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# Bricolage on the Upper East Side: The Intertwining of Multimedia in Emma, Clueless, and Gossip Girl

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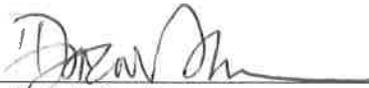
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Nichole Decker

Honors Scholar Project

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**“Okay, so you’re probably going, *is this like a Noxzema commercial or what?*” - Cher**

In this paper I will analyze the classic novel *Emma*, and the 1995 film *Clueless*, as an adaptive pair, but I will also be analyzing the TV series, *Gossip Girl*, as a derivative text. I bring this series into the discussion because of the ways in which it echos, parallels, and alludes to both *Emma* and *Clueless* individually, and the two as a source pair. I do not argue that the series is an actual adaptation, but rather, a sort of collage, recombining motifs from both source texts to create something new, exciting, and completely absurd.

***Emma* (1815)**

Jane Austen’s *Emma* follows 20-year-old Emma Woodhouse, a foolish, spoiled, and self-absorbed young woman who tries her hand at matchmaking, but realizes she’s not as romance-savvy as she likes to believe. Her failed attempts at meddling in other people’s relationships eventually lead her to a life-changing epiphany about herself, and help her realize whom she loves. The story is set in Highbury, England, and only introduces a small number of characters. About the character Emma, Jane Austen wrote, "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (Austen- Leigh 157).

### *Clueless* (1995)

*Clueless* is a 1995 American film written and directed by Amy Heckerling, categorized under the genres coming-of-age and romantic comedy. It is an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma*, with modernized settings, language, and theme points. The plot centers on Cher Horowitz, who is described as “entitled, privileged, ignorant, and arrogant. And yet as Emma would put it, she’s a sensible person making silly choices in such an impudent way that she comes across as charming” (Robinson 8). Like Emma, Cher meddles in romance - setting two of her teachers up, as well as the new girl in school. Similarly, Cher reaches her epiphany after her matchmaking attempts have failed, and she realizes “it all came down to one inevitable conclusion, I was just totally clueless” (*Clueless*).

## gossip girl

**“Who am I? That's One Secret I'll Never Tell”**

(“Pilot” *Gossip Girl*).

*Gossip Girl* is a television series categorized under the teen-drama genre based on the *Gossip Girl* book series by Cecily von Ziegesar. Taking place in the Upper-East Side of New York City, we follow the lives of extremely wealthy and spoiled teenagers who frequently backstab each other and partake in illegal activities with no real consequences. Rodger Sherman states, “that’s what *Gossip Girl* was: a soap opera in which everything was tied to the same few humans, which led to a glorious stew of stepbrothers banging stepsisters while their parents divorced, remarried, cheated on one another, and occasionally rose from the dead” (Sherman 12).

Hang on tight, it’s about to get messy.

xoxo, Gossip Girl.

### ***Clueless* as a Direct Adaptation of *Emma***

Linda Hutcheon describes an adaptation as “a derivation that is not a derivative --- a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing” (9). A commonly recognized text-to-film adaptation is the novel *Emma* being made into *Clueless*, the 1995 Amy Heckerling film. Genilda Azerêdo states,

Although *Clueless* does not mention Jane Austen or the novel in the presentation of credits, any reader of *Emma* (or viewer of a more “faithful” translation of the novel) will immediately perceive certain “coincidences” between both texts, all located on story-level. (236)

*Clueless* serves as a modernized version of *Emma*, changing elements such as fashion, setting, characters, and their situations, but retaining the wealthy, high-class lifestyle, and other basic plot elements. Despite the film being a direct adaptation of the novel, it is not secondary to its source. One can watch *Clueless* and still understand the plot without knowledge of the book. Hutcheon further states, “adaptors relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on” (3). Even with identical plot lines and overarching themes, Heckerling takes the elements of *Emma* and changes them to fit a 1990s society. Suzanne Ferriss writes:

Recent film versions of *Emma* invite speculation about the novel’s appeal in the 1990s. Written in 1816, *Emma* traces a classic comic arc: a misguided matchmaker, overconfident in her abilities, learns the error of her perception and discovers love in the

process... Amy Heckerling's inspired update, *Clueless*, brings the novel into our own era, successfully translating *Emma* into the California high school culture of the 1990s. (122)

Heckerling's decision to remain faithful to the plot and themes makes the allusions apparent to audiences who know both texts, but can also appeal to a 1990-era society who may not have read the novel, as it's humorous, with a high-school setting relatable to most everyone. With such parallels between the two texts, it's easy to view *Clueless* as a direct adaptation.

Hey UMF-ers... Here's how *Gossip Girl* serves as a bricolage series. Hold on to your hats, you've got 45 pages of reading ahead of you. Can you keep up? Good luck.  
xoxo, *Gossip Girl*

While *Clueless* is a direct adaptation of *Emma*, the 2007-2012 television series, *Gossip Girl*, echos both *Clueless* and *Emma* as independent pieces and as an adaptive pair. The series hints at an even more modernized version of the classic Jane Austen novel. *Gossip Girl*, however, does not stick to the exact plot as the source texts, and takes the elements to a whole new level. The series is much more intense than either *Emma* or *Clueless*, which makes the similarities less obvious, but at base level, a knowing audience can see repeated themes and ideas circulating among the three. I don't believe *Gossip Girl* is an adaptation of either source text, but I would argue that there are echos, parallels, and allusions to both of the earlier texts.

## gossip girl

Here's the 4-1-1 on pastiche...

Given to us by [Genilda Azerêdo](#) ... thanks for the tip, GI!

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic (255).

*Gossip Girl* replicates the 'peculiar and unique style' of both source texts, but never mimics them in a way to make the audience laugh. By analyzing the series as a pastiche-styled series, we can see that while *Gossip Girl* does imitate both *Emma* and *Clueless*, but the echoed motifs are amplified to a degree where even a knowing audience may not recognize the parallels by just simply watching the series. Thus we might consider *Gossip Girl* as a pastiche, blending modern-day ideas with the past ideas used in *Emma* and *Clueless*. Despite *Clueless* being a modernized adaptation, the movie is almost 25 years old as of 2019. In his analysis, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst writes, "even some of the social attitudes [of *Clueless*] now seem rather dusty, as one character announces that another boy is "a disco-dancing, Oscar Wilde-reading, Streisand ticket-holding friend of Dorothy" (2). This raises the question of what an even more modernized adaptation would look like. *Gossip Girl* serves as that modernized and pastiche version, with echoes of both *Emma* and *Clueless* without being a direct adaptation of either source text. The series takes elements and themes from the source texts and amplifies them to a nearly unrecognizable degree, which is where I argue that *Gossip Girl* is also a form of bricolage. Nasrullah Mambrol writes "bricolage is the skill of using whatever is at hand and recombining them

to create something new” (1). Looking at *Gossip Girl* with knowledge of the source text and its film adaptation, we can see rewrites of Emma/Cher’s personalities sprinkled throughout multiple characters, as well as similar plotlines, themes, and imitated events. This is not to say *Gossip Girl* is an adaptation of either source materials, but that aspects of the series are related to those source materials through allusions, echos, amplifications, parallels, and imitations. Bricolage emphasizes intertextuality, but between *Emma/Clueless* and *Gossip Girl*, that intertextuality is disparate and fragmented. The series manages to take elements from the source pair and amplify them into almost unrecognizable allusions. It is because of these expanded and amplified pieces, where we have a basic idea or plot, that we see *Gossip Girl* uses it as a jumping-off point for what happens in the series.

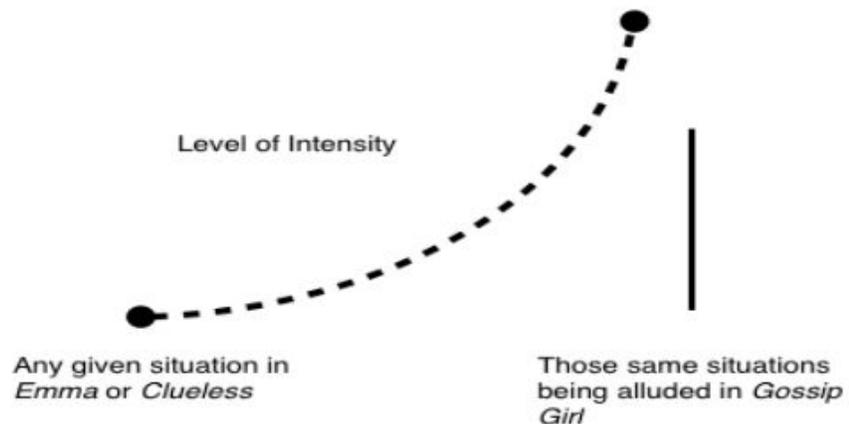


*Gossip Girl* is all about drama, and the series expands themes and motifs to a degree where there is no possibility of immediately recognizable parallels to the source-pair, also obliterating any chance for the audience to relate to the extreme situations the *Gossip Girl* characters go through. Osman Faruqi writes, “forget the one percent; *Gossip Girl* is about the social lives of the 0.1 percent: the over-privileged, bratty, self-indulgent heirs and heiress to old money fortunes” (5). Emma lives in a lovely home in a wealthy village, Cher lives in a beautiful house in a prosperous city, but Serena’s family rents out an entire hotel. Cher drives her jeep without a license, Serena keeps it a secret for years that she watched someone overdose and die. Faruqi further states,

The single best adjective to describe *Gossip Girl* is absurd. The premise of the show is absurd, the situations the characters find themselves in are absurd, the methods they use to fix problems are absurd, and the longer the show went on, the more absurd it got.

*Gossip Girl* was absurdist escapism and fantasy, and best of all it knew it. Of course, there were themes in there about family, loyalty, and relationships, but the situations were so wildly disconnected from reality it's hard to think of any serious life lesson you can glean on those topics. (5)

*Gossip Girl* alludes the significant themes of *Emma* and *Clueless* but changes them from a coming-of-age relatable story into storylines that are so distant from the majority of the audience that all relatability or sense of closeness to the characters is diminished. Because of this amplification, it also makes it more difficult for even a knowing-audience to recognize the similarities. Despite these similarities being subtle, they are definitely there, and I will attempt to make them more apparent.



**“Dionne and I were both named after famous singers of the past, who now do infomercials”**

**- Cher Horowitz**

One of the first similarities we see among the three texts is the approach to beauty and appearance. Emma Woodhouse (*Emma*) and Cher Horowitz (*Clueless*) are both described as being beautiful and smart, and their appearances are heavily emphasized. The first description of Emma reads, “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (1). This immediately portrays Emma as a beautiful, smart, and well-behaved young woman who hasn’t experienced negativity in her life. In her story, Emma honestly believed she was helping someone and only had good intentions, but these characteristics are ignored by the narrator, being replaced with knowledge of the fact that she’s beautiful and rich. Kristel Thornell discusses Alicia Silverstone, the actress who plays Cher, saying,

At the time of *Clueless*’ release, Silverstone enjoyed a reputation as something of a teen goddess. Her ‘look’ in *Clueless* is deployed to encode both knowing sexuality and ‘girlish’ naïveté. In one of the film’s opening sequences, Cher, dressed in just underwear, uses a personal computer to help her decide on an outfit for school. The fact that the viewer is being allowed such physical intimacy so early in the film sexualizes Cher, suggesting she has a confident nonchalance in relation to her body. However, the style of underwear, a white cut-off singlet top and a pair of white, long French knickers, could be seen to signify chastity and innocence. (5)

The fashion choice shows a more modernized approach at sexuality, where an audience is given access to such an intimate moment, whereas, it would have been completely unacceptable for Emma to show her body to anyone besides her husband. Despite this modernized accessibility, there is still the imitation of fashion in Emma's time, where the style of underwear is modest, a style more commonly associated with Emma's time period than the 1990s. Both of these women were meant to represent youth and childlike innocence, a form of irony since both stories are about the girls growing up, maturing, and finding love.

## gossip girl

### Queen Blonde Serena

Bricolage Beauty and High Class

Serena van der Woodsen, portrayed by Black Lively, is the first character we meet in *Gossip Girl*. Like Emma and Cher, we are immediately provided background information about Serena through montage and narration. The show begins with a montage of New York City, showing the Statue of Liberty, upscale shopping centers, Serena's school, eventually leading us to seeing her for the first time on a train. Our narrator reads:

Hey Upper East siders, Gossip Girl here, and I have the biggest news ever. One of my man sources - Melanie91 - sends us this spotted at Grand Central, bags in hand — Serena van der Woodsen. Was it only a year ago our it girl mysteriously disappeared for boarding school? And just as suddenly, she's back. ("Pilot" *Gossip Girl*)

This immediately gives viewers knowledge that the show begins in New York City, and provides us with the information that Serena has been away for the last year, also hinting that boarding school may be a lie, based on the narrator's voice. Rodger Sherman writes, "Serena (Lively)... whose defining character trait might be her blondness," (4) which completely ignores all the positive attributes Serena has, including raising both herself and her brother, she cares immensely for others, and always stands up for what she believes is right. Like both Emma and Cher, her appearance is emphasized more than any actual character traits, which ultimately appear to be less important than her beauty.

Sorry, S. But, who needs brains when you've got beauty?

**spotted: b turning a year older but not necessarily wiser.**  
 ("Seventeen Candles" *Gossip Girl*).

**xoxo Gossip Girl**

*Gossip Girl* features multiple protagonists who have the character-traits of Emma and Cher, emphasizing the dispersing of motif elements in the series. Traits that once belonged to only Emma and Cher in their respected story — selfishness, spoiledness, entitlement, privilege, etc. — are now dispersed amongst numerous characters in *Gossip Girl*. For example, the theme of beauty from the source texts is linked to the two main characters of *Gossip Girl*: Serena van der Woodsen and Blair Waldorf. Each of the protagonist's introduction appears similar, where it is immediately given where and how the characters live. While Serena may be the character that echos the most Emma/Cher character traits, she is not the only character who possesses them. Blair Waldorf, portrayed by Leighton Meester, also echos Emma and Cher, especially in the realms of fashion, attitude towards those of lower class, and dating standards. Upon meeting Blair, we learn, through *Gossip Girl*'s narration, that she and Serena were best friends before Serena left NYC without telling Blair. GG also informs us that Blair's boyfriend, Nate Archibald, has always had "a thing for Serena" ("Pilot," *Gossip Girl*). In Blair's first notable scene, we see her mother, Eleanor Waldorf, comment on her daughter's weight and her obvious self-consciousness. Rodger Sherman calls Blair "the cliquish, class-obsessed queen of the social scene" (4). The article "*Gossip Girl*: Our Last Great Problematic TV Show" by Osman Faruqi adds "scheming and manipulative? That's Blair" (6). Throughout the series we learn that on top of Eleanor's constant criticism, Blair is also coping with insecurity, depression, an eating disorder, and the fact that her father left the family for another man in Paris - only visiting Blair a few times throughout the series.



("The Goodbye Gossip Girl" *Gossip Girl*).

**“I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other” - Emma**

Arguably the most critical themes in all three texts are social class and wealth, and the fact that the main character’s social position allows her to do bad things without any repercussions from other characters. Not only that, but the way it’s portrayed does nothing to make the audience upset at them either, no matter how horrible the things they do are. The characters use their class and wealth to get special privileges and abuse authority, which is wrong (and sometimes illegal), but the idea that bad decisions lead to consequences is ultimately not present in any of the media. No matter what time-period the audience is from, we as a society are intrigued by stories about rich people. There is appeal in immersing ourselves into a life we don’t have access to. Through all three texts, we are able to experience the daily lives of high-class women as if we are actually experiencing it with them.

*Emma* keeps the theme of social position eliminating repercussions the tamest of the three texts. Emma doesn’t do anything illegal or even dangerous, but she meddles in people’s

relationships and has the opportunity to ruin people's lives, but then everyone forgives her and sees her as a foolish young girl with a good heart. Libby Bagno-Simon states,

Emma never faces the threat of social instability and financial uncertainty, and she is loved and admired by practically everyone around her. Even when she encouraged Harriet to refuse Robert Martin or when she humiliates Miss Bates at Box Hill, there is hardly a chance that her insensitive, meddling ways will ever jeopardize her place in society. (2)

Although Emma's heart seems to be in the right place, she is oblivious to the fact that her actions affect other people. In a situation between her new, lower-class friend, Harriet, and Mr. Elton, she automatically assumes Mr. Elton favors Harriet, not even stopping to think he may not like her. As it turns out, Mr. Elton doesn't want to be with her, which sends Emma into such a state of confusion because she honestly never believed she was wrong. John Mullan writes,

Her plans are kind, she tells herself because she will improve this uninstructed and wide-eyed young woman. We should be able to hear, however, that her designs are utterly self-serving. Soon she is persuading Harriet to refuse a marriage proposal from a farmer who loves her, and beguiling her with the wholly illusory prospect of marriage to the smooth young vicar, Mr. Elton. (2)

Emma thinks she is furthering Harriet's happiness and is helping her find a 'high-class' husband. She believes she is right in every aspect of matchmaking, and because of her meddling actions, she nearly ruins Mr. Martin and Harriet's relationship, initially claiming Mr. Martin wasn't good enough. Another example of Emma's inability to consider other people's feelings is when she lashes out at Miss Bates at the Box Hill event. There was no apparent reason for the outburst, and

even when Mr. Knightley confronts her about it, she “recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off” (340). In a conversation where Frank tells a group of people that Emma wants entertainment, Miss Bates makes a joke about being dull, to which Emma replied rudely in front of everyone.

‘Oh! very well,’ exclaimed Miss Bates, ‘then I need not be uneasy. Three things very dull indeed.’ That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan’t I? (looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body’s assent)--Do not you all think I shall?’

Emma could not resist.

‘Ah! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me--but you will be limited as to number--only three at once.’

Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but, when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush shewed that it could pain her.

‘Ah!--well--to be sure. Yes, I see what she means, (turning to Mr. Knightley,) and I will try to hold my tongue. I must make myself very disagreeable, or she would not have said such a thing to an old friend.’ (336)

Emma doesn’t consider Miss Bates’ feelings or how she will react at all. In a later conversation with Mr. Knightley, he tries to make her realize what she did was wrong, but at first, she still refuses to take any accountability and admit any error in her actions.

Additionally, Miss Bates immediately blames herself and feels as though she *must* have done

something wrong for Emma to say something like that. The fact that she is the one who got insulted, yet she's still the one who feels she's to blame, emphasizes the way people feel about Emma, and how they allow her to be rude to people. Nobody besides Mr. Knightley puts the fault on Emma, which ultimately allows her to get away with belittling people. Even with Mr. Knightley's confrontation, he doesn't say anything in front of anyone, only bringing it up in private, again emphasizing that nobody would want to either embarrass or confront Emma in front of other people. Because nobody brings up her poor behavior, people continue to see her as a well-mannered and polite young woman, which isn't necessarily always true.

*Clueless* takes this element, but stretches it to the point where Cher *is* doing illegal things and getting away with them. Of course, everyone forgives her, and they all have a happy ending, but not only does she meddle in people's lives and like Emma, has the possibility of ruining their lives, but she also never gets in trouble with the law. Cher drives illegally and gets her grades raised without doing any actual work. Even in 1995, it was illegal to drive without a license, let alone drive on the freeway with two friends, neither of whom have their license either. We see that Cher isn't a good driver, yet, she is never pulled over or talked to by anyone about the severity of her actions. Only her friend, Dionne, says something about it while Cher drives her to school, but it's done in a comedic way, and ultimately brushed off.

Dionne: Hello. That was a stop sign!

Cher: I totally paused! (*Clueless*)

Not only do Dionne, and in a later scene on the freeway, Dionne's boyfriend, condone and ride in Cher's car as she drives illegally, but they brush it off when she drives unsafely, never seriously telling her to stop at stop signs or red lights because she could cause an accident. We

see that Cher isn't an exceptional student, instead focusing more on the social aspect of school, causing her to appear dumb. It's not a secret to other characters, especially her ex-stepbrother Josh, who refers to her as, "a superficial space cadet who belongs in the shopping mall rather than the library" (*Clueless*). The theme of her not trying in school and manipulating her teachers into getting better grades is played in a comedic way, making the audience view it as funny, instead of dishonest and as a form of cheating. An example of this occurs after Cher submits her 'finished' report-card with significantly better grades than the first.

Mel: Cher, what's this all about?

Cher: My report card?

Mel: The same semester?

Cher: Uh-huh.

Mel: What'd you do? Turn in some extra-credit reports?

Cher: No.

Mel: You take the midterms over?

Cher: Uh-uh.

Mel: You mean to tell me that you argued your way from a C+ to an A-?

Cher: Totally based on my powers of persuasion. You proud?

Mel: Honey, I couldn't be happier than if they were based on real grades. (*Clueless*)

Not only does this show that Cher can improve her grades without doing any actual work, but it also ties into the fact that Mel doesn't make his daughter honestly succeed in school. Cher appears to be the richest person in school, and although her father has nothing to do with her raised grades, it does look suspicious when Cher is the only person who gets her grades changed

to fit her own personal standards. There's also the fact that her grades went up more than a whole letter grade, which would likely only be possible for other students by redoing midterms and extra credit assignments. Although Cher never uses her wealth as an excuse for her poor stance in school, she automatically assumes teachers will buy into any reason she states, letting her off scotch-free. An example of this is when Mr. Hall counts her tardies, and she reports in front of the entire class, "I was surfing the crimson wave. I had to haul ass to the ladies" (*Clueless*). A period isn't a valid reason for tardiness - and unnecessary to state in front of an entire class - but she expects Mr. Hall to take off that tardy mark because she has any excuse at all: and he does! This follows the idea that Cher can get away with poor grades and tardies, and further get improved grades and better attendance scores. Nobody else gets revised report cards or lessened tardy scores except for her, making it appear as though her wealth has something to do with it.

There is a difference between Emma and Cher, though. By the end of each of their respected stories, they come to an epiphany about love, and more specifically, who they love.

Libby Bagno-Simon writes,

The difference between Emma and Cher is clearly visible with regard to their relationships with Harriet and Tai after they have seen the error of their ways. Tai continues to be part of the clique; in the last scene of the movie, she and Travis are seen sitting at the same table with Dion, Murray, Josh, and Cher, and it is clear that these three couples are friends. The same cannot be said for Emma, who cuts Harriet out of her life after the latter marries Robert Martin. (4)

In every other regard, we can consider *Clueless* a direct adaptation of *Emma*, but in this after-epiphany piece, we see a significant difference between the ending of Emma and Cher's

stories. Both women have similar realizations about themselves and their knowledge about romance, but how they handle their projects (Harriet and Tai) afterward are opposite. Cher and Tai remain friends (and Cher becomes friends with Tai's boyfriend, the counterpart of Mr. Martin), but we see Emma end her friendship with Harriet altogether. Emma's narrator tells us,

The intimacy between [Harriet] and Emma must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of goodwill; and, fortunately, what ought to be, and must be, seemed already beginning, and in the most gradual, natural manner. (435)

It's an interesting difference that Heckerling chooses to make, but one that seems to tie together the coming-of-age element that *Clueless* is known for, but furthermore, it proves that Cher can get away with how bad she treated her so-called friends and they'll forgive her and continue the relationships. In *Emma*, on the other hand, when Emma decides she doesn't want Harriet in her life anymore, Harriet immediately jumps to obey Emma's wishes, and she leaves. Even after how Emma treated her, Harriet still follows her rules, showing less of forgiveness and friendship, but more of a sense of obedience. Nobody gives Emma too much of a hard time after 'banishing' Harriet from her life, showing that not only does Emma have some control over Harriet, but everyone else, as well. At the end of both stories, each girl gets exactly what they want, including the friends they *choose* to have, and of course, they get the guy, who they didn't treat the best either.

**"Whatever I do, my past seems to follow me" - Serena**  
 ("Goodbye Columbia" *Gossip Girl*).

*Gossip Girl* takes the idea that one's social position can allow them to get away with things without any repercussions, and amplifies it to unrelatable and crazy heights. Serena is known by other characters and the audience for being extremely high-class since both of her parents are incredibly wealthy and are viewed as royalty on the Upper East Side. Serena, Blair, Nate, and Chuck are the four characters shown to have the most wealth throughout the series, and while the Humphrey family is the only one who complains about being poor, it's apparent no other students at their school have as well a disposition as these four. Through numerous events that occur in the series, we can see that a student with higher social-class standing and more money AKA Serena and Blair, can get away with a lot more than the other students. The main characters of *Gossip Girl* all do horrible things to each other over and over again, yet, the fights only last the length of an episode. Rodger Sherman states, "when viewed from any distance, the plotline of the show is a preposterous web of nonsense, relationships, and betrayals forgotten from episode to episode" (3). Despite the audience acknowledging the character's poor, and most of the time illegal decisions, because there are no severe repercussions served in the show, any bad situation is forgotten by the next episode. The six main characters, Serena, Blair, Chuck, Nate Archibald, and Jenny and Dan Humphrey all sabotage and backstab each other countless times throughout the series, but in classic *Clueless* fashion, they end the series as best friends, completely ignoring all the horrible things they've done to each other.

For example, we learn Serena has slept with Nate, who was Blair's boyfriend at the time. We furthermore learn that Blair and Nate had been saving themselves for each other since middle school, but Serena stole that from her best friend. Once Blair finds out and confronts Serena, they physically fight one another and attempt to sabotage the other's college interviews with Ivy League College Representatives in the following episode, but then reconcile by the end, after Blair gets

even. We find out Blair is adamant on getting into Yale, and Serena, knowing this, attempts to win over the Yale Representative, which leads Blair to get on stage and announce:

May I please have everyone's attention? Welcome again to the Constance Billard/ St. Jude's Ivy week mixer. I'm Blair Waldorf, chair of the community outreach committee. Every year, our schools choose to support one local institution that we feel benefits our community. This year, our schools have chosen to honor the Ostroff center. This semester, our choice is a very personal one because the center has helped one of our own. It's because of their excellent program which aids so many young addicts and alcoholics that a student here with us today is clean and sober. At least, for now. Can I please have Serena van der Woodsen join me onstage? ("Poison Ivy," *Gossip Girl*)

Blair does this to sabotage Serena's chance at getting into a good college, and unfortunately, her accusation is false. It was Serena's brother, Eric who was in Ostroff following his suicide attempt. (Their mother never told anyone where he actually was, so when *Gossip Girl* released a photo of Serena going into Ostroff, everybody assumed it was her who was a patient.) Immediately after this, Serena begs Blair to end the fighting and be friends again. The fact that Serena doesn't even ask for an apology or even try to tell Blair the truth ties back into the idea that Blair can get away with potentially ruining Serena's educational future. Despite her pleas, Blair refuses to forgive her, and it isn't until Eric tells her the truth that Blair apologizes to him, and accepts Serena's pleas. Yet, she doesn't apologize to Serena for what she's done - which is disperse a horrible rumor about her being a drug addict to not only their classmates but also colleges. By seeing Serena beg for the friendship back and ultimately forgive Blair, the audience gets the impression that what Blair did wasn't that bad and we should forgive her too. Neither Serena or Blair face any repercussions for their actions, since they become besties again in the next episode, and neither event is brought up again throughout the series in an argumentative way.

Similarly, in an episode all about privilege and getting away with things, *Gossip Girl* amplifies it to a situation that's illegal, dangerous, and nearly kills a classmate. We see Serena, Blair, Chuck, Dan, and other classmates in the school's swimming-pool past school hours, a majority of people drinking alcohol (underage) and doing drugs. It isn't until a classmate falls unconscious and medical attention is needed that the students get busted for sneaking in. The headmistress of the school threatens expulsion to whoever stole the key to get into the pool, and even the audience is clueless as to who had it. The headmistress holds one-on-one interviews, even expelling Nate for falsely confessing. Eventually, we find out it was Serena who broke into the school since she had the key from an ex-boyfriend. Still dating Dan at this point, she confides in him and begs him not to rat her out, and he hesitantly agrees. He reminds her that unlike her and Blair, he relies on scholarships to attend this school and that he needs exceptional merits to get into a good college. During his interview, Serena comes in and confesses to the headmistress.

Serena: Headmistress Queller, I have something to tell you.

Headmistress: I must say, your file reads more like a rap sheet. You cut more sophomore classes than you attended, cheated on tests, talked back to teachers.

Serena: Look, I understand that this is a serious Matter. That's why it's important to me that you know, you being new here, that the person that you just described is not who I am anymore.

Headmistress: Oh, no? Who are you now?

Serena: Well, my grades are up, my attendance is nearly perfect, and I've stayed out of trouble.

Headmistress: Until now.

Serena: Please understand that I never intended for anything bad to happen. It may have taken some time, but I am here now, accepting responsibility for my actions. (“School Lies” *Gossip Girl*)

Not even two minutes later, Serena and Dan come out, and we find out Serena hasn’t been expelled or even suspended; her only punishment is 25 hours of community service. Considering the headmistress threatened to expel everyone until the perpetrator came clean, it’s surprising to everyone that Serena will face no academic punishment or even probation. This element of privilege benefiting Emma, Cher, and *Gossip Girl* characters, especially Serena, is a significant theme in each media and alludes to each other. While *Clueless* emphasized this aspect by having Cher drive illegally and forge her academic marks, *Gossip Girl* amplifies it to such a high stake, emphasizing the theme of amplifying motifs. *Emma* starts at a one on the privilege scale, *Clueless* brings it to a 5, and *Gossip Girl* brings it to 100. The series takes this important theme that was once as tame as meddling in people’s romantic life and brings it up to a situation where someone nearly dies because of the party Serena threw.

### **“Isn’t my house classic? The columns date all the way back to 1972” - Cher**

Like Emma, Cher is the first person to appear in the movie after a montage sequence that presumes the lifestyle our main character lives. Although *Emma* doesn’t have a montage in text form, we are immediately given background information about our main character, such as information about her family and where she lives.

Regarding residential settings, Andrew Urie quotes *Clueless* director Amy Heckerling saying, “I wanted to treat high school the way Merchant Ivory films treated England in the 1800s. I wanted a *hyperreal* [emphasis added], stylized, more elegant vision of reality” (7). Jane Austen paints Hartfield as a high-class place to live. Fast-forward to the 1990s and Beverly Hills

has that same element of high-class and glamour, and just by seeing Cher's home, we realize she has a similar wealthy lifestyle as Emma. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst states, "at the top of the pecking order is Cher (Alicia Silverstone), a beautiful sixteen-year-old who, like Austen's heroine, has 'a comfortable home and a happy disposition,'" adding, "what remains startlingly fresh is Heckerling's decision to relocate the action to a Beverly Hills high school, an environment bound by social conventions that are no less rigid than those of Austen's Highbury" (2). Looking at the settings of each text, there are apparent similarities between England, California, and New York, which are all viewed as high-class places to live.

Both texts introduce the audience to the protagonist's life through a montage sequence either showing Beverly Hills parties or telling an audience about Emma's wealthy lifestyle in England. Despite Emma and Cher being the first subjects of attention, they are different in the sense that while Cher narrates her life through voiceovers, Emma doesn't. We gain access to Emma's inner thoughts, but not from Emma herself -- an aspect echoed by *Gossip Girl*.

**Serena: But what Gossip Girl did with that power was write a love letter. Not just to me, but all of us.** ("New York, I Love You XOXO," *Gossip Girl*)

Alluding back to *Emma*, neither Serena or Blair is the first person to speak; it's the narrator who tells us about the characters. Similarly, Emma Woodhouse is not her own narrator, and it's a third-party narration which tells us about her. In *Clueless*, having Cher be the first center of attention and the first person to speak lets the audience enter her world - and it shows who is going to be telling the story. In *Gossip Girl*, however, the Gossip Girl narrator (Kristen Bell) is the first person to speak, and her first words are about our main protagonist, Serena. This is a significant contrast showing that while Serena and Blair may be the subjects of our attention, we

aren't gaining access to their inner thoughts. The only way we learn things is from dialogue or Gossip Girl's narration - neither of which allow us to read their minds. Any inner thoughts or feelings will have to be said out loud by her, or else the audience won't know it. While Gossip Girl may expose secrets and give the audience information we otherwise wouldn't know, she's telling other people's stories. She is unable to read anyone's mind, making her more of an unreliable narrator than Cher, who tells her own stories. However, this style of third-party narration echos the narration format in *Emma*. Bricolage comes into play here; *Gossip Girl* has pieces that both *Emma* and *Clueless* have as an adaptive-pair, as well as articles that only one may have. Additionally, it changes those pieces, adding an element of fragmented intertextuality.

### **“Wasn't my Mom a Betty?” - Cher Horowitz**

Another similarity between Emma and Cher is the death of their mothers. We see a direct parallel where the mothers died early in their daughters' lives, and both girls seem to be past the point of sadness. Suzanne Ferriss states, “both the film and novel stress paternal wealth as the key to the heroine's self-worth and confidence” (125). This brings up the idea that in both societies and periods, it is the father making money in the household. Of course in *Emma's* time, her mother likely wouldn't have a job, but it's completely possible Cher's mother may have. Libby Bagno-Simon discusses the similarities between Emma and Cher, reading, “they are both motherless, wealthy young women who live with their overprotective fathers and charm their way through life, loved and admired by everyone around them” (2). Between *Emma* and *Clueless*, it may be considered a direct form of revision, an idea introduced by Julie Sanders, who states, “re-vision — the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (9). The matriarchal figures in *Emma* and *Clueless* are both

deceased, and while Emma and Cher seem to handle it the same way, the mothers died in entirely different ways. Heckerling looks back on this aspect of the main protagonist not having a mother, and while Austen doesn't tell the audience how Mrs. Woodhouse died, Heckerling attributes Mrs. Horowitz's death to liposuction. The idea of modernization comes in here as well, as it's obvious Emma's mother couldn't have possibly died from liposuction in the 1800s. Although the loss of a parent is upsetting, Mrs. Horowitz's death is meant to be comedic - a theme not present in either *Emma* or *Gossip Girl's* deceased parent plot. *Emma* reads, "her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses, and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection," (1) while Cher states in a voice-over, "wasn't my Mom a Betty? She died when I was just a baby — a fluke accident during a routine liposuction. I don't remember her, but I like to pretend she still watches over me" (*Clueless*). Both seem to approach the aspect of the main protagonist being motherless but in completely different ways. It's never said how Emma's mother died, only that she's been deceased for quite some time, and that her sister is away. Cher tells through narration that her mother died in surgery many years ago, and she's an only child. We learn that her father did marry another woman, but as Cher states, "you were hardly even married to [Josh's] mother and that was five years ago" (*Clueless*), adding to the idea that Cher has never had a significant mother figure in her life. It's important to note that Cher's father doesn't have a love interest in the movie - and the only other woman in the house is the maid, who does not represent a maternal figure for Cher.

Suzanne Ferriss writes,

In the absence of her mother, Emma is mistress of Hartfield, secure enough in her own right to dismiss marriage as an option. Cher, too, is mistress of her father's house, possessed of all the modern trappings of excess: designer clothes, sport utility vehicle, cellular phone, and so on. To a great extent, Cher, like Emma, is a spoiled daughter, used to getting her own way and indulged in her penchant for manipulation (125).

Although both Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Horowitz play a role in their texts, it's shown that both play a minimal role in their daughter's lives. Both provide the money of the house but don't serve as prominent father figures. Both are focused on other things, emphasized in a further narration by Cher: "Daddy's a litigator. Those are the scariest kinds of lawyers. Even Lucy, our maid, is terrified of him. He's so good he gets paid five hundred dollars an hour just to fight with people, but he fights with me for free 'cause I'm his daughter" (*Clueless*). The two don't have any major fights throughout the movie, and he seems oblivious to the fact that Cher is failing her classes, and provides no real authority regarding her clothing choices, where she is, or the fact that she's driving a car without a license. Once Mel is made aware of Cher's actions, he still doesn't provide much authority. This idea is proved in a conversation about Cher's report card grades.

Mel: Where's your report card?

Cher: It's not ready yet.

Mel: What do you mean, "it's not ready yet?"

Cher: Well, some teachers are trying to lowball me, Daddy. And I know how you say, "never accept a first offer," so I figure these grades are just a jumping off point to start negotiations.

Mel: Very good. (*Clueless*)

Considering Cher doesn't have a job or any other responsibilities, her grades at school should be her top priority, and she should be receiving good grades, which isn't the case, but Mel seems not to care at all. Throughout the film we see Cher acting as more of a parent than her father, making sure he eats healthy foods and drinks his orange juice.

We see a similar patriarchal role in *Emma*, only Henry Woodhouse, Emma's father, is portrayed as more pathetic than Mel Horowitz. Mel is a lawyer who isn't afraid to fight people, stated by Cher, but Henry appears to be older and more house-ridden and quiet. The first introduction we get of him reads,

His spirits required support. He was a nervous man, easily depressed; fond of everybody that he was used to, and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind... and from his habits of gentle selfishness, and of being never able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself. He was very much disposed to think Miss Taylor had done as sad a thing for herself as for them and would have been a great deal happier if she had spent all the rest of her life at Hartfield. (3)

The narrator portrays Mr. Woodhouse as a selfish man who believes he is right 100% of the time, which is a character trait Mel Horowitz possesses and exemplifies through his work. Even though Mel is wholly engrossed in his work and shows selfish tendencies about not eating healthy or drinking orange juice, it seems Henry is overall more selfish since he doesn't want anyone to leave him, especially his daughters, which is blamed by his fear of illness. However, there are numerous instances throughout the book where he sticks his nose into other people's

business, just to tell them that they're wrong, and offers his unasked opinions and suggestions. An example of this occurs when Emma's sister, Isabella, visits home from London.

Ah! My poor dear child, the truth is, that in London it is always a sickly season. Nobody is healthy in London; nobody can be. It is a dreadful thing to have you forced to live there! So far off!-- and the air so bad!

No, indeed--we are not at all in a bad air. Our part of London is very superior to most others!-- You must not confound us with London in general, my dear sir.

Ah! My dear, it is not like Hartfield. You make the best of it-- but after you have been a week at Hartfield, you are all of you different creatures; you do not look like the same. Now I cannot say, that I think you are any of you looking well at present. (92-93)

Although Mr. Woodhouse doesn't bluntly tell Isabella she should move back to Hartfield, it's heavily implied by how negatively he talks about London and how she's forced to live there. He makes it apparent he's upset she lives there and believes that she should be back in Hartfield, likely so she's again in the same area as him. The fact that he tries to hide his true intentions is different than Mel Horowitz, who will bluntly say what he's thinking without sugarcoating it for anyone, especially Cher. Both men say harsh things, and of course, they believe they are protecting their children, but it comes off as rude and negatively paints both fathers. Mr. Woodhouse's harsh words are telling Isabella that she and her husband both look ill, even though they've shown no signs of illness. Mel Horowitz mimics this encounter when Cher is heading out on her first date but doesn't appear to sugarcoat what he's thinking to either his daughter or her partner.

Mel: What the hell is that?

Cher: A dress.

Mel: Says who?

Cher: Calvin Klein.

Mel: It looks like underwear. Go upstairs and put something over it.

Cher: Duh, I was just going to.

Mel [to Christian]: Hey, you?! Anything happens to my daughter, I got a .45 and shovel. I doubt anybody would miss you. (*Clueless*)

This encounter shows that Mel wants to protect Cher, even if he doesn't have the best way of handling it, which is similar to Henry, who fears illness and wants to protect Emma and Isabella from it, but it comes off in a very selfish way. I believe Henry Woodhouse tries to hide the fact that he's selfish, whereas Mel makes it obvious he thinks he knows what's best when it comes to his daughter, showing that *Clueless* takes elements from its source text and emphasizes it, which *Gossip Girl* does when echoing both source texts.



The element of an absent mother is echoed in *Gossip Girl* but is changed and amplified in a way that alters what it means not to have a parent. Whereas Emma and Cher lost that parent to death, there are mothers in *Gossip Girl* who are metaphorically dead to their children, and others who are actually dead, a more apparent parallel to the source texts. Neither Serena, Blair, or Chuck Bass have any respect for their mothers, and throughout the series, the audience loses respect for them based on how they treat their children. *Emma* and *Clueless* present the lack of

mother-daughter relationship in a literal way, where there's no relationship because the mothers died so early in the girls' lives that neither seems to remember them well. *Gossip Girl*, however, takes the lack-of-parent piece and changes it to a relationship where the children are given live parents, but can't maintain a successful relationship. Douglas Lanier suggests that "while it is true that postmodern pastiche often lacks parody's satirical agenda, it is certainly capable of extending or enriching the meaning of a text" (87). Looking at *Gossip Girl* as a pastiche, we can see that this element is enriched to change what it means for a child not to have a relationship with their parents - whether the mother is deceased, or just disrespected by their children. This plot-element is dispersed to multiple characters throughout the show, and is alluded to in numerous relationships. Similar to distributing Emma/Cher's characteristic traits to multiple characters in the derivative text, *Gossip Girl* uses this style of echos and parallels, taking one element from the source text and using it to amplify various components in the series.

## who = who in the bricolage families

Emma Woodhouse > Cher Horowitz > Serena van der Woodsen > Blair Waldorf > Chuck Bass

Henry Woodhouse > Mel Horowitz > Lily van der Woodsen > Eleanor Waldorf > Bart Bass

Mrs. Woodhouse > Mrs. Horowitz > Lily van der Woodsen > William van der Woodsen > Eleanor Waldorf > Harold Waldorf > Bart Bass > Elizabeth Fisher

Isabella Woodhouse > Eric van der Woodsen > Harold Waldorf

Are you keeping up, UMF-ers? Hope so, the bricolage is just beginning.

xoxo Gossip Girl

None of the parents in *Gossip Girl*, Lily van der Woodsen, Eleanor Waldorf, or Bart Bass, are winning an award for their parenting skills. Serena's relationship with her mother, Lily van der

Woodsen, echos *Emma* and *Clueless*, changing a literal death to a situation where even though Lily is alive, she's so absent that she might as well not be there at all. Their relationship is strained, and Lily doesn't serve as much of a parent throughout the series. The blogger MDK writes,

*Gossip Girl's* wealthy Upper East Side family must keep a superior reputation in order to keep their status above others, according to Lily van der Woodsen. Serena van der Woodsen and her mother have never had a close relationship. From Lily's many husbands and making her kids feel like they are not a priority; they do not have a close, mother-daughter relationship. Lily makes choices for her family to uphold their reputation that society is expecting them to keep as a wealthy Upper East Side family. However, sometimes these choices damage other people and sometimes even Serena and her brother Eric. (1-2)

Like Emma, who has Miss Taylor as a maternal figure, Serena still has a mother in her life, even if the relationship isn't perfect. This contrasts with *Clueless*, which provides absolutely no mother figure for Cher. *Gossip Girl*, however, does echo *Clueless* by hinting at appearance and class. Cher's mother died from cosmetic surgery, giving the impression she was highly concerned with looking better than anyone else. Lily makes it blatant that she cares more about her reputation than her relationship with her children. In the first episode of the series, we get a glimpse of how far Lily will go to protect this reputation, no matter how it affects her children. While her son, Eric, is in a mental institution for a suicide attempt, she declines his requests to go outside and admits that she's lying about where he's been to every one.

Eric: Morning, Mom.

Serena: Hey, I was just about to ask the doctor if I could take Eric to breakfast.

Wanna come?

Lily: Um no. I think what I'll do is go get him a croissant down the street.

Serena: Let me guess, you told everyone Eric's just visiting Grandpa in Rhode Island.

Lily: Your Aunt Carol in Miami.

Serena: So you're actually hiding him? He tries to take his own life, and you're worried it's going to cost you mom of the year?

Lily: Serena, you've been gone, doing who knows what with god knows who-

Serena: I told you, boarding school was not like that.

Lily: Then you know what? As happy as I am to have you home, you have no idea what it's been like. ("Pilot," *Gossip Girl*)

This interaction shows Lily will risk her child's well-being to maintain her reputation, which parallels the idea that Cher's mom died in surgery to make her look better than everyone else.

The dead mother aspect is a parallel between *Gossip Girl*, *Clueless* and *Emma*, but Lily van der Woodsen seems also to allude to Cher's father, Mel, in regards to a lack of authority. Serena is shown to regularly drink, smoke, and do drugs, about which Lily presents no knowledge.

Throughout the series, there are multiple times where Serena flies off for weeks on end with people Lily doesn't know, yet there are no repercussions for those actions. In season two, following an argument between Lily and Serena, Serena flies to Spain with her two friends, only telling Lily she's leaving once she's already on the plane via text message reading, "I've gone to Spain with Poppy for the week. I'll call when I land" ("Remains of the J," *Gossip Girl*). In the following episode when Serena returns, Lily states she's grounded and can't leave the house, but not even five minutes later, Serena has left to attend a party. This encounter shows the lack of respect Serena has for her mother in regards to discipline, but she also verbally expresses that disrespect at public events, all in an attempt to hurt her mother's reputation,

Hi, I'm Serena. I'm Lily's daughter. I wasn't going to be able to make it tonight because I was actually at the Ostroff Center. Though if it were up to my mother she would have you believe I was at Canyon Ranch. That's because having a daughter who's in a mental hospital threatens her carefully protected image. She wants you all to think that she's the perfect host and mother and wife. But the truth is she's a selfish liar who will destroy anyone who stands in her way. ("The Townie," *Gossip Girl*)

While Lily is a much more exaggerated deadbeat parent than Mel, there is a parallel. Having Lily imitate Mel's sense of commitments to other priorities, ultimately being too busy to care for her children truly amplifies and fragments the motifs, in addition to changing the gender of the parent. Despite this imitation, she is exaggerated so far from Mel's source-character that her 'deadbeat' parent element has other elements that are not true for either Mel or Mr. Woodhouse. Even though Serena and Lily do have moments of affection and always apologize for their actions, it's apparent the relationship is extremely toxic to both parties. The act of always forgiving each other, no matter how horrible the situation, also relates to the theme of Serena being able to get away with anything she does or says without any consequences. Another mimicked theme comes into *Gossip Girl* because Serena's father abandoned her, and they have no communication until season 3. Until he appears on the show, we aren't given much information about him, other than the fact that he's a successful doctor. This aspect seems to connect back to *Emma* and *Clueless* since neither Emma or Cher have much to say about their mothers.

**"I didn't want to worry you. I wanted to fix my mistake." - Eric**  
 ("While You Weren't Sleeping" *Gossip Girl*).

Although Cher doesn't have a sibling (besides Josh, but we'll get to that later), both Emma and Serena have a sibling who moves to London. Eric van der Woodsen is parallel to Isabella Woodhouse, both being portrayed as quiet and well-mannered. While both characters are well-developed rather than just a mentioned sibling who doesn't get any depth, neither Eric or Isabella is a significant character. Mr. Knightley often compares Isabella and Emma, as Eric is often referred to as 'Serena's little sister.' We see Emma's character traits dispersed to multiple characters throughout the series, but Isabella and Eric are paralleled in a pastiche style, the derivative character imitating Isabella, but of course changing elements to expand upon the role and modernizing him into a 2000s Upper East Side setting, while also incorporating homosexuality, something that would never be discussed in a Jane Austen novel.

Serena's relationship with Eric is strained as well. He doesn't play as significant a role in the series as Serena, only appearing in four of the six seasons. Just in season one do we see the two interact in a loving, sibling way. Serena supports him following his attempted suicide, as well as when he comes out as gay, but she seems to ignore him otherwise. Eric eventually leaves to attend a school in London, an obvious parallel to the fact that Emma's sister is residing in London. Both also face mental illness, Isabella suffering from a similar form of anxiety as her father, and Eric suffering depression and suicidal tendencies. We see Isabella as a vulnerable person to her family, and Eric is similar, always wanting to do what's right, even if it means putting his own happiness aside. *Gossip Girl* does a good job transposing Isabella into Eric's character, but some differences show that this is a pastiche rather than an adaptation. A significant example is the fact that Isabella is the older sister, whereas Eric is the younger brother.

**"Your childish games are who you are, not a phase." - Eleanor**  
 ("The Kids Are Not Alright" *Gossip Girl*).

As discussed earlier, Blair has a similar relationship with her mother, Eleanor, as Serena does with Lily. Eleanor is constantly critiquing Blair and commenting on her weight and offers no affection or parental support when she finds out Blair is still dealing with bulimia. Following an awkward encounter with Serena, who believes Blair is pregnant, Eleanor immediately blames Blair for being the reason they're arguing.

Eleanor: Were you arguing about the possibility that your condition may have returned?

Blair: No, and it hasn't.

Eleanor: I heard you the other day in your bathroom with the water running.

Blair: I'm very stressed, and with you and Serena down my throat, I can hardly think straight, never mind keep food down.

Eleanor: Maybe you just need to take a little break, visit your father. Lyons is beautiful this time of year. ("Blair Waldorf Must Pie!" *Gossip Girl*)

This conversation could also relate to the idea of the maternal figure of the texts being more concerned with reputation than their children's well being. Blair and Eric both have a mental illness, and in both cases, their mothers would rather ship them off than deal with those mental illnesses. Lily admits she's lied to people about where Eric has been, meaning she likely hasn't told people he attempted suicide. After having suspicions about Blair's bulimia, Eleanor bluntly tells her that she should go to Lyons to be with her father. In both scenarios, it's clear that the maternal figure cares more about herself and *her* reputation, rather than her children's safety.

Like Serena, Blair's father is absent for most of the series. *Gossip Girl* alters that 'motherless piece' by making it Blair and Serena's fathers, but alters it again specifically for Blair's situation. Unlike Serena, Blair knows her father and talks about him and their old traditions around the holidays. Although Blair is sad her father has moved to Paris, she has no ill feelings towards him, only his new boyfriend for a single episode while they're visiting. Of course, there's an parallel

among Isabella Woodhouse, Eric van der Woodsen, and Harold Waldorf, since they all moved to Europe. Harold is the only one not in London.

Furthermore, Lily sends Eric off to London, so she doesn't have to worry about him, and Eleanor wants to do the same thing to Blair. It's much darker than *Emma* or *Clueless*, but *Gossip Girl* seems to hint at the fact that the 'high-class bubble' has certain expectations, and if your children rebel, you should disown them. Of course neither mother wants to abandon their children since that would ruin their reputation, so instead, they lie about it and pretend everything is fine. Both Lily and Eleanor show that they'd rather have a spotless reputation than help their children live a happy and healthy life.



Another character in *Gossip Girl* who shares this aspect of being 'motherless' is Chuck Bass. The show manages to amplify its own motherless element when it comes to Chuck's relationship with his mother. Like Serena and Lily, Chuck and his father, Bart, have an extremely strained relationship throughout the series, a significant extreme being Bart faking his death for a majority of the series. Early in the series, we learn that Chuck never knew his mother through a conversation he has with Dan Humphrey.

Chuck: He hated me. His beloved wife died giving birth to me.

Dan: That's not your fault.

Chuck: Tell him that. Sometimes I swear he thinks I killed her. ("The Serena Also Arises," *Gossip Girl*).

There's bound to be some tension in the relationship if Chuck feels this way, but this tension is emphasized when he tells Dan, "the story I told you about my mother? I was lying. My mother died in a plane crash in the Andes when I was six," ("The Serena Also Arises," *Gossip Girl*) showing obvious insecurity and sensitivity about the subject. In true *Gossip Girl* fashion, though, we learn that his mother is a woman named Elizabeth Fisher, and she and Bart were never married. Oh, and plot twist, she isn't dead. She just abandoned her son and husband at birth. Chuck meets her and is devastated, which differs from how Cher and Emma handle their mother's actual deaths. They seem to be past the point of crying in bed every day, but Chuck instantly shuts down and begins drinking heavily. ("The Lady Vanished," *Gossip Girl*). The aspect of orphanage is heavily dramatized in Chuck's situation, but Bart Bass also attributes repeat themes from both Henry Woodhouse and Mel Horowitz, completely ignoring the fact that Chuck drinks, does drugs, and sleeps with multiple prostitutes.

**"My mission is clear. That girl, she is so adorably clueless. I have to adopt her. Don't you want to use your popularity for a good cause?" - Cher Horowitz**

In *Emma* and *Clueless*, the major plot revolves around Emma and Cher allowing a new girl of lower class, as Cher says, her project, into the high-class social bubble and trying to find them a good partner, in belief they're doing a good deed by helping the less fortunate. Although Emma and Cher's hearts may be in the right place, they ultimately do this for their own purpose, feeling some ego-boost in their charity work. In *Emma*, Emma befriends a woman, Harriet Smith, and instantly thinks (in free indirect discourse) about how she can improve Harriet. Her thoughts read, "she was not struck by any thing remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging ... Encouragement should be given. Those soft blue eyes and all those natural graces should not be wasted on the inferior society of Highbury and its

connections. The acquaintance she had already formed were unworthy of her” (18). Emma instantly decides that because of Harriet’s appearance and engaging manners, she can ‘help’ her. Similarly, in *Clueless*, Cher decides to give the new girl, Tai Frasier, a makeover. Not even thirty seconds after Tai is brought to the tennis court where the Cher and her friend Dionne are, Cher states, “Dee, my mission is clear. Would you look at that girl? She is so adorably clueless. We have got to adopt her” (*Clueless*). Both passages tie into the fact that Emma and Cher believe that being of a lower class is disgraceful, and their helping is a good deed or privilege to Harriet and Tai, respectively. Tasha Robinson states, “a small group of people are tied together by circumstance in a social setting where class and personality creates artificial rifts, nearly impenetrable except when the participants see some benefit in penetrating them” (9). Class is predetermined based on a family’s wealth, and it’s nearly impossible to be in a high-class setting unless someone from the high-class allows you in. This is what happens when Emma, who lives in a beautiful house in Highbury takes Harriet, a seventeen-year-old girl from a nearby academy, under her wing for personal benefit. This plot is then replicated in *Clueless* where Cher, the daughter of a lawyer, befriends Tai, a girl who has sexual experience and smokes marijuana, all in the name of doing a good deed. Tai isn’t the only person Cher ‘improves’ for personal benefit, though. She also sets up two of her teachers, Mr. Hall, and Mrs. Geist, to get better grades and have easier classes.

**here’s an inside tip, little j: the faster you rise, the harder you fall.**

(“Dare Devil” Gossip Girl).

**xoxo, Gossip Girl**

*Gossip Girl* also repeats the idea of allowing someone into the elite 'high-class' bubble. Just as Emma brings Harriet into her social class, and Cher brings Tai into hers, Serena and Blair allow Jenny Humphrey into the Manhattan Elite circle. This element is arguably the most significant form of bricolage present between the three media, as the motif of matchmaking is present. While *Emma* and *Clueless* romantically portray the act of matchmaking: wanting their 'project' to meet a good man who is of the higher class, all in an act to make them feel like they've done a good deed. *Gossip Girl* turns away from the romantic element, making it less of a matchmaking situation, but more of an introducing a lower-class girl into the elite circle for both Serena and Blair's own personal benefits. Serena allows her on-again-off-again boyfriend's sister to hang out with her and the 'it squad' at school and at parties in an attempt to show Dan she doesn't care about class or wealth. Blair showers her with gifts and otherwise impossible opportunities, but only when Jenny is of use for her, but other than that, bullies her repeatedly. In the source texts, Emma and Cher both genuinely believe they're doing good deeds, and only realize they were wrong after they find a love of their own. *Gossip Girl*, on the other hand, alters and intensifies this idea by making it obvious to other characters and the audience that Serena and Blair are using Jenny as a pawn for their personal use, which is usually to sabotage other people. Emma and Cher's good intentions are replaced with selfishness and bullying, and unlike Harriet or Tai, Jenny is never seen as a project that either Serena or Blair genuinely care about and want to help, but instead, she is nothing more than a tool they use to hurt each other.

Serena only opts to help Jenny once she becomes interested in Jenny's brother, Dan. Serena has the power to bring people into the social-bubble but only chooses to do so once it benefits her. In the first episode, her mother mentions attending the annual "Kiss on the Lips" party, and Serena tells her she can't go because she already has plans with Dan, whom at this

point she doesn't know at all. This was a lie: she and Dan had no plans, she didn't want to go to avoid conflict with her best friend, which further emphasizes the idea that Serena has the power to let the 'less fortunate' into the bubble, but only does so for selfish reasons. Not even an hour into the date, Jenny texts Dan "HELP. EMERGENCY. NEED YOU, J." Dan didn't receive an invite to the party since he's in a lower social class, but Serena immediately offers to go to the party she was avoiding to help Jenny - whom she has never met. While this appears to be selfless on Serena's behalf, one must ask if she would have jumped to the rescue for a girl she had no connections with ("Pilot" *Gossip Girl*). Serena continues to help Jenny, allowing her to sit with the high-class clique at lunch on the sacred stairs, a place where only girls chosen by Blair Waldorf, the self-declared Queen Bee of the Upper East Side, are allowed to sit. Despite Blair's refusal to allow Jenny into the clique, Serena continues to include her in activities such as lunch and parties. This continues while Serena and Dan are in a relationship, but as soon as they break up, Jenny is no longer protected or included by Serena. Again, this emphasizes that Serena has the power to choose who she penetrates the social bubble for, and when she does it. It's also shown that she can kick someone out of the bubble as quickly as she let them enter it.

Serena isn't the only one who lets Jenny into this bubble, though; Blair does it on multiple occasions. Blair blatantly bribes her not to be friends with Serena after finding out she has slept with Nate, Blair's boyfriend.

Jenny: My brother's name is Dan. Actually, you might know him. He, um, he went out with Serena last night.

Blair: That's your brother? So does that mean you're friends with Serena now?

Jenny: I mean, I don't have a problem with her, but if someone did have a problem with her, I wouldn't have a problem with that either.

Blair: You know, if you like that dress, you can have it.

Jenny: What? No, no.

Blair: I'm sure you'll find some way to repay me.

Jenny: Oh, Blair, thank you. I mean, for the dress and for the other thing about, uh, about Chuck.

Blair: If you want to be part of this world, Jenny, people will talk eventually, and you need to decide if all this is worth it. ("The Wild Brunch," *Gossip Girl*)

The element of Serena and Blair allowing Jenny into the high-class bubble is an example of fragmented intertextuality because the element of matchmaking for personal benefit is relevant, but there's no sense of Blair or Serena trying to find Jenny a husband/boyfriend to get into that bubble. Sadly, in the early seasons, Jenny is used as a pawn by both Serena and Blair to get revenge on the other. Each convinces Jenny to reveal the other's secrets and sabotage any success the either may be feeling, bribing her by letting her into the social-bubble if she complies with their vengeful wishes. Jenny does have relationships with wealthy, high-class boys throughout the series, but those are never a result of Serena or Blair's doing. *Gossip Girl* seems to use a similar underlying message, the idea of "the social-bubble being nearly impenetrable except when the participants see some benefit in penetrating them" (Robinson 9), creating a parallel, since both *Emma* and *Clueless* possess this theme. In "*Emma's Homies*," Douglas-Fairhurst writes,

The teenagers may gather around lunch tables rather than card tables, and they may adopt different costumes to identify their particular social set (bum-hanging trousers for skaters; long hair and check shirts for slackers), but here too you're either a winner or a loser in the social stakes; either you're hot or you're not. (2)

In *Gossip Girl*, it's Serena and Blair who are the winners; Jenny is the loser. The series doesn't mimic identically, since it changes that piece of romance benefit into a friendship/enemy benefit for Blair and Serena to get back at one another, in a loose pastiche of the original theme. The show

uses the theme of social-bubble penetration as a starting point, but amplifies it to a much more blatant act of selfishness, changing it from a 'her heart was in the right place' scenario, to a 'wow, Serena and Blair are bitches to Jenny' scenario.

### **“I am Totally Butt-Crazy in Love With Josh!” - Cher**

Of course, *Emma* wouldn't be a classic romance, and *Clueless* wouldn't be a coming-of-age story, if our main characters didn't get their Prince Charmings in the end. Both stories revolve around the idea that Emma and Cher are so busy meddling in other people's love life that they completely ignore *their* feelings of love. In the article, “Exactly How *Clueless* Overlaps With Jane Austen's *Emma*, Because Josh Is Totally Mr. Knightley” Loretta Donelan writes,

Josh = Mr. Knightley. Both Josh and Knightley start off as brother figures before becoming major love interests. Both are older than their women, with a slightly disturbing prior familial relationship. (5)

Both girls realize they love the men that have been there all along and the only people that told the women when they were making bad choices. Despite all the bad things they've done throughout their stories, the men still love them and commit to relationships with them -- Emma marrying Mr. Knightley, and Josh becoming Cher's first boyfriend.

In a blog post on Medium, Modern Austen writes, “Emma believes her judgment is superior to everyone else's—except Mr. Knightley's. She may not allow anyone to tell her what to do, but, whether she realizes it or not, Emma allows Mr. Knightley to act as her conscience” (2). Emma so strongly believes that she is right in every situation that for a majority of *Emma*, she

shows aggression and annoyance towards Mr. Knightley for arguing with her, which nobody else does. It isn't until her epiphany that she realizes he only tests her because he loves her, and grows to love him for that. The same blog post later states,

Although Emma only declares she's in love with Mr. Knightley after Harriet professes her feelings for him, she would not have come to that conclusion if Mr. Knightley had not forced her to see herself, and her behavior, in a new light. (5)

While it may have taken a majority of the novel, Emma Woodhouse gets her happy ending with Mr. Knightley, the only person who loved her enough to tell her she was wrong. While it's never directly addressed, Mr. Knightley and Emma are technically related. Emma's sister, Isabella, is married to Mr. Knightley's older brother, John. Cher and Josh directly refer to each other as ex-step siblings, which isn't present in *Emma*, which seems to ignore the idea that Emma is marrying her sister's brother-in-law. *Clueless* seems to poke at this idea by making Cher and Josh act as actual siblings throughout the story. Both texts, however, seem to forget about the somewhat- incestuous relationships in the end, and both girls get their happily-ever-afters with their brothers.

**Dan: You'd really go out with some guy you don't know?**

**Serena: Well, you can't be worse than the guys I do know.**

("Pilot," *Gossip Girl*)

By the end of the novel, Emma ends up with Mr. Knightley, a much older man who is viewed as family. Cher ends up with her ex-stepbrother, Josh, who is a college freshman, while she is sixteen. In true *Gossip Girl* fashion, the series takes the base-point of 'brotherly love' and amplifies it. In a significant example of bricolage carried out throughout the entire series, *Gossip*

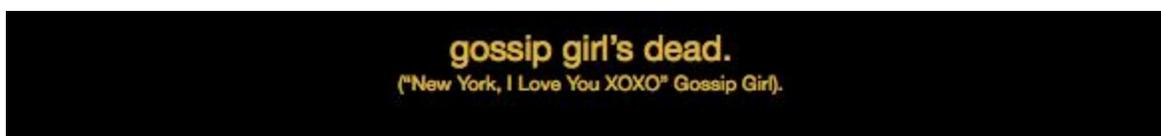
*Girl* takes the romantic motif started in the source texts and used it as a jumping-off point for Serena's relationship with Dan Humphrey. Early in the series, we learn that Lily van der Woodsen and Dan's father, Rufus Humphrey, used to date. While that's awkward enough and causes Dan and Serena to break up, the two parents actually get back together for multiple seasons, and eventually get married (and then divorced again.) During the relationship, the two families begin living together, meaning Dan and Serena are both roommates and step-siblings following their break-up. Rodger Sherman writes, "[*Gossip Girl*] is a six-season flow of characters oozing in and out of relationships, each fling completely unrelated to everybody else's nonsense, while everybody's parents also go to town on one another" (6). The series takes this 'almost-incest romance' motif to the absolute extreme, having almost every character hook-up, and Lily marry both Rufus Humphrey (Dan and Jenny's father) and Bart Bass (Chuck's father).

### The Main Character Hook-up Chart

	Hookup 1	Hookup 2	Hookup 3	Hookup 4	Hookup 5
<b>Serena</b>	Chuck (Rape) (Adopted siblings)	Dan (Married)	Aaron (Blair's step-father's son)	Tripp (Nate's cousin)	Nate (Dated)
<b>Blair</b>	Chuck (Married)	Nate (Dated)	Dan (Dated)	Jack (Chuck's cousin)	
<b>Chuck</b>	Blair (Married)	Vanessa (Hook up)	Serena (Rape) (Adopted siblings)	Georgina (Hook up)	Jenny (Hook up)
<b>Nate</b>	Blair (Dated)	Jenny (Kissed)	Vanessa (Dated)	Serena (Dated)	
<b>Dan</b>	Serena (Married)	Blair (Dated)	Vanessa (Dated)	Georgina (Adopts her son)	
<b>Vanessa</b>	Nate (Dated)	Dan (Dated)	Scott (Dated - Rufus & Lily's son)	Chuck (Hook up)	

Jenny	Nate (Kissed)	Chuck (Hook up)			
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*Gossip Girl* plays off this web of hookups like it's no big deal, but it amplifies and breaks apart the aspect of romance, indeed fragmenting the motif as a whole. While the element of Dan and Serena's relationship is the most apparent adaptation from the source texts, having the brother-sister love interest, the derivative manages to amplify it and disperse it into every character hooking up with everyone. Blair and Serena, who are best friends, both have romances/hookups with Chuck, Nate, and Dan. Serena and Chuck aren't related when the sexual assault occurs, but they *do* become siblings - meaning Serena has had incestual encounters with two of her siblings. Blair has sex with her future husband's cousin. Jenny loses her virginity to her adopted-step-brother, Chuck. While Serena's relationship echos both Emma and Cher, an element of bricolage is present where Serena is much more sexually experienced than either of the two, an imitated character-trait from Tai Frazier, who openly states she isn't a virgin. Cher hints at losing her virginity to Josh, but it's never explicitly said, she does state in a voice over after her first kiss with Josh, "well, you can guess what happened next" (*Clueless*). Serena has sex with multiple people throughout the series and is often referred to as a slut. *Gossip Girl* gives Serena the same elements as Cher and Emma but amplifies them to make even more extreme romantic situations.



To conclude, *Emma*, *Clueless*, and *Gossip Girl* can be viewed as a source-and-derivative trio, but because of modernizations and amplified themes, any audience can read/watch any of these texts and still understand them. I am not saying *Gossip Girl* is an adaptation of either

*Emma* or *Clueless*, or the two as a source-pair, but I *am* saying the series takes pieces from both source-texts and amplifies them into over-the-top dramatic themes, which is part of what makes *Gossip Girl* so absurd. In the source-pairs, we see two women who seem to be the only people in their towns with any wealth, but the derivative sprinkles that wealth into multiple characters. Likewise with the character traits and deadbeat parent theme, instead of having one character possess those pieces, they are dispersed to numerous families.

*Gossip Girl* is absurd and completely unrelatable to 99.9% of the population, but it appeals to people the same way it does when they read *Emma* or watch *Clueless*. There's this element of glamour and coming-of-age, and of course, happy endings. Our girls get their happy endings with their brothers, and they get away with everything they've ever done.

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