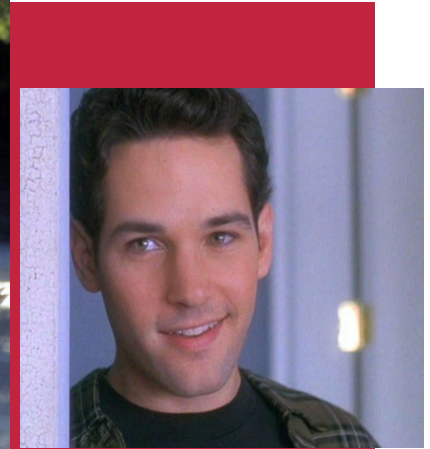


Treasures from the Yale Film Archive



Clueless

Thursday, May 2, 7 p.m.

Humanities Quadrangle Alice Cinema

Written and Directed by **Amy Heckerling**

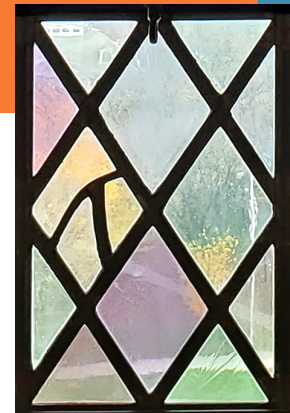
Cinematography by **Bill Pope**

Produced by **Paramount Pictures** (1995), 97 mins.

Starring **Alicia Silverstone, Stacey Dash, Brittany Murphy, Paul Rudd,**

Dan Hedaya, Jeremy Sisto, Breckin Meyer, Justin Walker,

Donald Faison, Elisa Donovan, and Wallace Shawn



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A SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

So, OK, you're probably going, "Is this, like, a mindless teen movie, or what?" As if! Writer-director Amy Heckerling's concept was, on the contrary, high-minded: a transplanting of Jane Austen's 1815 novel *Emma* to 1990s Beverly Hills. Heckerling, a graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and the American Film Institute, had directed only student films prior to her feature film debut, 1982's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (written by Cameron Crowe), which grossed \$50 million on a \$5 million budget and launched the careers of Sean Penn, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Forest Whitaker, and others. Heckerling was also a big success with 1985's *National Lampoon's European Vacation* (\$50 million gross on a \$17 million budget) and 1989's *Look Who's Talking* (\$297 million gross on a \$7.5 million budget).

Since *Fast Times*, Heckerling wanted to return to high schoolers, but with a different center: as she described it, "an optimistic teenage girl who, no matter what was happening, couldn't have her bubble burst." She originally conceived *Clueless* as a television series. 20th Century-Fox convinced her to turn it into a theatrical film, but then the studio, having qualms about "the female focus," put the project in turnaround. Heckerling then pitched it to a succession of studios, which, despite her impressive track record, said, in effect, "totally no way," until producer Scott Rudin picked it up for Paramount.

To create the fictional Bronson Alcott High School, Heckerling sat in on classes at Beverly Hills High, observing behavior, language, and clothing, but her goal was "to make up a world that I liked...I just wanted the fake world that you would see in a comedy of manners, something more beautiful and happy than what really is." Heckerling wasn't confident about the film's potential success: "We didn't have any big stars, the main characters were female, and it was going to come out in theaters among a slew of kid comedies. Nobody thought that we were anything or accounted for anything."

To her surprise, when *Clueless* opened, on July 19, 1995, the reviews were largely enthusiastic. Kenneth Turan (*Los Angeles Times*): "a wickedly funny teen-age farce...that, like its heroine, turns out to have more to it than anyone could anticipate." Janet Maslin (*New York Times*): "a candy-

DID YOU KNOW The film's success led Heckerling to create a three-season television series (1996-1999) and an off-Broadway musical (scheduled for a limited run, November 2018-January 2019). Other spinoffs have included novels, a video game, and a comic book series—none involving Heckerling and often veering wildly from the wildly from the original, but...whatever.

colored, brightly satirical showcase for Alicia Silverstone as Cher, a mind-bendingly up-to-date version of the novel's matchmaking minx." Roger Ebert (*Chicago Sun-Times*): "smart and funny...aimed at teenagers, but like all good comedies, it will appeal to anyone who has a sense of humor and an ear for the ironic." The film grossed \$88 million on a \$12 million budget; made stars of Alicia Silverstone (previously known for appearances in Aerosmith music videos), Stacey Dash (Dionne), Brittany Murphy (Tai), and, in his movie debut, Paul Rudd (Josh); earned Heckerling the National Society of Film Critics' Best Screenplay award; and became a cult classic.

The cult includes the fashions and the language. Heckerling found that the real Beverly Hills teenagers wore mostly "grunge" clothing, so costume designer Mona May helped create Heckerling's "fake world" by integrating grunge with vibrant high fashion, including 60 costume changes for Alicia Silverstone alone. In 1995, Ebert observed that Heckerling's dialogue "could be anthologized," which proved prophetic. Numerous articles have analyzed the lexicon (e.g. Baldwin=attractive man; Betty=attractive woman; buggin'=freaking out; wiggin'=buggin'), which Heckerling derived partly from observations and research, and partly from imagination. Using one of Heckerling's invented expressions, Cher disparages a rival as "a full-on Monet...It's like a painting see? From far away, it's OK, but up close, it's a big old mess." Whether viewed from far away or from up close — most properly, in 35mm on the big screen — *Clueless* is gorgeous.

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