

# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

WEDNESDAY

JUNE 26, 2019

7 PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

# EMMA

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM  
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



"I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other."

– Emma Woodhouse, *Emma* (Jane Austen, 1815)

Austen's endearing/infuriating matchmaker certainly has had her share (over a dozen) of media treatments, from a live BBC teleplay in 1948 to a movie scheduled for release in 2020. These include Amy Heckerling's like totally cool Cher in like contemporary Beverly Hills in *CLUELESS* (1995); a lavish four-hour BBC miniseries with Romola Garai (2009); the Bollywood film *AISHA* (2010), set in modern Delhi; and a completely reimagined 21st century Emma in the YouTube series *EMMA APPROVED* (2013-2014). In 1996 alone there were two *EMMAs*: a U.S./UK television production starring Kate Beckinsale, and the Douglas McGrath theatrical film being shown tonight.



Jane Austen's comedy-of-manners novel begins: "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....The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself....The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her." Austen has immediately and concretely established her protagonist's social class, her insulated life, and the pitfalls of self-delusion. McGrath also begins with a third-person narrator (who then disappears until near the end): "In a time when one's town was one's world, and the actions at a dance excited greater interest than the movement of armies, there lived a young woman who knew how this world should be run." McGrath's invented-for-the film narration makes no mention of evils or dangers; but the miniature globe that Emma confidently holds, and presents to her former governess, is initially shown spinning wildly, hinting of Emma's potential loss of control over her world.

DIRECTED BY **DOUGLAS MCGRATH**  
SCREENPLAY BY **DOUGLAS MCGRATH**  
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY **JANE AUSTEN**  
PRODUCED BY **MIRAMAX**  
(1996) 120 MINS.  
STARRING **GWYNETH PALTROW, JEREMY NORTHAM, TONI COLLETTE, JULIET STEVENSON, EWAN MCGREGOR, ALAN CUMMING, AND GRETA SCACCHI**

Director-writer McGrath is fully in control, giving us two hours of elegantly-staged, impeccably-acted entertainment. The impressive production values (including Oscar-nominated costumes that often convey instantly the essence of a character) belie its relatively low \$7 million budget. McGrath's achievement is especially remarkable considering that this was his first feature as director. Born in 1958, he began his career in 1980 as a *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* writer. He convinced Miramax to finance this production on the strength of his Academy Award-winning original screenplay (co-written by Woody Allen) for Allen's *BULLETS OVER BROADWAY* (1994).

McGrath manages to be reasonably faithful to the novel while taking enjoyable liberties with plot, dialogue, and narrative modes (including the addition of Emma's diary, which enables some first-person narration). He also brings events more to the outdoors. Two countryside scenes, not in the novel, are noteworthy: Emma's driving her carriage alone and her archery practice with Mr. Knightley (the latter scene reinforcing visually her role as cupid). In both, McGrath gives us an Emma with more agency than in the novel, and simultaneously undercuts that power. In the first, Emma needs to be rescued by a knight on a white horse; in the second, she begins by hitting the bullseye but ends by missing the target board, signifying the unravelling of her self-assurance.

*New York Times* critic Janet Maslin wrote that Gwyneth Paltrow (an American affecting a convincing British accent) "makes a resplendent Emma, gliding through the film with an elegance and patrician wit that bring the young Katharine Hepburn to mind. And as with Hepburn, that very refinement turns sly, bestowing a serenely polite veneer upon her character's sneaky, meddlesome tricks." Largely because of *FLESH AND BONE* (1993) and *SE7EN* (1995), Paltrow had already been proclaimed a star and had been featured on many magazine covers. But *EMMA* was her breakthrough role. Two years later, she would win the Oscar playing another Brit, Viola, in *SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE*.

**DID YOU KNOW:** FOR *EMMA*, RACHEL PORTMAN RECEIVED THE ACADEMY AWARD FOR ORIGINAL SCORE, MAKING HER THE FIRST WOMAN EVER TO WIN IN THAT CATEGORY. ONE YEAR LATER, ANNE DUDLEY (*THE FULL MONTY*) WAS THE SECOND, AND LAST TO DATE. PORTMAN WAS SUBSEQUENTLY OSCAR-NOMINATED FOR *THE CIDER HOUSE RULES* AND *CHOCOLAT*. HER OTHER FILMS INCLUDE TWO FOR DIRECTOR MCGRATH: *NICHOLAS NICKLEBY* AND *INFAMOUS*.

**NEXT UP:** LANA AND LILLY WACHOWSKI REIMAGINE THE 1960S ANIME AND MANGA SERIES *SPEED RACER* IN THEIR 2008 LIVE-ACTION FEATURE, WITH EMILE HIRSCH IN THE TITLE ROLE, PLUS SUSAN SARANDON, CHRISTINA RICCI, AND JOHN GOODMAN. JOIN US FOR A 35MM SCREENING **WEDNESDAY, JULY 17 AT 7:00 PM.**