
Marcia McClintock Folsom, ed. *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Emma*.
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The 1990s showed a dramatic increase of interest in Austen's novel *Emma*, including the immense popularity of three movies based on the book: Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*, Douglas McGrath's *Emma*, and Diarmuid Lawrence's *Emma*. These films have led young readers to *Emma* for the first time and encouraged teachers to place *Emma* on their reading lists for courses ranging from 18th- or 19th-century novel courses to classes on women writers. According to Joseph Gibaldi, the series editor, MLA's thoughtful series *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* attempts to "collect within each volume different points of view on teaching a specific literary work, a literary tradition, or a writer widely taught at the undergraduate level" (ix). The volume includes a section on materials, succinctly delineated by Folsom, although perhaps too many works are not included, and a set of essays discussing approaches to teaching the novel. This volume amply meets the aims of the series, resulting in a teaching guide that provides an overview of the approaches currently available.

The essays are grouped in five sections: Social and Political Contexts; Literary Contexts; Teaching about Class and Gender in *Emma*; Teaching about Language in *Emma*; Teaching Specific Scenes, Patterns, or Words in *Emma*. As these headings suggest, the essays are intended to provide the reader with critical perspectives such as feminism, Marxism, and post-colonialism, as well as close readings of passages focusing on Austen's literary style, word choice, and narrative technique. The scope of approaches covered in the essays is impressive, if not, by necessity, comprehensive.

Emma, as several contributors to the volume note, poses unique problems for the teacher in an undergraduate class because it appears as if "nothing happens" (xviii). The historical significance or moral conflict of the usual novel is missing for *Emma*. Overcoming these problems is essential to teaching the work, and several essays help teachers find processes to explore the complexities of Austen's novel. Julia Prewitt Brown's essay, "The Everyday of *Emma*," explores Austen as a talented and cutting-edge author who describes the relationship between everyday life and the value of an individual's life. In a time when most students are trained to study literary works focused on the historical significance of the story, *Emma* can frustrate the student of history. Brown's essay explains Austen's choice to write not of political and historical concerns but of the realities and importance of our everyday lives.

Several essays, such as Dorice Williams Elliott's "Teaching about Free Indirect Discourse" and John Wiltshire's "Health, Comfort, and Creativity: A Reading of

Emma,” provide close reading of passages that reveal the intricate world of language Austen has woven. Miss Bates and the Box Hill episode are both analyzed closely in Jonathan H. Grossman’s “Manners in *Emma*” and Pamela S. Bromberg’s “Learning to Listen: Teaching about the Talk of Miss Bates.” Discovering patterns and exploring the reader’s process, these essays help the reader pay attention to what at first appears to be the characters’ unimportant and inconsequential discussions. Grossman’s essay examines the power relationship inherent in manners and gossip, and thus these close readings provide the teacher with good jumping-off points for encouraging discussion of *Emma* on a deeper level.

Perhaps the most comprehensive essays in the collection discuss feminist approaches to Austen’s *Emma*. Devoney Looser’s essay on 18th-century feminism and female patronage provides valuable information while tracing the ideas of feminism from the 18th century to the current time. Placing *Emma* in the female novel tradition, Lorna Clark extends our understanding of Austen’s place in the literary canon. Clark succeeds in placing Austen’s “innovations, discoveries, and achievements in better perspective” by reminding readers that she wrote “within a rich cultural and literary context” (54). Each of the feminist essays concludes that Austen critiques her society’s view of women and their roles. Some, like Patricia Howell Michaelson’s “Language and Gender in *Emma*,” encourage teachers to examine “the norms of language and gender that had developed in [Austen’s] time” (134) and that remain with us today. Although necessarily short, her essay provides another powerful example of the use of close readings.

Perhaps the most important essay in the collection is Ruth Perry’s “Jane Austen, Slavery, and British Imperialism.” Edward Said in his famous essay “Jane Austen and Empire” denounces Austen as complicit in the imperialistic ambitions of Britain. Perry’s essay answers Said by showing that Austen’s views on slavery connect all exploited humans and thus comment not only on the exploitation occurring outside Britain but also inside its borders toward other races and women as well.

Overall, anyone who has attempted to teach *Emma* on the undergraduate level will find much in this collection to inspire new approaches. Since Austen’s works are already widely read by students, many students will bring preconceived ideas about *Emma* to the classroom. This volume helps teachers find ways to question these assumptions. ✱