

Jane Austen's

emma



**BAG &
BAGGAGE**

Jane Austen's Emma

adapted by Michael Fry, based on the novel by Jane Austen
directed by Patrick Walsh
May 5-29, 2016

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CAST

Clara-Liis Hillier* Sarah, *who plays Emma*
Cassie Greer* Jane (*Harriet Smith, Miss Bates, Mrs. Elton*)
Arianne Jacques* Elizabeth (*Jane Fairfax, Mrs. Weston, Mr. Woodhouse*)
Andrew Beck* William (*Frank Churchill, Mr. Elton, Mr. Martin*)
Joey Copsey* Robert (*Mr. Knightly, Mr. Weston, Mrs. Bates*)

CREW/PRODUCTION TEAM

Patrick Walsh Director
Emily Trimble[†] Stage Manager
Props Mistress
Ephriam Harnsberger Assistant Stage Manager
Melissa Heller[†] Costume Designer
Megan Wilkerson[†] Scenic Designer
Molly Stowe[†] Lighting Designer
Scott Palmer Sound Designer
TBD Run Crew

BAG&BAGGAGE STAFF

Scott Palmer
Artistic Director

Beth Lewis
Managing Director

Arianne Jacques
Patron Services Manager

Cassie Greer
Capital Campaign Manager

Emily Trimble
Company Stage Manager

*Member of the Bag&Baggage Resident Acting Company

[†]Member of Bag&Baggage Resident Production Team



INTRODUCTION

Emma is one of the best-known and most-beloved of all English novels, and Jane Austen's story has delighted generations of readers. First published in 1816, the novel features a uniquely flawed heroine that Austen declared "no one but myself will much like." In actuality, generations of readers have fallen in love with Emma Woodhouse, and the colorful characters that inhabit her world; this new adaptation brings to life all of these wonderfully eccentric characters, played by just five actors.

"Private Theatricals" were a popular pastime in the Austen family home, and adaptor Michael Fry has inventively placed his *Emma* within just such a setting, as Sarah - with her friends Jane, Elizabeth, Robert, and William - explores the family attic and brings Austen's vivid prose to life. Sharp-tongued, beautifully observed, and with a charming lightness of touch, this is a "play within a play" which delightfully and ingeniously retains the words and wit of the classic novel. This year marks the bicentenary of the novel's publication, and we at Bag&Baggage are thrilled to celebrate this beloved literary classic with our production.



BACKGROUND: The Writers

Jane Austen & Michael Fry



Jane Austen, from a drawing by her sister Cassandra

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, at Steventon Rectory in Hampshire, England, the seventh child of a country clergyman and his wife, George and Cassandra Austen. Austen's parents were well-respected community members; her father was Oxford-educated, and the children grew up in an environment that stressed learning and creative thinking. When Jane was young, she and her siblings were encouraged to read from their father's extensive library. The children also authored and put on plays and charades.

In order to acquire a more formal education, Jane and her older sister Cassandra were briefly sent to boarding schools during Jane's pre-adolescence. Their short period of formal education cut short by financial constraints, they returned home and lived with the family from that time forward. Though Austen lived a quiet life, she had unusual access to the greater world, primarily through her brothers: Frank and Charles, officers in the Royal Navy, served on ships around the world and saw action in the Napoleonic Wars; Henry, who eventually became a clergyman like his father and his brother James, was an officer in the militia and later a banker. Austen visited Henry in London, where she attended the theater, art exhibitions, and social events and also corrected proofs of her novels. Her brother Edward was adopted by wealthy cousins, the Knights, becoming their heir and later taking their name. On extended visits to Godmersham, Edward's estate in Kent, Austen and her sister took part in the privileged life of the landed gentry, which is reflected in all her fiction.

Jane spent much of her early adulthood helping run the family home, playing piano, attending church, and socializing with neighbors. Her nights and weekends often involved cotillions, and as a result, she became an accomplished dancer. On other evenings, she would choose a novel from the shelf and read it aloud to her family, occasionally one she had written herself. As a child Austen had begun writing comic stories, which are now referred to as the *Juvenilia*. Her first mature work, composed when she was about 19, was a novella, *Lady Susan*, written in epistolary form (as a series of letters). This early fiction was preserved by her family but was not published until long after her death.

In her early twenties Austen wrote the novels that later became *Sense and Sensibility* (first called “Elinor and Marianne”) and *Pride and Prejudice* (originally “First Impressions”). Her father sent a letter offering the manuscript of “First Impressions” to a publisher soon after it was finished in 1797, but his offer was rejected by return post. Austen continued writing, revising “Elinor and Marianne” and completing a novel called “Susan” (later to become *Northanger Abbey*).

In 1801, Austen moved to Bath with her father, mother, and Cassandra, and lived there until her father died suddenly after a short illness in 1805, thrusting the family into financial straits. The three Austen women spent the next four years moving from place to place, skipping between the homes of various family members and rented flats. It was not until 1809 that they were able to settle into a stable living situation at Jane’s brother Edward’s cottage in Chawton.

In her 30s, Austen began anonymously publishing her works; the period spanning 1811-16 saw the printing of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*. Early in 1816, Austen began to feel unwell. She ignored her illness at first and continued to work and to participate in the usual round of family activities. But by the middle of that year, her decline was unmistakable, both to herself and her family, and Austen’s physical condition began a long, slow, and irregular deterioration culminating in her death the following year.

While Austen received some accolades for her works while still alive, with her first three novels garnering critical attention and increasing financial reward, it was not until after her death that her brother Henry revealed to the public that she was an author.

Today, Austen is considered one of the greatest writers in English history, both by academics and the general public.



Jane Austen’s 1809-1816 home at Chawton Cottage, which now houses the Jane Austen House Museum



Michael Fry is a director, playwright, academic, and executive, currently serving as the Deputy Director of East 15 Acting School at the University of Essex. He has previously been artistic director of the UK-based theatres Not the National Theatre; Great Eastern Stage, Lincoln; and Floorboards Theatre Productions; as well as serving on the faculty of Coventry University, Middlesex University, Washington University in St. Louis, Webster University, and the Royal Holloway College, University of London. Fry is a regular international workshop leader and conference speaker, and a prolific theatre director, having directed more than 150 productions at UK regional theatres and opera companies, and in London at the Young Vic, the Lyric Hammersmith, the Gate, the King’s Head and the Soho Theatre. He has written and adapted thirteen plays in addition to *Emma*, including *The Great Gatsby*, *War and Peace*, *Tartuffe*, *The Princes Bride*, and *Garrick’s Women*; his plays and adaptations have been performed in theatres throughout England, America, and Australasia, and are published by Methuen, Samuel French, and Oberon.

Fry’s *Emma* adaptation was originally titled *Sarah’s ‘Emma’ After Jane*, and was first produced in London by the Gloucester Stage Company in 1991. Drawing on Austen’s own childhood experience of staging plays at home with family and friends, Fry constructs his adaptation in a similar style, with five Georgian-Era youths getting together to put on one of these private theatricals.

BACKGROUND: The Georgian Era and the British Gentry



George III Coronation Portrait by Allan Ramsay, 1762

All of Jane Austen's novels are set against the background of daily life in English Georgian society at the turn of the 19th century. As the name indicates, the Georgian period covers the successive reigns of kings George I, George II, George III, and George IV. (That of William IV is also sometimes included.)

The Georgian era was a time of immense social change in Britain, with the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of rival political parties like the Whigs and Tories. Small communities in rural areas began to decline as industry caught on, as people flocked to cities or to the North American colonies in search of more opportunity. This resulted in an intensification of class divisions and unrest in all ranks of English society, and early reformers began to bring about radical change in many areas of social justice. It was during the Georgian era that the Whig Party - generally in opposition to the power of the king - first came to power; the territories of Australia and New Zealand were claimed by Britain; the Thirteen Colonies in America declared their independence; the French Revolution overthrew the monarchy in that country; the Napoleonic Wars were fought; and slavery was ultimately abolished and criminalized throughout the entire British Empire.

The point of view from which Jane Austen describes England is that of a woman of the English gentry (albeit from its lower fringes), belonging to a reasonably well-off family, and living in a very small village of rural England around the late 18th or early 19th century. It is understandable, then, that some essential aspects of the Georgian era are virtually absent from her novels, such as American, French, and Industrial Revolutions, and the birth of the British Empire. Rather than a depiction of the history of English society at large, Austen's novels provide an understanding of everyday life in rural England at the turn of the 19th century.

As Austen's novels are set in the social context of the gentry, it is important to understand what exactly that class entails. A gentleman is distinguished by his personal qualities as much as by his status as a land-holding nobleman - the simple gentleman comes below the Esquire (title derived from Squire, the chief landed proprietor in a district), who in turn is inferior - in ascending order of precedence - to the Knight, the Baronet, the Baron, the Viscount, the Earl, the Marquess, and finally to the Duke. It is the gentleman of the Georgian period who is the precursor to the gentleman of the Victorian period in that he establishes a code of conduct based on the three Rs: Restraint, Refinement, and Religion. During the reign of George III, the British gentry begin, by their reserve and emotional control, to distinguish themselves from the peoples of southern Europe who are of a more hot-headed temperament.



A 1799 caricature of British gentry "types" by Isaac Cruikshank



Chatsworth House. Photo by TW Astro.

Within the gentry, the differences in income and fortune reflected in Austen's novels are considerable. In real Georgian society, the Duke of Devonshire maintained a household of 180 people in his magnificent country house, Chatsworth House. Just to feed that number of people, five cattle and fifteen sheep were slaughtered each week. In return for this wealth, it was customary for the proprietor of an estate to use his huge kitchens to have thick soups prepared and distributed to the most needy villagers during the winter, when bad weather set in and fuel became scarce.

In Great Britain, the 18th century was a period of considerable wealth generation; the nobility therefore lived in sumptuous country houses, all of which were comparable with the royal family's most beautiful homes. Rich owners devoted a lot of time and money to beautifying the grounds surrounding their houses, and to making the approaches and the views from the windows more impressive.

At a less impressive, though no less important level of society, the clergy occupied an essential place in Austen's work, likely because Jane Austen's father himself was a clergyman. Becoming a clergyman was a profession like any other: any well educated, well-spoken man of sound morals could enter it, and no particular religious vocation was called for. The income of a clergyman varied a great deal depending on the living assigned to him. A small, poor, rural parish like Steventon (where Austen's father was the rector) might be worth only about £100 a year, while a good parish could be worth nearly £1000. The allocation of the living, and therefore of the benefits attached to it, was in the hands of the local lord of the manor.

Amid this male-dominated society, the very idea that a woman might have a profession, with the attendant status and financial independence, was virtually inconceivable. Women ideally existed to marry, to please their husbands, and to raise families. Austen's writing perfectly reflects the limitations of her situation (even though she did not rebel against it directly) in that she almost never depicts women involved in anything other than domestic activities, except for those who teach either as a governess or at a boarding school.

In an England where propriety was essential, the opportunities for young people of both sexes to meet and be able to talk privately were rare. It was balls, uncommon as they were, with the attraction of music and the exercise afforded by dancing, that made social relationships possible. Even though the physical contact permitted by the country dance - or later the quadrille - were very limited, the possibility of having a regular partner who reserved several dances during the ball was an indispensable prelude to an engagement. For a girl to be allowed to go to a ball, however, her parents had to consider her old enough to come out: that is, make her debut into adult society. Her first steps in the world thus marked a stage in her life when she could hope to get engaged and be married.



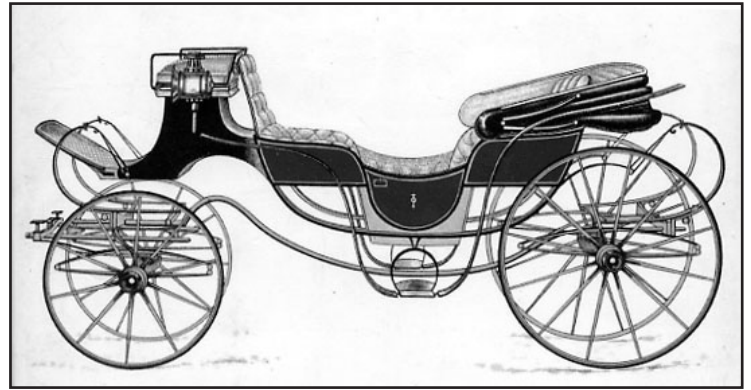
An 1811 "Analysis of Country Dancing"



A drawing of "The Fancy Ball at the Upper Rooms, Bath" c. 1800

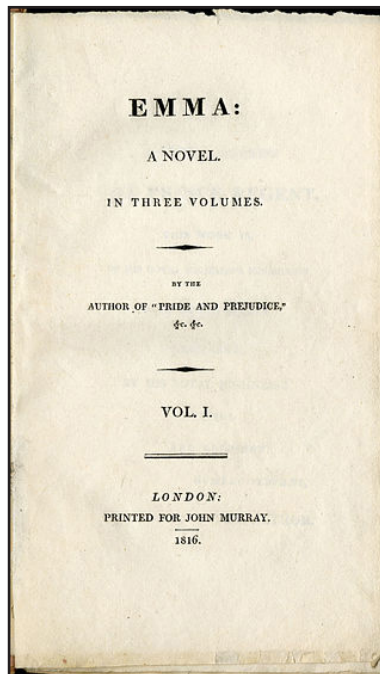
Women of the gentry were expected to be refined, mannerly, and accomplished in domestic affairs and the arts. It was on women that the pleasures of social life depended, and at a time when the opportunities to hear music were rare and expensive, a musical woman could charm guests with a few piano pieces, sing, or provide the necessary accompaniment for an impromptu dance. In the same way, in the absence of photography, the possibility of recording a beloved face depended on women's talents in drawing or watercolor painting.

Not to be overlooked, an essential role of women in the Georgian period was to have children - a role reflected in the massive growth of England's population at this time. Among the British gentry, child-rearing took a back seat to child-bearing, as governesses were often employed to look after growing families so women could turn their attentions to managing the rest of their domestic affairs. Homes and gardens must be beautified, meals must be arranged, calls to friends and neighbors must be made, letters written and correspondences maintained, and social activities planned and arranged. In a time when the gentry lived on large estates and the average carriage speed was seven miles an hour, managing the necessities of daily life took time, and the days of women and men alike were easily filled with activity.



A 19th century barouche landau - a fashionable open-air summer carriage drawn by two horses, and typically carrying four passengers. Mrs. Elton repeatedly references her sister's barouche landau in the play.

BACKGROUND: The *Emma* Story



The 1816 Emma title page

Jane Austen began to write *Emma* in January of 1814 and finished it a little over a year later, in March of 1815, at the age of thirty-nine. Emma Woodhouse is a privileged young heiress who becomes lonely after her governess marries. In Austen's opening sentence, we learn that Emma is "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home an happy disposition" and that she "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." Indeed, she is a heroine that Austen claimed no one but herself would like, and in many ways, Austen made Emma very like herself.

Emma Woodhouse and Jane Austen both create intricate and intimate stories about other people's lives; both demand attention, to the delight of their audiences; and both fiercely hang onto their creativity, despite the challenges and limitations as a woman in early 19th century England. Susan Morgan, a Jane Austen scholar and Professor of English at Miami University, further talks about the similarities between author and character like this:

Near the end of the story Emma can still claim persuasively that she always deserves the best treatment because she never puts up with any other. The resolution to Austen's plot does offer her beloved creation and fellow creator only the best treatment, which does not include having to give up her imagination. The real difference between the author and her flawed but fabulous heroine is that Austen tells a better story than Emma. And part of what's better is Austen's more inventive, and less conventional, vision of romance.



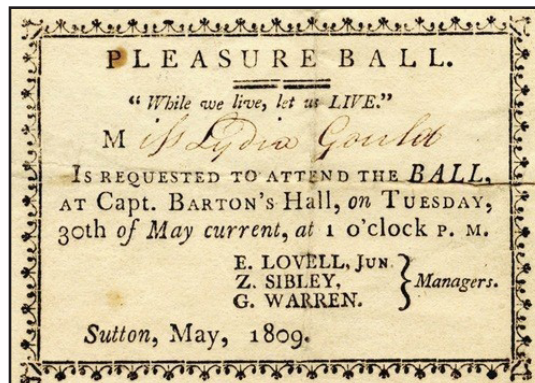
A illustration by Philip Gough for the Macdonald & Co. Publishers 1948 edition of Emma

Emma Woodhouse is devoted to her father, an irritable, fastidious hypochondriac, and takes up matchmaking as a diversion, deciding to unite her orphan protégé, Harriet Smith, with a clergyman, Mr Elton - much to the disapproval of her neighbor Mr. Knightley. Gradually Emma perceives that her manipulative, meddling actions are ill-conceived. Though this progression to maturity and self-awareness is painful for Emma herself, Austen's skillful plotting and sharp wit make it a delight for the reader.

Emma is the first Austen heroine with no financial concerns, which, she declares to the naïve Miss Smith, is the reason that she has no inducement to marry. This is a great departure from Austen's other novels, in which the quest for marriage and financial security are often important themes in the stories. Also in contrast to other Austen heroines, Emma seems immune to romantic attraction. She is genuinely surprised (and somewhat disgusted) when Mr. Elton declares his love for her. And her fancy for Frank Churchill represents more of a longing for a little drama in her life than a longing for romantic love.

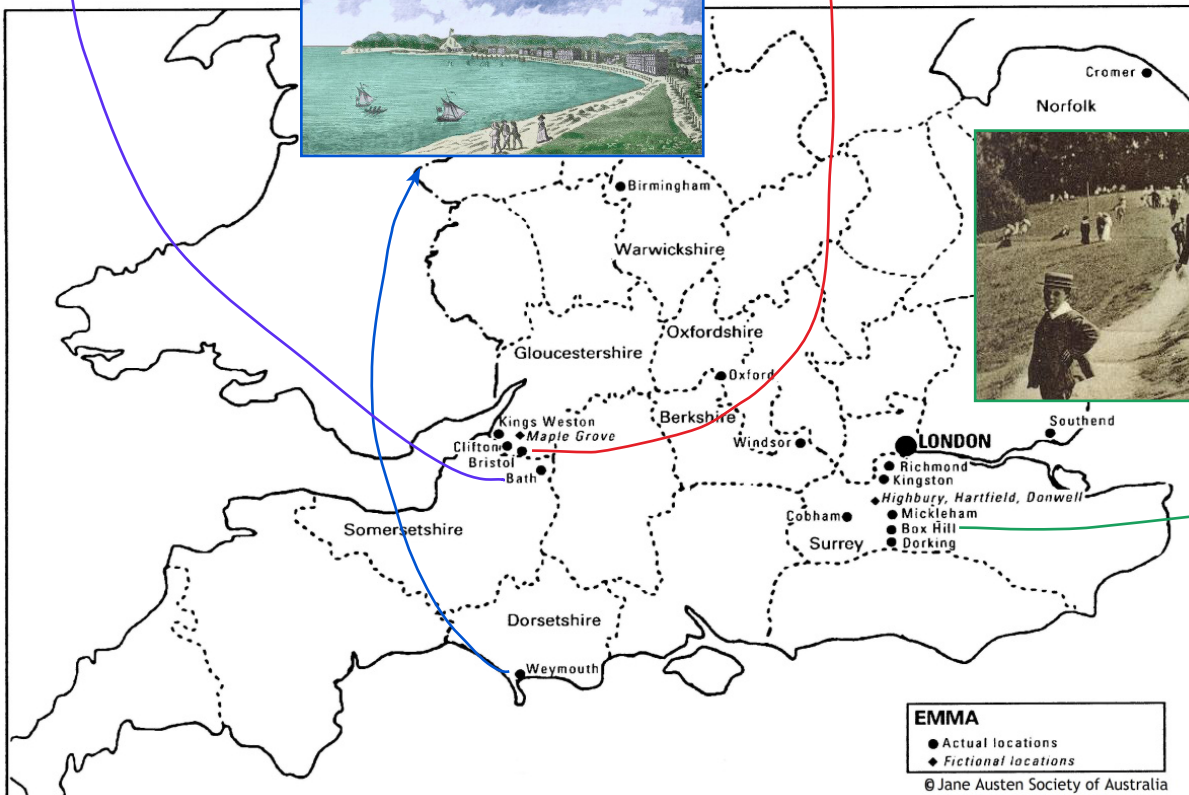
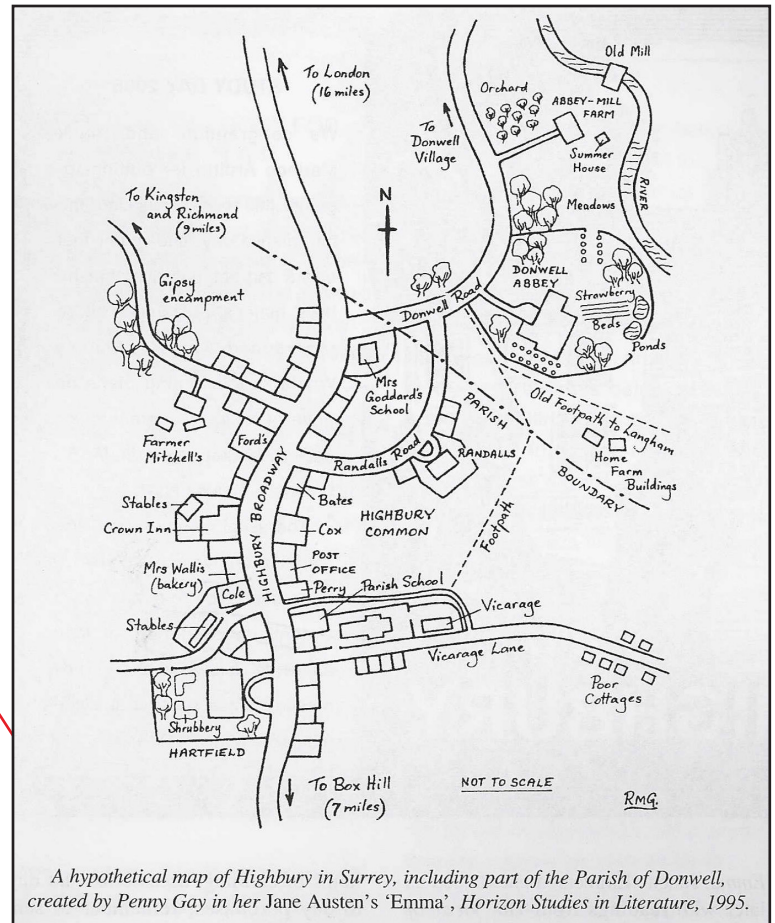
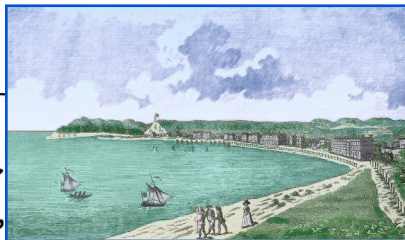
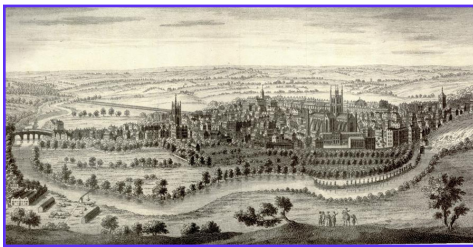
While Emma differs strikingly from Austen's other heroines in these two respects, she is also similar in one significant way: she is an intelligent young woman with too little to do and no ability to change her location or everyday routine. To again quote Susan Morgan:

The plot of [Emma] is a tribute to everyday life, to the extraordinary richness of the world that is to be found in our very own neighborhoods, to the enormous potential for happiness that can be fulfilled by going no farther than right next door. I think one reason so many of us love this novel is that it celebrates the high possibilities, the real thrills, the enthusiastic creativity and even the "perfect happiness" to be found in the small worlds of ordinary life in which almost all of us live.



MAPS & GEOGRAPHY

Geography is continually referenced in *Emma*, and though the story is largely confined to the immediate neighborhood of Hartfield, the Woodhouse estate, Jane Austen is quite specific about the locations in the village of Highbury. She also draws particular attention to the other cities in which characters live or visit over the course of the story, and knowing what and where these are can help give us a better understanding of the action.



THEMES

Social Status

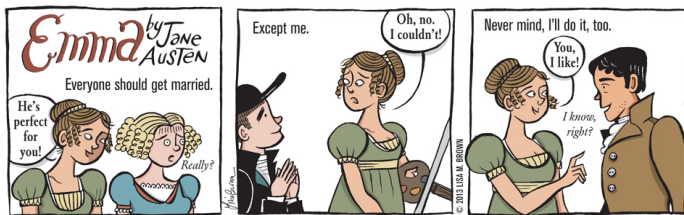
Class structures are the most obvious – and most important – differences between characters in *Emma*. The rich (like Emma and Mr. Knightley) control social situations, the social climbers (like Mr. and Mrs. Elton) attempt to seem rich and important, and the poor (like Mrs. and Miss Bates, Harriet Smith, and Jane Fairfax) are at the mercy of the rich. Family background and reputation are also important factors in social status, and although Austen's novel turns on Emma's attempts to raise Harriet out of social oblivion, in the end, manners mean everything, and those who weren't born with good breeding just can't measure up to those who are. *Emma* builds up various definitions of respectability – and its evil cousin, pretension. Pretension may be the more interesting of the two, but it's always deflated as the sort of social climbing it is. A good family reputation takes time (perhaps centuries) to build. Everybody knows who everybody else is – and where they fall in the social hierarchy.



Illustration of Mr. Elton's economic considerations of marriage. By Chris Hammond, 1898.

Gender, and the Suffocating Nature of Women's Existences

Gender roles in Georgian England at first seem to blur in everyday life: men gossip as much – if not more – than women, women run the social and political networks of the community as much as their male counterparts do, and everybody vies to be the perfect host/hostess. Women, however, in reality, have fewer options than men. They can either get married, or they can spend their lives living with their families - their existences are extremely claustrophobic. Without any other options, they become restrained and defined by a very different set of expectations and images than men.



Gender and Class Structure are related in that marriage is the only way for a woman to raise her social status - there is nothing she is able to do of her own merit. Marriage, therefore, and matchmaking, become standard female preoccupations. Emma is unique in that her high social status does not necessitate marriage, and her obsession with matchmaking comes more from boredom and an underused intellect than any real need to advance herself.

Imagination, and the Role It Can Play In One's Downfall

Born both of Emma's unique status as a woman as well as her very active mind, her imagination becomes the most satisfying outlet for her need for excitement in her life. Matchmaking is again the field on which her imaginings play out, and her frustrations with the limitations of her own existence combine forces with her immense romantic imagination to spur on the plot of Austen's story. While Emma's frustration and imagination lead to her eventual downfall, they are also the very things which lead to her education, and her better understanding of her world, her own desires, and her ideal place within her existing social framework.



Miscommunication

Characters who make mistakes and learn from them are almost as much fun to read about as characters who say and do foolish things all the time – and never learn anything. *Emma* contains a good balance of both: Austen creates a social world chock-full of romantic missteps, social gaffs, and just plain silly social conventions. In so doing, she points out the ways that society constructs ridiculous expectations of people – but she also emphasizes the fact that people depend upon social conventions in order to make it through life. No one is free from folly. Perhaps that's what makes almost all the characters in *Emma* so likable.

QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

1. Emma starts arranging Harriet's life because she's bored. What other options does a woman have to entertain herself? Is Jane Austen making a comment on gender roles with the whole premise of this story?
 2. Does Emma ever really learn her lesson when it comes to matchmaking?
 3. Why does Emma need Mr. Knightley to point out her errors? Would she have figured out her mistakes on her own?
 4. To what extent do good manners determine social standing? What other factors influence social status, and how important are each of these factors?
 5. Mrs. and Miss Bates aren't rich, but they are respectable. Why? Is Mrs. Elton respectable? Mr. Weston? Frank Churchill? What determines respectability?
 6. Is Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax's decision to keep their engagement secret a respectable one? Do you think that their marriage will be a happy one?
 7. Is it possible to dissociate love and money? How do you perceive the relationship between love and money at different points of this story? Does this relationship ever change?
 8. Do you think Michael Fry's device of a "play within a play" is an effective one? Why or why not?
 9. This production references myriad time periods in the props and costumes as the show progresses. When did this particularly resonate with the story of *Emma* for you? When did it distract you?
 10. Do you think *Emma* is an important or interesting story for contemporary audiences? Why or why not?
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SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Read blog posts from the cast and crew at <http://bagnbaggage.org/category/blog-bloggage/>
Jane Austen on biography.com: <http://www.biography.com/people/jane-austen-9192819#death-and-legacy>
Jane Austen Society of North America: http://www.jasna.org/info/about_austen.html
"Austen Only": <http://austenonly.com/>
Michael Fry: <http://michael-fry.net/michael.php>
Emma Adaptations from strangegirl: <http://www.strangegirl.com/emma/index.php>
"Georgian Society in Jane Austen Novels": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian_society_in_Jane_Austen%27s_novels
Emma on austen.com: <http://www.austen.com/emma/>
"Adoring the Girl Next Door: Geography in Austen's Novels" by Susan Morgan: <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol21no1/morgan.html>
Emma page at the British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/works/emma>
"I Read Everything Jane Austen Wrote, Several Times" by Adelle Waldman:
http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_completist/2013/04/jane_austen_books_ranked_and_reconsidered_from_emma_to_persuasion.html