

Jane austen's emma

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Jane Austen said of Emma 'she is a character who no-one but myself will much like.' Examine the idea of Emma as a likeable character.

On deciding my opinion of Emma from what I have perceived of her, I took into account the different influences when reading it. In the period when the book was written, the character of Emma would have been disliked by the audience whoever read it in Austen's time would have felt she is headstrong and could have been seen as a woman who rebels against society. This is shown in the novel when she is speaking to Mr. Elton and refusing his proposal, "believe me, sir, I am far, very far, from gratified in being the object of such professions." In this time women were influenced by society to marry for wealth in order to secure their future. The author's opinion on Emma is "she is a character who no-one but myself will much like."

However these very same characteristics would be viewed by the modern world as acceptable because more women in today's society are found to be more independent and are headstrong. Reading through the book at different points, we can see the many flaws and strengths Emma has a character. As a reader we notice how she is a loyal friend and considerate both towards Harriet and her father Mr. Woodhouse. But we also see how she can be manipulative to Harriet and thoughtless to Miss Bates "it was as much as Emma could bare without being impolite." The idea of the author describing the situation by using the bare would suggest to us that the predicament she is in; to her is something very bad and difficult to get out. The reason the author chose this was to get the readers to understand what Emma's feelings are at that point, being there and listening to Miss Bates, at this point I empathize with Emma, she is being patronizing but polite towards

miss bates. It's in this chapter 43 where she finds miss bates dull, but to say those things in her society would be frowned upon.

However in certain times of the book I find Emma to be too full of her and should learn how to respect others. Although generally my opinion of Emma would be that I like her and the character she is, is believable as her characteristics are found in all of us. Even if the book may portray the other characters in another way not showing the reader what they are truly like so we can't judge Emma's actions against theirs. I find Emma to be a typical human by the way she acts. Emma has her own opinions and voices them out if what others are saying or doing her is against. This shows Emma as a strong minded individual and doesn't believe in the way society is governed, to me as a reader, it seems that Emma is restrained and held back by society.

When studying at the character of Emma in the period of Austen, the readers may approach Emma differently. Their views and opinions of her may change due to the way the society of their time worked. The fact that Emma was rude publicly to miss bates where she voiced out her opinions of her, " ah ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me - but you will be limited as to number - only three at once." in this sentence you can see that when Emma says this, there is hardly a pause and that the thoughts come easily to her but what she says is not justified for in the period this was written if certain members did not cooperate with each other they were taught to refrain themselves from speaking nastily about them out loud. People in Austen's society, when reading this book, would disapprove of Emma when

she talks about her feelings towards marriage. At this point, us the audience can now see Emma at a different perspective, we now see how selfish she is capable of being when she declares that she will marry Mr. knightly for love and not wealth but advises her friend Harriet to marry for social status on page 48.

This links to when Harriet tells Emma that she plans to marry Mr. Martin for love but Emma dismisses this idea and encourages Harriet to find someone else and marry them for wealth. However Emma's feelings change yet again when Harriet confides in her and tells Emma that she believes to be in love with Mr. knightly, here we see Emma change moods and projects Harriet to be beneath Mr. knightly and that she does meet the expectations. This is where Emma clings to established idea only when it suits her, but does turn against them, to the readers it would suggest to them that Emma is confused about where she stands and what she wants to believe in. she seems as though her character is rather fickle. At the time when this book was written women were expected to marry mainly for wealth and social status in order to secure their future and well being. But in the 19th century at the time when this was being written, there had been a huge change in the social structures because of heightened industry. New money had been introduced and began to make its mark; Austen satirizes this least confident, most pompous part of society such as the Coles. Rank was determined by family history and not current wealth. Mr. Weston is of good family but is not a historical landowner. This is where Emma clings to established ideas only when it suits her but does go against them.

People reading Emma in Austen's time would find Emma too headstrong and seems to have no respect. This also links to when Harriet wishes to marry Mr. Martin for love but is persuaded by Emma to refuse him and marry someone else who is financially secure, however when Emma finds out about Harriet's feelings towards Mr. Knightly, Emma's mood switches and makes Harriet sound as though she is beneath him and not good enough. One incident in the book where Emma shows this is when Mr. Weston marries Miss Taylor "a portionless governess." Emma also illustrates her changing attitudes in society as well when Emma is distasteful of the Coles and Mrs. Elton who have come into money only recently and here Emma refers to that by commenting "she bought no name, no blood..." in this quote Emma uses blood in a very personal context about people now becoming wealthy, she sticks to old hierarchical values which shows she lacks forward thinking.

In Austen's period men were allowed to make matches with no money and social security if the woman was pretty and accomplished. With this attitude in today's society because women now have a near equal status, the idea wouldn't be welcomed and maybe frowned upon by us. Also both partners are expected to have some money and had an education. In chapter 8 it backs up my point as Mr. Knightly is arguing with Emma about influencing Harriet's decision in marrying Mr. Martin because Harriet's background is unknown and it's because of this that none of the characters can make a true judgment as to who will be best suited to Harriet. Here it shows one of Emma's faults as she is quick to judge without knowing all the facts.

We would perceive her as more of the type of person we would associate with our modern society, as well as looking at the people around us in our world and comparing it to the time the book was written; over the years women have grown more independent and it is seems clearly in our society. Women are seen to be more head strong and focused for what they are aiming for in life, and the character of Emma enforces this. She had formed her own opinions of people and had admitted that she is quite happy to match make even if others disapprove. " I have none of the usual inducements of wanting to marry... fortune I do not want, employment I do not want". Emma's thoughts of marriage and love is put to the reader she also refuses to acknowledge about the qualities men look for in a wife, such as security and for the women to be pretty and accomplished. Her refusal to these codes, caused problems between men, and relationships.

This idea could be linked to when she refuses Mr. Elton as she does not love him and is also not prepared to commit herself to him. Mr. Elton is a wealthy character and in Austin's time Emma would have been expected to marry him. In today's society, many young single women take an interest in their friend's future and also match make, but in our time it is very much welcomed. Also in our modern environment people of become less shallow about wealth and appearance, and when they marry, they marry for love and not wealth, compared to Austin's era. Touching on the idea that Emma is more ahead of her time in the opinions of love and marriage, we ourselves look back and see her character as normal for most of her actions are exactly what we today would feel, such as being honest about our feelings of other people, whether we like them or not. As well as advising or helping our

friends, choose partners. When Emma is helping her friend Harriet by introducing her to gentlemen, people in Austin's time as well as our society would approve of her doing that.

At the period of time, the author was writing, she was at that point single and un-married. She had strong feelings against loveless marriages and with these emotions Jane Austin has established her characters, for instance she herself is written as Emma, Miss Taylor's role is idealized and Jane Fairfax; her position is more realistic as her outcome/marriage to Frank Churchill is looked upon as unlikely. She focuses on Emma's character to put across to the readers, her views on marrying for love as the outcome for Emma is that she marries Mr. Knightly for love.

With Austin's female characters she removes them from actual society and romanticizes. The readers expectations of a happy ending is marriage, Emma is shown to have learnt that marriage is good. Could Austin be shown to be ironic?

I think that at the time Austin was writing most, if not, all stories finish with a happy ending and it was unusual if they did not. I also, have the idea that the reason why she chose Emma to fall in love and then marry, is that she probably wanted to show people in her society that it is possible to stop caring so much about money and to marry someone you care about. However, when I contemplate this idea I begin to wonder, why, if my theory is correct in some way, that she chooses Emma to act peculiar and show her clinging onto establish ideas when it suits her.

Most women in Austin's period would not have been troubled or confused about their feelings towards their marriages and the gentlemen they married, where as Emma at one point asks herself for a clear answer about what she feels for Mr. Churchill. " I will certainly not persuade myself to feel more then I do... he is undoubtedly very much in love everything denotes it very much in love indeed".

By ending the story happily it suggests to the reader as well as taking into account Austin's views, that perhaps Austin is wanting this in her own life, such as to find a gentleman she loves and marry. There are two explanations as to why Austin is doing this, it could in away be that the author feels threatened in someway, that she may never marry as she is turned against society for promising to marry for love and with this idea she uses Emma to portray what she wishes. The other explanation is taken from a modern point of view that Austin is looking at the realistic side of marriages, such as love and not the materialistic side, for readers of today would respect Austin and the character of Emma for feeling this way. By Austin making this promise to her she is in a way making a statement to her society by using Emma's character to mould Austin's emotions. By ending the story with Emma marrying, Austin in turn hopes that she will find a gentleman, that she loves and will eventually marry him.

The position of Emma's character in the social hierarchy is that she is a daughter from a father who is a substantial land owner. She has been brought up in a well to do family, who has a history of wealth which they are flourishing in. It is from this situation that Emma has formed her opinions, on

the 'old' times and is distasteful to people who have recently come into money, due to the society shake up.

When a woman, such as Emma is born into high society, she is expected to help the less fortunate, by attending to them and giving them food, which improves her character and it is thought by doing this, it will help her have a better profile when marrying. Readers in Austin's period would agree with Emma helping the less fortunate, however in our society we would respect this charitable act. Although, the mentioning of the poor and needy, conditions in their time were largely missed out of the novel. But Austin writes of one visit to the poor, which is to heighten Emma's charity due to her command of the narrative. This is shown when Emma and Harriet pay a visit to Miss Bates house and offer help, also the topical issues such as social structures are held to irony and exaggeration. Because Emma is expected to be charitable she is also predicted to be nice to those lower in the social status such as Miss Bates. However, because of Emma's view on the resentments and the people who have reaped the benefits and become rich, Emma acts pleasantly towards them, but in our society we would class that as an insult and snobbery.

" With the father who is affectionate and indulgent" towards Emma. Would help us to understand Emma's view on certain things; possibly it is the father who has enforced the established ideas on Emma.

From studying the characters of Jane Fairfax, Emma and Mrs. Elton, it gives me the impression that Jane Fairfax illustrates the positive side of Emma's

character whereas Mrs. Elton is seen as the negative side of Emma's character.

At the beginning of Chapter (20) the readers are introduced too Jane Fairfax " Jane Fairfax was an orphan" this setting makes you as a reader sympathetic towards Jane Fairfax. Continuing to read the chapter, readers learn of Jane's background and become aware of a more positive description of her character as opposed to Emma's character. As well as that Emma tolerates Jane and she accepts Jane into society but not the Coles who have recently become rich. The readers begin to get the idea that Emma recognizes Jane's attractiveness and becomes jealous of her, in chapter 20 " Jane Fairfax is elegant..." However when reading the description we seem to side rather with Emma and look upon Jane as too much of a good character and feel she is too superficial, this is my opinion from a reader of today. The reason the readers feel like this towards Jane is probably because the narrative style as Austen uses a narrative style that is omniscient, she writes in third person so she is observing the action and development of the plot from the point of view of a central character and privy to her thoughts and feelings alone.

The character of Emma is more believable as she has many faults like a proper human which are revealed through her actions and conversation. Picking out certain key quotes, I notice that maybe Emma is acting a bit harsh towards Jane " why she did not like Jane Fairfax might be a difficult question to answer." Personally I don't think she is aware of how harsh she can be but needs to take control of feelings. In Austen's society, the readers

would favor Jane over Emma as she would be seen as a better wife to look at but knowing Jane's background it would affect her chances for she was not born with money. Why readers of Austen's period would also like Jane's character more, is that the author doesn't write from Jane's point of view but only Emma's, so we can't understand any of Jane's feelings towards certain characters, whether she thinks nastily of them or highly. Another fault of Emma shown in this chapter is that we as the readers perceive Emma to be lazy " always doing more than she wished and less than she ought."

To help us understand Mrs. Elton's character, we can look at the conversations between her and the other characters. I noticed that she is very tedious to talk to. " It was as much fun as Emma could bear without being impolite." This once again illustrates Emma's character in a bad light; it's when Emma shows the reader her capability of being rude to characters when it's unprovoked makes me wonder if I do like Emma. Maybe Emma is nasty to Mrs. Elton; I don't think that both Austen's and modern society would disapprove as much for Mrs. Elton is shown not to be a likeable character. But with Jane the readers of Austen's society would feel it's unnecessary for she is a likeable person.

The readers make their judgment of the characters from what they have been shown or given hints to by the author and from this we get the idea that both Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Elton seem like (2) exaggerated characters of Emma's personality.

Emma's relationship with the male members of society differs from the personality of the male; for example when she is in the presence of Frank

Churchill, Emma tends to act flirtatious and possessive therefore gives an immediate impression that she feels insecure and thinks that Frank is only there for her amusement (reference to this is in Chapter 43, page 361)

As we read more about the different occasions Emma spends with Frank we assume Emma to fall in love with Frank and marry " if I find him conversable, I shall be glad of his acquaintance; but if he is only chattering coxcombi he will not occupy much of my time or thoughts." After being around Frank Churchill Emma develops a judgmental streak in her personality as she becomes almost fanatical with looks and appearance (Chapter 18) the similarities between Frank and Emma is that they are both appearing to be critical on appearance because at a degree Frank also cares about looks (Chapter 23) Frank is flirting with Emma and flattering her. Emma likes to be around Frank when he is flattering her as it is more adult, (Chapter 43). At this point we sort of like Frank but wonder if he is false. The remarks he makes when complimenting characters does he truly mean them or is he just saying them to improve him-self and to make others like him. " Miss Woodhouse you have the art of giving pictures in a few words. Exquisite quite exquisite." By giving the readers these certain hints it means that Austin can help trick the readers into believing that Frank is Emma's match for they are socially equal it is a far gone conclusion before he even enters the novel. (I. e. they are both socially and financially equal as well as being at a similar age).

The conversation's between Emma and Frank shows Emma to be slightly immature and prone to speak her mind as opposed to when she is in the

company of Mr. Knightly. Frank Churchill is a "dashing young hero" this makes him sound a bit ruthless and insubstantial.

However, Emma's relationship with Mr. Knightly is different the impression of Mr. Knightly is that he is a perfect hero, The two quotes that have been mentioned above clearly states that Frank Churchill is shown to be vain, whereas Mr. Knightly comes across as not. Mr. Knightly is virtually never wrong, as he shows clarity and insight in judging Emma as well as other characters. To us as a reader we feel we can trust and respect him for his thoughts and opinions. In (Chapter 8) we see Emma to be showing her faults as she takes criticism from Mr. Knightly. From my opinion by Emma becoming aware of her faults she can rectify them and therefore become a better person.

But in Chapter 43 we see Mr. Knightly giving opinions and not criticism he is honest and admits to not liking Frank Churchill to which the readers of Austen and today's society would respect, however when Emma admitted to not liking Miss Bates, she was frowned upon because Miss Bates character was portrayed as old and pathetic.

When Mr. knightly is dancing with Harriet, he is trying to almost prove to Emma that he would do any thing for her but I doubt the readers would pick this little hint up as they felt its an act of kindness. We also read a different persons opinion of frank Churchill's character " Mr. knightly who for some reason had taken an early dislike to Mr. Churchill." It's as if by reading this quote that the author is patronizing and suggests that frank is harmless for the way which he shows kindness is through flattery. Austen is

demonstrating irony. The irony in Emma's belief that she is the centre of everyone's intrigues when she is in fact blind to her own feelings she has of Mr. knightly.

I think as a reader I would say I much rather prefer Emma's character when she is in the presence of Mr. knightly as she more grown up by realising her mistakes and able to take criticism in chapter 8 but when in the company of frank Churchill Emma is somewhat childish and more prone to speak her mind in chapter 43, she is inclined to feel jealous as she is of Jane Fairfax when invited to the Coles party in chapter 25.

Emma's relationship with her father, he is overprotective of her " affectionate and indulgent father." But they are very close to one another for when the readers are told about the proposal of Mr knightly to Emma she has trouble to say yes as she wishes to remain near to her father and live near to him in chapter 50. Emma is selfless in relation to her father.

The connection with Emma and miss bates the harmless spinster who is the aunt of Jane Fairfax. She is sweet and tempered but tedious due to incessant chatter. In chapter 43 the readers see another side to Emma as she acts unkindly towards miss bates. It illustrates to us that Emma doesn't think before acting but later regrets the things which she has said. Yet the reader can't clarify whether Emma apologises for herself of Mr knightly. We are shown the extent of Emma being headstrong we therefore feel sympathy for miss bates but can see how she can be intensively annoying because of the narrative style. Although in Austen's period when women were not allowed to speak out of tone publicly but the character of Emma is shown otherwise, I

feel in a way that I respect Emma more and she is presented to the readers that she is ahead of her time.

Emma reflects the values of Augustan society which was written 100 years before the novel was written. In the 19th century at the time when Austen was writing there had been a huge change in social structures. New money was beginning to make its mark and more people were becoming rich. It's this that Austen satirises this least confident and most pompous part of society. Mr knightly and Mr Woodhouse are substantial landowners. The 'new rich people' now associate themselves with the historical landowners and its because they have only just come into money that Emma is distasteful towards them but Emma clings to established ideas as and when it suits her; She accepts Harriet of whom a financial background is a mystery where as she isn't fond of the Coles.

" The Coles were respectable in their way, but they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them." From a modern perspective I would see this as snobbery and for me puts Emma in a bad light whereas in Austen's point in time it may have the opposite effect for they would see Emma as obeying the society rules. I gather that Emma would have the satisfaction in dismissing the invitation but hearing of others going and wanting to be the centre of attention she partakes, this idea relates to my point I made about clinging to traditional designs when it suits her.

Harriet smith is seen as Emma's project and a " lady of unknown birth." She is more in charge of her heart then Emma. Throughout the novel the readers

can clearly see that both Emma and Harriet are close friends; Emma is very considerate of Harriet and loyal. In chapter 7 Emma influences Harriet on rejecting Mr Martin's proposal because Emma fears for Harriet's financial situation when marrying Mr Martin. This could be seen in two different ways as it shows Emma trying to be a good friend as she thinks of Harriet's future however some readers may think this hypocritical of Emma; after reading the book and looking back at this point once Emma has declared she will marry for love and not money but advises Harriet to marry for money and not love. Austen is trying to comment on a society interested in social structures not values and personality. With Mrs Elton she marries for money even though she is quite wealthy whereas Mr Martin who doesn't seem to care about the social structures or the social statuses involved he wishes to marry for love.

Emma has many flaws and weaknesses and suffers from humility (chapter 43, criticism from Mr Knightly) and self knowledge both of which she lacks at first but through the novel she gains in her journey in adulthood. One of her weaknesses is that she is manipulative in chapter 7 on influencing Harriet's decision but could be seen as caring for Harriet's future. She is shown to be thoughtless towards Miss Bates but might be turned into Emma being headstrong and not following a trend with others. I generally think Emma's character means well in what she does throughout the novel. I see Emma as a genuine character because she has flaws in her personality which are resolved but because they are I don't find her as interesting in towards the end of the novel. From a person of 100 years ago when the book was written

I would say that they would've have liked emmas character because of her flaws and the way they are displayed to the reader.