

Cambridge University Press
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Edited by Peter Sabor
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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO EMMA

Thanks to its tightly paced, intricately plotted narrative and its astute psychological characterisation, *Emma* is commonly thought to be Jane Austen's finest novel. In the twelve chapters of this volume, leading Austen scholars illuminate some of its richest themes and topics, including money and rank, setting and community, music and riddles, as well as its style and structure. The context of *Emma* is also thoroughly explored, from its historical and literary roots through its publication and contemporary reception to its ever-growing international popularity in the form of translations and adaptations. Equally useful as an introduction for new students and as a research aid for mature scholars, this *Companion* reveals why *Emma* is a novel that only improves on rereading, and gives the lie to Austen's famous speculation that in Emma Woodhouse she had created 'a heroine whom no one but myself will much like'.

PETER SABOR is Director of the Burney Centre and Canada Research Chair in Eighteenth-Century Studies at McGill University. He is a past president of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He is General Editor of *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney* and co-General Editor of The Cambridge Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Samuel Richardson. His publications on Austen include the *Juvenilia* (2006) volume in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen and *Jane Austen's Manuscript Works* (2013), co-edited with Linda Bree and Janet Todd.

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of the book.

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PREFACE

Emma (1816), Jane Austen's fourth and arguably her greatest novel, begins with one of the worst sentences she ever committed to print. This disconcertingly wooden start to a wonderfully rich and enigmatic book is not the opening sentence of the novel itself but the one that precedes it: a dedication to the Prince Regent, the future George IV. 'To His Royal Highness The Prince Regent', she declares, 'This Work Is By His Royal Highness's Permission Most Respectfully Dedicated, By His Royal Highness's Dutiful And Obedient Humble Servant, The Author.' With the clunking triple repetition of 'His Royal Highness' and the formulaic presentation of herself as the Prince Regent's 'Dutiful And Obedient Humble Servant', Austen composed what amounts to an anti-dedication, clearly indicating her lack of enthusiasm, if not her contempt, for its subject. As Jan Fergus notes in the opening chapter of this *Companion*, it is not only flat but also startlingly brief in comparison with others of the period, such as Frances Burney d'Arblay's cloying dedication of her final novel *The Wanderer* (1814) to her beloved father. In the twenty-six dedications of her juvenilia, written between 1787 and 1793, over twenty years before she began work on *Emma*, Austen had composed a variety of exuberant and inventive tributes to her family and close friends. Now, instead, she would give an unworthy dedicatee his just deserts.

The first sentence of the novel itself, however, reveals Austen at her finest. It is not, admittedly, as memorable as the epigrammatic first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, in which the narrator's remark about a 'truth universally acknowledged' has been used and abused by generations of subsequent writers and speakers. The opening of *Emma* works in a different way, introducing us at once to the eponymous heroine:

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.

(p. 3)

PREFACE

As Linda Bree remarks in her chapter on the novel's style, structure and language, the sentence is deceptively simple. What seems at first to be a straightforward opening turns out, on further scrutiny, to be riddled with caveats: the word 'seemed' is crucial here, and 'very little' is by no means the same as 'nothing'.

This *Companion*, with twelve chapters devoted to the text and context of *Emma*, throws light on both of these sentences. The first four chapters – by Fergus, Bharat Tandon, Jonathan Sachs and Robert D. Hume – are concerned with the circumstances of the novel's composition and publication, as well as with its literary, historical and economic context. Collectively, they illuminate such matters as Austen's business dealings with the prestigious publisher of *Emma*, John Murray, the successor to the publisher of Austen's three previous novels, Thomas Egerton; Austen's odd and uncomfortable experience with literary patronage, which gave rise to the subversive dedication to the Prince Regent; the literary context in which Austen was writing, including the place of *Emma* in the tradition of eighteenth-century comic fiction and the novels, poems and plays to which she alludes; the period in which she wrote all of her novels – from the 1790s through the Napoleonic Wars and well into the Regency; and the crucial role played by money and rank in the novel. The fifth chapter, by Edward Copeland, considers the novel's contemporary reception, beginning with Austen's own 'Opinions of *Emma*', a tongue-in-cheek compilation of the often conflicting responses of readers known to her. Copeland also discusses the seminal review of *Emma* by Walter Scott, and the reviews of *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1870) by Austen's nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh.

Chapters 6 to 10 offer close readings of various aspects of *Emma*, including, of course, that elusive opening sentence on which so much of the novel depends. Bree pays careful attention to Austen's mastery of free indirect style, observing that much of the novel is told through the consciousness of its characters, rather than by a dispassionate third-person narrator. John Wiltshire scrutinises Austen's depiction of the heroine, in the only one of her novels named after its principal character. Beginning with Austen's famous remark about the novel, 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like', he explores the complex psychology of one of her most fully developed characters. In her chapter on setting and community, Janine Barchas considers how Austen's fictional village of Highbury functions, and fails to function, while also pointing out the threat to its integrity posed by the appalling Augusta Elton. *Emma* is replete with music and with riddles, the subjects of chapters by Ruth Perry and Jillian Heydt-Stevenson. Perry draws attention to the importance of music in Austen's life, as well as in the novel; the author played the piano every day, and a pianoforte, sent

PREFACE

by Frank Churchill to Mrs Bates's house as a Valentine's Day gift for Jane Fairfax, plays a pivotal role in *Emma*. So too do the various games, riddles and charades that permeate the text. For Heydt-Stevenson, this riddling is a virus, readily transmitted from character to character and place to place. The riddles include David Garrick's 'Kitty, a fair but frozen maid', which, with its sexual innuendos, contributes to the surprising number of *double entendres* in Austen's novels, including Mary Crawford's notorious pun on 'rears and vices' in *Mansfield Park*.

The last two chapters of the *Companion* follow the fortunes of *Emma* in the form of translations into a host of languages and a remarkable variety of screen versions, up to the present day. Gillian Dow surveys the translations that began appearing very shortly after the first edition of *Emma*: *La Nouvelle Emma* was published in Paris only three months after Austen's novel. Dow also focuses on twentieth- and twenty-first-century translations, including a striking number of Chinese and Japanese editions. The covers of several of the *Emma* translations, three of which are reproduced in the *Companion*, are wonderfully effective in supplying visual images that complement the transformation taking place in the text. The cover of the *Companion* itself is illustrated with a still from the highly successful 1996 film of *Emma*, directed by Douglas McGrath, with Gwyneth Paltrow in the title-role and Jeremy Northam as Mr Knightley. In the background is George Lambert's painting of Box Hill, the location of one of the most memorable scenes in both novel and film. In her concluding chapter, Deidre Shauna Lynch studies McGrath's *Emma* and Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995), as well as several more recent screen versions of the novel, from the United States, Europe and beyond, including Bernie Su's YouTube series *Emma Approved* (2013–14), which, like *Clueless*, is set in present-day California. The multiplicity and global reach of translations and screen versions of *Emma* attest to its ever-increasing appeal.

Among the throwaway remarks recorded by Austen in her 'Opinions of *Emma*' was one by Jane Murden, who read *Emma* on its first publication and compared it with the earlier novels, pronouncing it 'certainly inferior to all the others'. It is regrettable that Austen had no access to a far more astute reading of her book by the diarist Anna Larpent, who was also familiar with the previous novels and who recorded her impressions of the new work in April 1816. Larpent was, she confided to her journal, 'pleased & interested with *Emma*. The story & the characters are quite in a familiar stile but perfectly in Nature.' 'Take each character singly', she continued, 'not one is original, groupe them & they become a lively picture of domestic scenes & the portraits are from the life – A certain stile of middling society is excellently painted ... & upon the whole I think the work has much merit

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in shewing the minute traits of nature, & of a nature whose little foibles are within the notice of all.’¹ Two hundred years later, Austen’s unparalleled capacity to depict ‘the minute traits of nature’, in *Emma* and in all of her novels, is within the notice of more readers than Larpent, or perhaps even the author herself, could have imagined.

Peter Sabor

NOTE

- 1 Anna Larpent, ‘Diaries, vol. 9, 1814–16’, pp. 247–8, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, HM 31201.

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NOTE ON TEXT AND ABBREVIATIONS

Quotations from *Emma* are given simply with the page number. These numbers refer to the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Juvenilia *Juvenilia*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Letters *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 4th edn (Oxford University Press, 2011).

LM *Later Manuscripts*, ed. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

MP *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

NA *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

P *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

P&P *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

S&S *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

CHRONOLOGY

1764–7	The Revd George Austen, rector of Steventon, marries Cassandra Leigh. Three children, James (1765), George (1766) and Edward (1767), are born.
1768	The Austens move to Steventon, Hampshire. Five more children – Henry (1771), Cassandra (1773), Francis (1774), Jane (1775) and Charles (1779) – are born.
1775 16 December	Jane Austen born at Steventon.
1781 Winter	JA's cousin, Eliza Hancock, marries Jean-François Capot de Feuillide, in France.
1782	Austen family amateur theatricals first recorded.
1783	JA's third brother, Edward, is adopted by Mr and Mrs Thomas Knight of Godmersham in Kent. Later he will take their name.
1785 Spring	JA and Cassandra attend the Abbey House School, Reading.
1786 April	JA's fifth brother, Francis, enters the Royal Naval Academy in Portsmouth.
December	JA and Cassandra leave school and return to Steventon. Between now and 1793 JA writes what will become her three volumes of <i>Juvenilia</i> .
1788 Summer	Mr and Mrs Austen, JA and Cassandra go on a trip to Kent and London.
December	Francis leaves the Royal Navy Academy and sails to East Indies; does not return until Winter 1793.

CHRONOLOGY

1790	JA writes 'Love and Freindship'.
1791 July	JA's sixth and youngest brother Charles enters the Royal Naval Academy in Portsmouth.
27 December	Edward Austen marries Elizabeth Bridges, and they live in Rowling in Kent.
1792	JA's eldest brother, James, marries Anne Mathew; they live at Deane.
? Winter	Cassandra becomes engaged to the Revd Tom Fowle.
1793 23 January	Edward Austen's first child, Fanny, born.
1 February	War declared between Britain and France.
8 April	JA's fourth brother, Henry, becomes a lieutenant in the Oxfordshire Militia.
15 April	James Austen's first child, Anna, born.
3 June	'Ode to Pity', last item of JA's <i>Juvenilia</i> , composed.
1794 22 February	M. de Feuilleide guillotined in Paris.
September	Charles goes to sea. 'Lady Susan' possibly written this year.
1795	'Elinor and Marianne' probably written.
3 May	James's wife Anne dies.
December	Tom Lefroy visits Ashe Rectory – he and JA have a brief flirtation.
1796 October	JA starts writing 'First Impressions'.
1797 17 January	James Austen marries Mary Lloyd.
February	The Revd Tom Fowle dies of fever at San Domingo.
August	JA finishes 'First Impressions'. George Austen offers a JA manuscript for publication to Thomas Cadell – rejected sight unseen.
November	JA begins rewriting 'Elinor and Marianne' as <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> . Mrs Austen and daughters visit Bath.
31 December	Henry Austen marries his cousin, the widowed Eliza de Feuilleide, in London.

CHRONOLOGY

1798–9	JA probably writes 'Susan' (later <i>Northanger Abbey</i>).
1800	George Austen decides to retire and move to Bath.
1801 24 January	Henry Austen resigns commission and sets up as a banker and army agent.
May	Austen family leave Steventon for Bath.
1802 25 March	Peace of Amiens appears to end Anglo-French war.
December	JA and Cassandra visit Steventon. Landowner Harris Bigg-Wither proposes to JA; she accepts, but declines the following day.
Winter	JA revises 'Susan' (<i>Northanger Abbey</i>).
1803 Spring	JA sells 'Susan' (<i>Northanger Abbey</i>) to publisher Benjam in Crosby.
18 May	War with France recommences.
Summer	Austens visit Ramsgate in Kent, and possibly West Country; in November they visit Lyme Regis.
1804	JA probably starts writing 'The Watsons'.
Summer	Austens at Lyme Regis again.
1805 January	George Austen dies.
Summer	Martha Lloyd joins Mrs Austen and her daughters.
21 October	Battle of Trafalgar.
1806 July	Austen women visit Clifton, Adlestrop, Stoneleigh and Hamstall Ridware, before settling in Southampton in the autumn.
1808 October	Edward Austen's wife Elizabeth dies at Godmersham.
1809 April	JA tries to secure publication of 'Susan' (<i>Northanger Abbey</i>).
July	Mrs Austen, Jane and Cassandra and Martha Lloyd move to Chawton, Hants.
1810	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i> accepted for publication by Thomas Egerton.

CHRONOLOGY

1811 February	JA starts planning <i>Mansfield Park</i> .
30 October	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i> published. JA starts revising 'First Impressions' into <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> .
1812 Autumn	JA sells copyright of <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> to Egerton.
1813 January	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> published.
July	JA finishes <i>Mansfield Park</i> . Accepted for publication by Egerton.
1814 January	JA starts <i>Emma</i> .
5 April	Napoleon abdicates and is exiled to Elba.
May	<i>Mansfield Park</i> published.
1815 March	Napoleon escapes and resumes power in France.
March	<i>Emma</i> finished.
18 June	Battle of Waterloo ends war with France.
August	JA starts <i>Persuasion</i> .
October	Henry Austen takes JA to London; he falls ill.
November	JA visits Carlton House, is invited to dedicate future work to Prince Regent.
December	<i>Emma</i> published by John Murray, dedicated to Prince Regent (title-page 1816).
1816 Spring	JA ill. Henry Austen buys back manuscript of 'Susan' (<i>Northanger Abbey</i>), which JA revises.
August	<i>Persuasion</i> finished.
1817 January	JA starts 'Sanditon'.
18 March	JA too ill to work.
24 May	JA goes to Winchester for medical attention.
18 July	JA dies; buried on 24 July, Winchester Cathedral.
December	<i>Northanger Abbey</i> and <i>Persuasion</i> published together, by Murray, with a 'Biographical Notice' added by Henry Austen (title-page 1818).