayed throughout the film and are sprinkled into conversation. Clothes are frequently not referred to as just a shirt or a skirt but by designer names instead. Consumption and display of these goods is essential to "fitting in" at Bronson Alcott High School (which Heckerling ironically names after a man who shunned materialism). In Beverly Hills, style, at least among teenagers, seems to have become a component of the culture they inhabit.

When Tai first arrives at Bronson Alcott, her baggy pants and T-shirts cause her to stand apart from her Calvin Klein-clad classmates. Her appearance alone is enough to elicit Cher's quest to makeover Tai's appearance. "I'm going to take that lost soul in there and make her well-dressed and popular," Cher declares. "Her life will be better because of me." Cher transforms Tai from a tomboyish skateboarder to a designer-wearing fashion plate through the use of hair dye, designer clothing, and exercise videos. Cher's assumption is that style plus cultural awareness will enable Tai to become a member of the popular crowd at Bronson Alcott.

With the assumed success of the makeover, Cher plays matchmaker and plans to pair Tai with Elton. She fails to realize, however, that the economic/class based differences between Elton and Tai will prohibit them from becoming a couple. When Cher asks Elton why he does not want to date Tai, he snobbishly retorts, "Tai? Why would I go with Tai? . . . Don't you even know who my father is? . . . Me and Tai, we don't make any sense." From Elton's perspective, Tai's class status makes her unworthy of his affection regardless of her appearance and her social connections. As much as Cher wants to see Tai and Elton paired together, she is reluctant to admit that older, class-based hierarchies are still at work in modern society.

While Tai may possess all the outward markers of Elton's class, such as the right clothes and friends, she is not considered his equal. Veblen's notion of commodities acting as markers of affluence and status does not seem to work here. Outward appearance alone is not enough to compensate for Tai's lack of social status. The new look Cher provided through the right clothes, makeup, and hair color is not enough to allow Tai to gain full access to the social class to which Cher and Elton belong. Cher's makeover of Tai is not entirely successful. She is still drawn to Travis Birkenstock, sings along to commercials, and is ignorant of high cultural knowledge, all of which are signs of lower social status in Cher and Elton's eyes.

Heckerling hints in a later scene that it is mainly Tai's lack of high cultural knowledge that plays a role in preventing her from belonging to the social class to which Cher, Elton, and their friends belong. When Tai sees Elton dancing with Amber (Elisa Donovan) and fears that they may be dating, she asks Cher if she thinks Amber is pretty. "No," Cher replies with disgust, "she's a full-on Monet." Confused, Tai asks, "What's a Monet?" "It's like the paintings, see? From far away it's ok, but up close it's a big old mess."

The authority and ease in Cher's demeanor when she makes the comparison between a Monet painting and Amber reveals a lot about Cher's exposure to high culture. Although simplistic, Cher's explanation for her use of this artistic allusion is accurate and demonstrates an understanding of the characteristics of Impressionist paintings. Her knowledge of art is extensive and thorough enough to allow her to make the comparison without much thought. To Cher, familiarity with Monet is a part of the common knowledge that everyone possesses. Tai's confusion, however, shows that this is not necessarily true. Evidently, Tai has not been exposed to this type of high cultural knowledge, as Cher has, and Cher was unable to compensate for Tai's lack of exposure in

her makeover efforts. The intellectual gap between Cher and Tai magnifies the obvious class difference that exists between them. In illuminating this difference, Heckerling is suggesting that possession of high cultural knowledge entails some degree of economic advantage. With Tai, Heckerling points out that outward markers of class status alone are not enough to elevate a person from one social class to another and that other indicators of class, such as exposure to high culture, are just as important. In doing so, Heckerling assigns capital value to high cultural knowledge, and she makes it clear that outward markers of economic affluence (which tends to be conflated with high culture) do not necessarily indicate high cultural knowledge. She, like Matthew Arnold, maintains that culture does rest in the hands of the wealthy and well-educated.

Heckerling's invocation of *Emma* as the literary basis for *Clueless* and the characters' use of literary allusions and references to high culture give the film a higher cultural capital. The film is also heavily based on popular culture. Without recognizing the film's use of and allusions to high culture, it could be viewed as just another popular culture film. But when one recognizes Heckerling's use of high culture, the film becomes a popular culture film with high cultural capital. Heckerling's incorporation of both high culture and popular culture into one film makes it seem as if she is trying to narrow the perceived distance between the two, and like Raymond Williams, broaden the definition of culture. By having Tai fail to make a match with Elton, however, Heckerling maintains the existence of social and cultural hierarchies. Heckerling portrays Travis, Tai, and Elton in such a manner that it makes us want Travis and Tai to be matched up. As a wealthy snob, Elton exists in contrast to Travis, the sensitive skater who has more in common with Tai in terms of interests, economic affluence, and social status. As in *Emma*, the plot is resolved when people of similar economic and social backgrounds are paired together.

While both Austen and Heckerling are somewhat critical of the society in which they exist, they maintain that the existing social hierarchies are as things should be. In translating *Emma* into a modern setting through *Clueless*, Heckerling does not close the distance between social and economic classes but reinforces them. In contrast, Helen Fielding does just the opposite in utilizing *Pride and Prejudice* as the basis for *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*.

## THE COLLAPSE OF CULTURAL HIERARCHIES

### IN *BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY* AND *BRIDGET JONES: THE EDGE OF REASON*

The plots of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* are not as direct in translating *Pride and Prejudice* into a modern setting as *Clueless* is in its use of the *Emma* storyline. Instead, Helen Fielding takes portions of Austen's original plot and bends them to suit her own purposes in constructing her novels, which revolve around Bridget Jones, a single woman in her early thirties who lives in London. Like Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Bridget must cope with a pushy, overbearing, and, at times, vulgar, mother who is constantly trying to find her a husband.

Perhaps the most obvious connection between the Fielding novels *Pride and Prejudice* is the resemblance between the two male suitors, Mr. Darcy and Mark Darcy. Both Mr. Darcys come across as proud, aloof, and a bit snobbish. Mark Darcy cautions Bridget against any involvement with Daniel Cleaver much as Mr. Darcy warns Elizabeth about Wickham. Daniel Cleaver and Wickham, however, contend that they have been wronged by the Mr. Darcys. Both women are outraged at the Mr. Darcys' apparent mistreatment of and prejudice against the men in their lives until they learn that the men they have been associating with have abused them and both Mr. Darcys. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham tricked Mr. Darcy's father into leaving him some money, which he quickly squandered away. When Mr. Darcy refused to give him more, he attempted to seduce Darcy's younger sister so that he could gain access to the family fortune through marriage. In the case of Bridget Jones, Daniel Cleaver had slept with Mark Darcy's ex-wife soon after their marriage. Mark Darcy finally wins Bridget's full approval in a manner similar to that of Austen's Mr. Darcy. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth begins to admire Mr. Darcy after visiting his estate and grows to love him after he tracks down Wickham and Lydia Bennet (who have run way together). Similarly, the relationship



between Bridget and Mark Darcy begins after she attends a party at his house and is cemented when he saves the Jones family from disgrace by tracking down Bridget's mother and Julio, her Portuguese boyfriend who engages in fraudulent business dealings. The second novel continues Mark Darcy and Bridget's relationship and all the mishaps that go with it.

"Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien--and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance of his having ten thousand a year" (Austen, *Pride* 6). Like Austen's Mr. Darcy, Mark Darcy's reputation precedes him. Beginning four months prior to Geoffrey and Una's New Year's Day Turkey Curry Buffet (an annual holiday event held by Geoffrey and Una Alconbury, who are close friends of Bridget's parents), Bridget's mother and Una repeatedly remind Bridget that Mark Darcy is handsome, newly divorced, a "super-doooper top-notch lawyer," and "very rich" (Fielding, *Diary* 11). The obvious implication is that he would make a very good match for Bridget because of his profession and financial situation. By the time New Year's Day arrives, Bridget has grown weary of hearing about Mark Darcy but is eager to meet him and make a good impression. Surprisingly, it is Mark Darcy who seems to be the more uneasy of the two when they meet. He nervously asks, "I. Uh. Are you reading any, ah . . . Have you read any good books lately?" (13). Because Bridget works in publishing, she thinks that "reading in [her] spare time is a bit like being a dustman and snuffling through the pig bin in the evening" and frantically racks her brain in an attempt to remember the last "proper" book she has read (13). Her current book of choice is *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, but, interestingly enough, she does not regard this as a proper book. Instead, she lies and declares that Susan Faludi's *Backlash* was the last good book that she had read.

Bridget's decision to lie to Mark Darcy about her reading choices reveals a lot about her perception of literary, and subsequently, cultural hierarchy. In this case, her definition of a book that is proper and good is one that has a greater cultural and intellectual value in the eyes of others. Even though she likes *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, Bridget fears that others may consider the popular self-help book to be on a lower intellectual level and have a lower cultural capital than Faludi's "five-hundred-page feminist treatise," because from Bridget's perspective, the former is popular literature (13). While *Backlash* is a popular culture version of other more difficult to read feminist texts, it still possesses a higher cultural capital in comparison to *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. Subsequently, Bridget feels as if Mark Darcy would be far less impressed with her personally and intellectually if he knew that she had read the latter rather than the former. Her job in publishing carries with it the expectation that she, as part of the mechanism that determines what society reads, should be engaged in reading great literature or intellectual treatises, rather than popular self-help books, which fail to carry the same amount of cultural capital. Later in the novel, Mark Darcy voices similar expectations when he reveals that he thought Bridget was "a sort of literary whizz-woman, completely obsessed with books" (206). In the same discussion, he also tells Bridget that he was informed that she was "a radical feminist" that has "an incredibly glamorous life . . . with millions of men taking [her] out" (206). Bridget's reading of *Backlash* simultaneously reinforces the perception of her as literary minded and as a liberated woman with an active social life. When Mark Darcy reveals that he has actually read *Backlash*, Bridget quickly changes the subject so that the perception of her as a strong, culturally aware young woman is not spoiled. In order better to fulfill the expectations set forth by both society and Mark Darcy, Bridget feels

she must say that she has read *Backlash* rather than *Men Are from Mars, Women Are From Venus* because of its higher cultural capital.

In addition to society's expectations, Mark Darcy's background also plays a role in determining Bridget's response to his question. When she first arrives at the Alconbury's party, she finds him standing alone "with his back to the room, scrutinizing the contents of the Alconbury's bookshelves" and "looking snooty" (12). Not only is he an upper-class, highly educated person, but he appears to have an interest in books. Bridget feels that these factors combined would make him better able to delineate the intellectual differences among books. Because of this, Bridget perceives his idea of a proper book to be one that is considered to have a higher cultural capital than *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, and she feels pressured to say that the most recent good book that she read possessed the same kind of value. In declaring that she has read *Backlash* and deeming it to be a good book, she feels that it will make a better impression on him because of the book's higher cultural capital.

As both *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* progress, Fielding reveals Bridget's fascination with self-help books and her adherence to their advice. Initially, Mark Darcy is shocked and appalled at Bridget's reliance on their supposed insight into the opposite sex. He refers to their contents as "theoretical knowledge" and laughs at Bridget's assertion that they are a "new form of religion" (Fielding, *Edge* 59-60). On another occasion, Bridget overhears Mark describing self-help books and his opinion of them:

"This self-help knowledge—all these mythical rules of conduct you're presumed to be following. And you know every move you make is being dissected by a committee of girlfriends according to some breathtakingly arbitrary code made up of *Buddism Today, Venus and Buda Have a*

*Shag*, and the *Koran*. You end up feeling like some laboratory mouse with an ear on its back!" (205)

Clearly, self-help books are publicly assigned a sort of second-class status by both Mark Darcy and Bridget because of their supposed pseudo-intellectual content. Strangely enough, on an intellectual level, neither book is far and away above or beneath the other. But because *Backlash's* subject has a more intellectual tone, it is granted a higher cultural capital than popular self-help books. Bridget's choice of *Backlash* in the earlier scene, is in part, a "safe option" because she thinks that there is "no way diamond-pattern-jumpered goody-goody would have read" it, but the book is well-known enough carry with it a sort of cultural status for the reader (Jones, *Diary* 13). In contrast, self-help books, such as *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* are not viewed in the same light and are relegated to the realm of popular culture. Bridget, in her decision to say that she read *Backlash*, adheres publicly to and reinforces society's construction of high/low cultural hierarchies. In private, however, both Bridget and Mark still read and consider the advice of self-help books. She because she likes them and finds solace in their advice, and he (at least in part) because of the authority she assigns to them. In public arenas, Bridget and Mark seem to be very conscious of cultural hierarchy in expressing their opinions about literature. They are aware that the types of books one consumes are considered to be reflective of their levels of education and possession of high cultural knowledge. They each fear that they may not be held very high esteem by their friends and acquaintances if it is discovered that they read and enjoy popular literature.

Later on, however, both are less concerned with the binary view of high culture as good and of low/popular culture as bad when discussing culture as a whole at a party that they attend. Bridget is invited to a "glittering literati launch" of a new novel, *Kafka's Motorbike* (Fielding, *Diary* 83). While at the party, she encounters her boss, Perpetua,

and her two friends, Piggy and Arabella, who are having a conversation about cultural hierarchy:

"I have to say, I think it's disgraceful. All it means in this day and age is that a whole generation of people only get to know the great works of literature--Austen, Eliot, Dickens, Shakespeare, and so on--through the television."

"Well, quite. It's absurd. Criminal."

"Absolutely. They think that what they see when they're 'channel hopping' between *Noel's House Party* and *Blind Date* actually is Austen or Eliot."

"Blind Date is on Saturdays," I said

"I'm sorry?" said Perpetua.

"Saturdays. *Blind Date* is on Saturdays at seven-fifteen, after *Gladiators*."

"So?" said Perpetua sneerily, with a sideways glance at Arabella and Piggy.

"Those big literary adaptations don't tend to go on on Saturday nights." (86)

Perpetua argues that obtaining knowledge about great works of literature through television adaptations of novels is not as commendable as obtaining it from the works themselves. Her opinion is that the visual adaptation of a novel is of less substance than the written, literary text. Perpetua snobbishly makes the assumption that people who watch and enjoy programs that are popular among the masses, such as *Noel's House Party* and *Blind Date*, are not educated enough to realize that what they see when they watch television adaptations of novels are not the actual novels. In doing so, she hints

that the popularization of literature through television should not be taking place. Bridget points out that viewers channel hopping on nights when these two programs air could not possibly come across "big literary adaptations" because they are not shown on the same nights. With this statement, Bridget reveals that she is among those people who watch and enjoy popular culture shows such as *Noel's House Party*, *Blind Date*, and *Gladiators*, but is aware that the literary adaptations are just that--adaptations--and not the real thing. Bridget disproves Perpetua's generalization that people heavily invested in popular culture misidentify adaptations as original works. Perpetua's perception of culture is clearly in line with Matthew Arnold's definition of culture, in that she sees culture not belonging to the masses, but to the educated elite. Bridget, however, believes that culture is more inclusive than Perpetua's narrow definition and continues to voice her opinions.

But unlike in her earlier conversation with Mark Darcy, Bridget does not hesitate to admit her investment in popular culture. Perpetua's attitude towards Bridget's appreciation of popular culture is overtly condescending. Bridget feels as if she must defend her assertion, so she goes on to extol the virtues of popular culture TV programs:

"What I meant was, there isn't anything any good like *Blind Date* on the other side during the literary masterpieces, so I don't think many people would be channel hopping."

"Oh, *Blind Date* is 'good' is it?" sneered Perpetua.

"Yes, it's very good."

"And you do realize *Middlemarch* was originally a book, Bridget, don't you, not a soap?" (87)

At this point in the conversation, Perpetua is using high cultural knowledge as a weapon to belittle Bridget's knowledge and enjoyment of popular culture. Bridget's opinion is that literary masterpieces and television programs like *Blind Date* are each

"good" in their own right. Each have redeeming qualities, and one is neither better nor worse than the other. Perpetua, on the other hand, is still of the opinion that culture can be divided into superior and inferior categories. She mocks Bridget's enjoyment of *Blind Date* by implying that because Bridget enjoys aspects of popular culture, she does not possess sufficient high cultural knowledge to realize that *Middlemarch* is not only a soap, but originally a novel by George Eliot. Perpetua is of the opinion that popular culture has a degraded status and refuses to accept Bridget's opinion that culture encompasses all aspects of society. Perpetua maintains this view and uses it as a means of belittling Bridget in front of Mark Darcy as he arrives with his date, Natasha, who shares views towards culture that are similar to Perpetua's:

"We were just talking about hierarchies of culture," boomed Perpetua. "Bridget is one of those people who thinks the moment when the screen goes back on *Blind Date* is on par with Othello's 'hurl my soul from heaven' soliloquy," she said hooting with laughter.

"Ah. Then Bridget is clearly a top postmodernist," said Mark Darcy.

... "I must say," said Natasha, with a knowing smile, "I always feel with the Classics people should be made to prove they've read the book before they're allowed to watch the television version."

"Oh, I *quite* agree," said Perpetua, emitting further gales of laughter. "What a marvelous idea!"

... "They should have refused to let anyone listen to the World Cup tune," hooted Arabella, "until they could prove they'd listened to *Turandot* all the way through!" (87-88)

Mark Darcy comes to Bridget's defense in saying that her view of culture as not having low and high distinctions is shared by Postmodernists, and in doing so, he gives her opinions a sense of authority and respect. Perpetua, Arabella, Piggy, and Natasha, however, continue to carry on about the distinctions between high culture and low culture. Their elitist view restricts exposure to popularized versions of high culture to those who have knowledge of their high culture origins, such as the original literary work or opera. Their contention is that not everyone should be allowed exposure to high culture because then there would no longer be a distinction between high culture and popular culture, and the cultural hegemony enjoyed by the wealthy and educated elite would be lost. Natasha points out that making high culture available to the masses through popularized forms is not as detrimental as Perpetua, Arabella, and Piggy perceive it to be:

"Though in many respects, of course," said Mark's Natasha, suddenly earnest, as if concerned the conversation was going quite the wrong way, "the democratization of our culture is a *good thing*--"

... "What I *resent*, though"--Natasha was looking all sort of twitchy and distorted as if she were in an Oxbridge debating society--"is this, this sort of, arrogant individualism which imagines each generation can somehow create the world afresh."

"But that's exactly what they *do*, do," said Mark Darcy gently.

"Oh well, I mean if you're going to look at it at that level . . . ," said Natasha defensively.

"What level?" said Mark Darcy. "It's not a level, it's a perfectly good point."



"No. No. I'm sorry, you're *deliberately* being obtuse," she said, turning bright red. "I'm not talking about a ventilating deconstructionalist freshness of vision. I'm talking about the ultimate *vandalization* of the cultural framework."

Mark Darcy looked as if he was going to burst out laughing.

"What I mean is, if you're taking that sort of cutesy, morally relativistic, '*Blind Date* is brilliant' sort of line . . .," she said with a resentful look in my direction.

"I wasn't, I just really like *Blind Date*," I said. "Though I do think it would be better if they made the pickees make up their own replies to the questions instead of reading out those stupid pat answers full of puns and sexual innuendoes."

"Absolutely," interjected Mark.

"I can't stand *Gladiators*, though. It makes me feel fat," I said.

"Anyway, nice to meet you. Bye!"

Natasha's narrow view of culture limits what can be defined as culture and what cannot. She admits that new interpretations of existing pieces of art, literature, and music have some merit but contends that neither they nor the cultural output of each generation can automatically be considered high culture. Her elitist definition of culture holds that what constitutes high culture cannot be created with each new generation. She snobbishly asserts that Bridget's opinion that *Blind Date* is brilliant is entirely dependent on her supposed limited exposure to culture, and therefore, the contention that *Blind Date* has high cultural significance is inaccurate. Bridget, however, seems unaffected by Natasha's argument and maintains that she likes *Blind Date*, even if it cannot be considered high culture, and she comments on how it can be improved.

In this conversation, Bridget's opinions about what she likes and what she dislikes are determined more by her personal preferences than by her desire to adhere to notions of highculture and low culture. In contrast, her opinions in her initial conversation with Mark Darcy concerning which book she had read recently were governed by pressure to express a preference for books that were categorized as high culture instead of popular culture. In the conversation at the literary party, both she and Mark Darcy are publicly defending a less narrow view of what constitutes culture than they each did previously concerning the value of self-help books. This, in combination with their acceptance of popular self-help books, helps to create a broader notion of what constitutes culture. In doing so, Fielding, through her characters, is collapsing cultural hierarchies so that the line between high culture and low/popular culture is less distinct than the characters, or we the readers, would like to think.

Fielding does something similar in the construction of her two novels. Each utilizes *Pride and Prejudice* as the high cultural literary basis of their plots, but they both invoke aspects of popular culture as well. At one point in the novel, she even seems to be drawing from *Clueless* for inspiration. Lines uttered by Rebecca to Mark Darcy at the end of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* sound vaguely reminiscent of Elton's snobbish response to the suggestion that he date Tai:

"Don't you think it's perfectly possible for two people who ought to be together, a perfect match in every way--in intellect, in physique, in education, in position--to be kept apart, through misunderstanding, through defensiveness, through pride, . . . and end up with the wrong partners. . . . She's [Bridget] wrong for you, darling, as Giles is for me. . . . Oh, Mark. I only went to Giles to make you realize what you feel for me. Perhaps is was wrong, but . . . they're not our equals! . . . I know, I know.

I can sense how trapped you feel. But it's your life! You can't live with someone who thinks Rimbaud was played by Sylvester Stallone, you need stimulus . . ." (323)

Mark Darcy's only response to Rebecca's plea is "Rebecca, . . . I need Bridget" (323). In this instance, the seemingly mismatched Bridget and Mark Darcy end up together.

Rebecca's contention is that she and Mark Darcy are the ideal match because of their similar backgrounds, education levels, and social class. Bridget, on the other hand, is not a good partner for Mark Darcy, according to Rebecca, because she and he differ in these areas. Because Rebecca appears to be Mark Darcy's perfect match, the outcome of the novel is the opposite of what seems right. Many times Austen, although she is critiquing society and the prejudices that exist between its classes, reinforces the existing class hierarchy by having men and women of similar social status matched together.

Throughout much of the novel *Emma*, for example, there is chaos because Emma is trying to match people together who are not social equals. At the novel's conclusion, she is paired with Mr. Knightley, Jane Fairfax with Frank Churchill, and Harriet Smith with Robert Martin. The novel's resolution occurs because everyone stayed within his or her class when paired together. Exactly the opposite occurs at the end of Fielding's second novel when Bridget and Mark Darcy are paired together. The happy ending occurs when two people, seemingly incompatible in terms of education levels and social class, are matched together. In contrast to both Heckerling and Austen, Fielding collapses existing social hierarchies that dictate matches among people of similar backgrounds and social status.

The connection between *Clueless* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* does raise questions about Fielding's choice in utilizing *Pride and Prejudice* as its literary basis. In *The Friendly Jane Austen: A Well-Mannered Introduction to a Lady of Sense and*

*Sensibility*, Fielding is quoted as saying, "I just stole the plot from *Pride and Prejudice*. I thought it had been well market-researched over a number of centuries" (274). A year prior to the publication of the first Bridget Jones book in 1996, both *Clueless* and the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* made their debuts, and each received considerable attention for its connection to Jane Austen. In the 1995 BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice*, Colin Firth's portrayal of Mr. Darcy "ignited Darcymania in the United Kingdom" because of Firth's tight trousers, his wet T-shirt scene, and his "repressed smoldering".<sup>2</sup> Fielding's characters make repeated references to this television program and even point out the similarities between Bridget's Mark Darcy and Austen's Mr. Darcy. Not only is Fielding making use of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* storyline in her two novels, but she is using the Darcymania generated by a television adaptation of the same novel as part of the plot and perhaps as a marketing tool for her novel as well. Her invocation of both the original high cultural literary text and literary adaptation as sources for her two novels gives each an equal amount of cultural capital.

Like her characters, Fielding is collapsing existing social and cultural hierarchies in her construction of the novel. In doing so, she supports Raymond Williams's all encompassing definition of culture. By invoking both high culture and popular culture sources in her novels and collapsing the assumed social class differences between her characters, Fielding creates a sense that the difference believed to exist between high culture and popular culture does not exist in fact.

## CONCLUSION

Evaluating Jane Austen's presence in popular culture makes it possible to assess modern-day notions of culture. Society's understanding of high culture and popular culture as two distinct entities is articulated in the writings of Matthew Arnold. His comprehension of culture makes a distinction between high culture and popular culture. Most people's sense of culture, like that of Arnold, points to so-called high culture, or that which, which according to Arnold, produces a quality of enlightenment, refinement, and improvement of the mind through an acquaintance with what is considered to be the best in the areas of music, art, and literature. High culture also tends to be associated with education and wealth. In contrast, popular culture is seen as the simplified forms of art and entertainment readily available to the masses. In light of this understanding of high culture as existing in contrast to popular culture, many people see Jane Austen and her works as symbols of high culture because she is regarded to be an especially good writer who produces outstanding works of literature. In addition, the world she recreates in her novels is that of the sophistication, civility, elegance, opulence, and refinement that are associated with high culture. As we have seen, however, Jane Austen and her works are not just associated with high culture, but they occupy a place in popular culture as well. She and her works are no longer confined to intellectual circles and English classrooms, but enjoy a mainstream popularity. The Jane Austen clock, Jane Austen pendant, Regency figure trinket box, *Clueless*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* are just a sampling of the various media through which Jane Austen and her works have permeated popular culture.

The consumption of Austen-related objects may be linked to a consumer's intense desire to be associated with Jane Austen and the high culture she represents. Their invocation of Jane Austen's image and their relationship to her works is what grants value

to these objects, films, and texts. The high cultural capital of these Jane Austen objects, films, and texts helps to derive their exchange values and use-values. The production of these items is contingent upon consumer demand for them. The mass production of goods in modern-day consumer culture has provided a means for people to satisfy their desires quickly through the consumption of goods. Consumption of these Austen objects, films, and texts not only serves as a means to satisfy desires to be linked to Jane Austen and high culture, but possession of these commodities can also indicate to others that the consumer had a knowledge of Jane Austen and an association with high culture.

In her film *Clueless*, however, Amy Heckerling points out through her characters that consumption is a means to satisfy desires, but it is not necessarily indicative of one's possession of high cultural knowledge or of one's social status. Heckerling maintains that the existing social hierarchies are as things should be, and she reinforces the existence of and distance between social and economic classes. Helen Fielding, in contrast, does the opposite in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. Fielding collapses existing social and cultural hierarchies through her characters and through her invocation of both a high cultural literary text and a literary adaptation as the bases for her novels.

Juxtaposing Heckerling's film and Fielding's novels, one can see the difference between Arnold's understanding of culture and that of Raymond Williams. In *Clueless*, Cher refuses to accept that the social differences between Tai and Elton will prohibit them from being paired together. She is reluctant to accept that the social difference between them cannot be erased by the consumption of goods. After Cher gives Tai a makeover, Tai appears to be a member of the social and economic elite at Bronson Alcott High. Tai's lack of high cultural knowledge, however, cannot be compensated through the consumption of goods. Heckerling maintains that culture is divided into high culture and

popular culture, and that outward markers of affluence are not indicative of high culture. Fielding, however, offers the view that culture is not divided into high and popular categories. Her understanding of culture, which she reveals through the actions of her characters, is much broader than that of Heckerling's. She, like Raymond Williams, perceives culture as consisting of both high culture and popular culture.

Though, like Helen Fielding, some people would like culture to be understood as Raymond Williams understands it, it is still more widely understood to be divided into high culture and popular culture. The market for these Jane Austen items is created, at least in part, by people's desire to be attached to her and her works and to the high culture they represent. This desire is evidence that the distinction between high culture and popular culture still exists in people's minds. Still, because of these various adaptations, Austen and her works are no longer restricted to intellectual circles or English classrooms, and they are becoming more accessible to a greater number of people through the production and consumption of Austen-related goods. The evaluation of these three Austen objects, the Austen-based film, and two Austen-inspired novels reveals that modern-day commodity culture has confused social and cultural hierarchies but that they still exist. Jane Austen's existence in popular culture through objects, films, and texts can be seen as step towards an understanding of culture in Raymond Williams's terms, but the fact that they may be consumed because of their relationship to high culture indicates that our understanding of culture is still like Matthew Arnold's.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Bourdieu originally developed the theory of cultural capital in his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. My sense of cultural capital here and at other points throughout the text comes from John Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Canon Formation* and from Mike Featherstone's *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*.

<sup>2</sup> These quotations are taken from a caption beneath the first photo in a series of photos on unnumbered pages (between pp. 128 and 129) in Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield's *Jane Austen in Hollywood*.



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