

Reader's position in jane austen's emma

Profession, Writer



After the episode at Box Hill, Mr. Knightley says to Emma, 'I must once more speak to you as I have been used to do: a privilege rather endured than allowed, perhaps, but I must still use it.'

How do you as a modern reader, respond to Austen's presentation of Mr. Knightley's guidance of Emma in the novel as a whole?

It can be said that Emma is a novel which is based on morals and manners. In the society, and the people in which Jane Austen deals with, we see the high expectations, the pride and mainly good use of manners in their community. George Knightley is considered to be a well-mannered and respectable man, and we are shown good reasons to believe so, on many occasions. He is thought of as a 'good-catch', being rich with 'old money', and having very high status, but does not show any signs of snobbery to or against another person.

In addition, Mr. Knightley has many good qualities, and we can see how fond Austen is of her 'faultless' character. We see him in many circumstances, (mostly) being calm, polite and sharp, never succumbing to rudeness. He is always pleasant and friendly towards Miss Bates, which shows the reader a very gentle side to him, even though many other characters get agitated with her rather easily. Austen also helps us understand how courteous and patient he is, whilst dealing with Mr. Woodhouse. He is a very annoying, infuriating man so by showing Mr. Knightley to be friendly and tolerant with him, helps us see what truly great qualities this man has. When speaking to Emma, we understand how much he cares for her, though sometimes he may seem quite abrupt.

Nevertheless, throughout the novel we see Emma's countless faults. She seems to be inexperienced at the start of the novel, which can be said to 'justify' her childish behaviour. Though it appears that she does not know a lot about life in general, acting spoilt and immature; we are soon shown of her sharp, intelligent and kind self, which makes the reader realise of her desperate need of help. She is lacking parental support greatly, and quite seriously; it is clear to us that she has never had a mother figure to look up to, only ever having Miss Taylor her governess, which seems more like friendship than mother-daughter. Her father does not realise of her need of love and support, and therefore continues to act like a selfish child who needs a great deal of care, consequently ending up with Emma caring and concerning for her father and not concentrating on her own needs. Although we see of her and her sister's closeness, Isabella has her own life and is away from their estate for most of the year. As a result Mr Knightley shows to be the only one capable and willing around her, to help her through and towards her development.

As Mr. Knightley acts as Emma's 'mentor' throughout the novel, we see on many occasions, him upsetting her with the truth, them in conflict, and a lot of realisation about oneself. When she boasts of her persuading Harriet to decline Robert Martin's marriage proposal, as she is certain of Mr. Elton's love for Harriet, we see Mr. Knightley fuming with rage at her, as she does not realise the consequences of her actions, and the damage she will cause for the people involved. She is stubborn with George Knightley, and only when Mr. Elton proposes to her, does she realise the reality in what she has done and the truth in what he has said. The situation is then followed by her

self-searching, and reflecting on her actions, admitting she is wrong to only herself, soon forgetting of her wrong doings.

Following the incident at Box Hill, it is the first time that we see Emma break down in the novel. Mr. Knightley is very angry with Emma, but does raise his voice, simply explains their situation of how people perceive them, clarifying the importance of them setting a good example. Possibly the reason for her humiliation, is the fact that she did not realise how hurtful she was to Miss Bates, and never once took into consideration of her position in the society. By explaining how their circle of friends look up to both her and Mr. Knightley, Emma for the first time in the novel realises her situation as a woman, a mentor, and a friend. Once releasing her true, sad feelings, Mr. Knightley acts kind and caring towards her, and she accepts her mistakes, and is prepared to apologise to Miss Bates as well as being friendly and patient with her from then on. This can be seen as a self-analysis, which truly shows her willingness to develop.

Even as a modern reader, it seems that Austen is simply showing two people's love for each other, in which they both work hard to persist.

Mr. Knightley cares a great deal for Emma, and we can see that all his stern and honest ways in which he has dealt with her throughout the novel, have all been on the grounds of his love for her, as a friend, a companion and a man. He is sensible and truthful during the narrative, which is how Austen gains our trust for him. He has helped her comprehend many difficult situations on many occasions, but she has also helped him to maybe not be so serious and untrusting. And it seems as though Emma realises this near

the ending of the novel, whilst discussing the situation of herself and Mr. Knightley, and the situation of Frank and Jane, to Frank Churchill himself.

Though at times Mr. Knightley has maybe seemed harsh and cold towards Emma, it has made her improve and mature in character greatly, ending with her fine development.