Emma: Knowing Her Mind

MARCIA MCCLINTOCK FOLSOM
Marcia McClintock Folsom is Professor of Literature, Chair of Humanities and Writing at Wheelock College. She is the editor of *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Approaches to Teaching Austen's Emma*, co-editor with John Wiltshire of *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Mansfield Park*, and author of "Power in *Mansfield Park*: Austen's Study of Domination and Resistance."

Jane Austen's own trauma of having to leave Steventon when she was twenty-five years old casts a shadow in all her novels. The threat or reality of dispossession seems to haunt her heroines, women who must move from one place to another. One essential way that *Emma* differs from *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and even *Persuasion* is the certainty of Emma's possession of a home.

Emma's security is so absolute that Emma herself sees no reason for any change, even any reason for marrying. As she declares to Harriet, "'Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's'" (90–91). Although the words, "never, never" and "always" "always," point to Emma's blind spots, her three clauses, ending with "I do not want," summarize what she sees as her situation after Harriet Smith becomes her friend.

But in spite of this later declaration, "employment I do not want," it is clear in the first pages of the novel that Emma is about to be relatively alone and without employment. When Miss Taylor's wedding is over, and all the "bride-people gone," Emma is left alone with her father "with no prospect of a third to cheer a long evening" (4). Even she perceives that "she was now in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude," and without equals with whom to share her thoughts. Her daily life centers on her father, and although

she "dearly loved her father, . . . he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful" (5). Emma pounces with delight on the chance to befriend a "girl of seventeen," and her eagerness to meet a new person, one whom she can perhaps manage and mold (22), is at that point completely understandable.

The problem that Austen has set for her novel is to imagine an intelligent young woman with a vivid, active imagination who does not face the loss of her home but who faces a life without meaningful activity, secure, but stuck in one small society. Emma's thinking often appears in metaphors of speed and velocity, suggesting that her brain is especially mobile, telepathic, and quick. "With an alacrity beyond the common impulse of a spirit which yet was never indifferent to the credit of doing every thing well and attentively, with the real good-will of a mind delighted with its own ideas, did she then do all the honours of the meal" (23). The words "alacrity," "impulse," "attentively" emphasize Emma's pleasure in acting hospitably, and the phrase, "the real good-will of a mind delighted with its own ideas," underlines Emma's internal delight in perceiving her own abilities. The rhythmic repetition of "with" at the opening of these phrases captures the allied qualities of Emma's mind and spirit in action. "Quick and decided in her ways, Emma lost no time in inviting, encouraging, and telling [Harriet] to come very often" (25).

In listening to Miss Bates's undiscriminating and random summary of her niece's letter, for another example, Emma suddenly discerns something mysterious in Jane Fairfax's decision to give her time to Highbury. "At this moment, an ingenious and animating suspicion entering Emma's brain with regard to Jane Fairfax, this charming Mr. Dixon, and the not going to Ireland, she said, with the insidious design of further discovery, 'You must feel it very fortunate that Miss Fairfax should be allowed to come to you at such a time'" (170–71).

The idea that leaps into Emma's mind is a way to impose a meaningful narrative on Miss Bates's fragmentary recounting of events at Weymouth: a "suspicion" that suddenly enters Emma's "brain." Emma's thought is both "ingenious," that is, clever as an interpretation, and "animating," that is, exhilarating to Emma in her dislike of Jane Fairfax. The suspicion suddenly occurs to her as a way to explain Miss Fairfax's otherwise incomprehensible decision to come to Surrey in January for three months for her "health." The narrative Emma imagines—of an adulterous love that Mr. Dixon might have felt for Jane Fairfax while being engaged to her friend Miss Campbell—is entirely Emma's fantasy, but her sense that there must be a secret reason for Jane's

willingness to be entrapped in the small Bates household is right. Emma's ulterior motive in encouraging Miss Bates to talk more is called an "insidious design," reflecting the thought processes of the self-aware and sly Emma herself. In such moments, Austen seems to have an image of Emma's mind—a brain—into which ideas and insights shoot suddenly, perhaps from layers of mind not accessible to conscious thought.

What is it like for someone who is quick and perceptive to be surrounded mostly by people who are not reflective, sophisticated, or astute? What should a heroine who is mentally vigorous do with inadequate sources of valid stimulation? One possibility would be to focus on creative or intellectual pursuits, as clearly Jane Fairfax has done. Emma has meant to practice her music more, and work on her drawing more, and read the books on her lists, but she doesn't do these things.

Timothy Peltason, recognizing the meaning of the "intellectual solitude" that threatens Emma in the first pages of the novel, identifies a key pattern in Austen's own thinking that illuminates the problem in this novel.

> The problem that Jane Austen represents with genius in one novel after another is the problem of stupidity, vacuity, lack of employment. This specter of mental emptiness menaces her protagonists in two chief ways: first by taking the comic/awful form of so many of Austen's other people and the stupidities and insensitivities that they present to be endured, outmaneuvered, lived with, and lived around; but also by taking the more deeply frightening form of the enveloping ennui that might afflict even [the] heroines as they consider both the present and the uncertainties of the future, the long hours and the blank spaces that their own resources will be required to fill. (624)

The first of these problems acutely affects Marianne and Elinor Dashwood, who lose their home and are then surrounded by people they must deal with, most of whom are petty, selfish, and vacuous, and some of whom are intentionally malicious. Vacuous and insensitive characters are also part of the world of *Pride and Prejudice*, and there, too, Austen's own impatience with such people sometimes arises with bald indignation, as when she says of a card game at Rosings: "their table was superlatively stupid" (188). Emma also faces a limited society as she tries to answer the question, "How was she to bear the change?" (5).

But it is the second of the problems Peltason describes, the problem of a lack of employment, that Austen explores most searchingly in *Emma*, the more

deeply frightening form of "enveloping ennui," which, at the beginning of the novel, Emma does not feel: "The danger . . . was at present so unperceived, that [the disadvantages that threaten alloy to Emma's happiness] did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her" (4). The way that Emma is protected from immediately perceiving how lonely she will be is to allow her to persist in a faulty conception of her own importance, an illegitimate confidence in her own powers of observation and interpretation, and a belief that she can guess, foretell, and even manage other people's destinies. Clearly, the naïve and grateful Harriet Smith is the perfect, unthinking protégé on whom Emma feels confident she can impose a script. Emma's inflated valuation of her own social class and her right to declare who is beneath it are understandable results of Emma's position as "'always first and always right'" in her father's eyes (91), the absence of her mother, "'the only person able to cope with her'" (37–38), having an indulgent governess for sixteen years, and having no experience of school or even serious study.

Austen's fascinating elaboration of the free indirect discourse she uses with such dexterity in *Mansfield Park*, the intermingling of Emma's own voice and the narrator's voice, enables the reader to hold conflicting ideas about Emma simultaneously. In a discussion of Emma's thinking as she befriends Harriet Smith, John Wiltshire captures the way Emma's errors in judgment intermix with her enthusiasm, thus forcing the reader simultaneously to register Emma's exasperating self-confidence and something healthy, vigorous, and comically likeable in her energy.

> She was not struck by any thing remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging—not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk—and yet so far from pushing, shewing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of every thing in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense and deserve encouragement. (22)

Wiltshire notes that the reader here of course perceives Emma's "self-deception and snobbery," even her "arrogance," but that "one picks up, at the same time, contrapuntally, as part of that very same self-deception and arrogance, the warmth, the eagerness, the panache and brio" that accompany Emma's appraisal of Harriet and Harriet's prior acquaintance (*Jane Austen and the Body* 132). These sentences also capture Emma's mental habit of listing qualities or ideas in groups of three or four: she observes that Harriet is

"shewing so proper a deference," and is "so pleasantly grateful," and "so artlessly impressed," that she then jumps to the conclusion "that she must have good sense." These mixed qualities exist, especially in the first volume, in the very sentences that reveal Emma's mind in action.

Another important quality of Emma—not a feature of her mind or her thinking, exactly—is her absolutely unwavering kindness to her father and her patience with his querulousness, fearfulness, and need for constant reassurance. Her habitual kindness is repeatedly dramatized, but it is not openly analyzed by the narrator, making it such an intrinsic part of Emma's nature that certain later moments of her generosity are fully prepared for by her numerous conversations with and arrangements for her father. She never fails to protect his feelings or sustain his need for reassurance and care. In fact, Emma's almost unconscious steadfastness toward her father may partly explain her conscious impatience with Miss Bates, a weariness that finally betrays her and leads her to her deeply unkind remark on Box Hill.

The presentation of Emma's consciousness often registers her hidden private thinking and her sometimes uneasy awareness of alternatives to her chosen behavior. In the first conversation of the novel, when Mr. Knightley joins Emma and her father on the evening of Miss Taylor's wedding, Mr. Knightley makes a point that Emma does not contest. "'Well,'" says Emma, and the narrator adds, "willing to let it pass," indicating Emma's brief inner debate and decision not to argue with Mr. Knightley on a small issue (9).

Emma repeatedly attempts to impose her ideas on the surprisingly unmalleable world, but her thoughts frequently reveal that she has to argue with herself inwardly. The voice she hears is sometimes called "her heart" and sometimes "her conscience." In the first volume, Emma begins to have experiences that so directly challenge her expectations that she is not able completely to silence her own inner misgivings. For example, when Harriet Smith describes to Emma her encounter with Robert and Elizabeth Martin, Harriet begs, "'Oh, Miss Woodhouse, do talk to me and make me comfortable again.'" Revealingly, Emma cannot do it. She was "obliged to stop and think. She was not thoroughly comfortable herself," and initially she cannot quell her accurate perception of the courtesy and deep feeling exhibited by the young man and his sister, the "interesting mixture of wounded affection and genuine delicacy" in the Martins' behavior (192).

But her self-defensive rationalizations rise to overrule her accurate insight into the Martins, people whom she has prejudged as unacceptable: "she had believed them to be well meaning, worthy people before; and what difference

did this make in the evils of the connection?" The defensively argued concession—"well meaning, worthy"—and the exaggerated diction—"the evils of the connection"—demonstrate Emma's willful silencing of her own insight. When she mentally concludes, "It was folly to be disturbed by it" (192), Emma makes the decision to dismiss the guidance of an inner voice that Fanny would call the "better guide."

Other passages, especially in accounts of Emma's thoughts about Harriet and the Martins, follow the same pattern of Emma's perceiving Harriet's painful feelings and the Martins' justifiable resentment, and even Emma's perceiving that she is acting wrongly and yet deciding to overrule these perceptions with rhetorical questions that reassert her prior convictions.

> She could think of nothing better: and though there was something in it which her own heart could not approve—something of ingratitude, merely glossed over—it must be done, or what would become of Harriet? (199)

> Fourteen minutes to be given to those with whom she had thankfully passed six weeks not six months ago!—Emma could not but picture it all, and feel how justly they might resent, how naturally Harriet must suffer. It was a bad business. She would have given a great deal, or endured a great deal, to have had the Martins in a higher rank of life. They were so deserving, that a *little* higher should have been enough: but as it was, how could she have done otherwise?—Impossible!—She could not repent. (201)

The vague questions—"it must be done, or what would become of Harriet?" and "how could she have done otherwise?"—allow Emma to overrule her conscience by mentally claiming that she had no choice. Emma's sympathetic imagination forces her to "picture it all," imagining the feelings of Harriet and the Martins about those paltry fourteen minutes, a picture that asserts itself against her thoughts. The passionate exclamation, "Impossible!—She could not repent," reflects Emma's foot-stamping determination not to listen to "her own heart," which "could not approve" her actions. In such scenes, Emma's hurtful and unjust interference in Harriet's life and her "ruthless" "patrolling of class boundaries" cannot help but make the reader "squirm," as Wiltshire argues ("The Heroine" 105).

In many places, Emma seems to be defending herself against the introjected voice of Mr. Knightley, plainly suggesting how deeply his presence and importance have entered her consciousness, though she doesn't recognize what that means. At times the thought of his disapproval appears only to be

dismissed, as in this sentence: "Mr. Knightley might quarrel with her, but Emma could not quarrel with herself" (73). At other times, she is not quite able to forget his criticisms; it is he whom Emma sometimes mentally addresses in her self-examinations. "She had had many a hint from Mr. Knightley and some from her own heart, as to her deficiency [in visiting the Bateses]—but none were equal to counteract the persuasion of its being very disagreeable,—a waste of time—tiresome women—and all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury" (165). Again, Emma's unspoken thoughts capture her habit of listing arguments in groups of three or four items—"very disagreeable,—a waste of time—tiresome women," and her grasping at exaggerated diction to explain her decision to herself: "all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury." Her "horror" reflects Emma's almost visceral fear of contamination if she pays a call to the Bateses.

Emma can't help remembering a stinging observation Mr. Knightley made once about her dislike of Jane Fairfax, citing Emma's own inflated self-image as the source of her dislike.

> Why she did not like Jane Fairfax might be a difficult question to answer; Mr. Knightley had once told her it was because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself; and though the accusation had been eagerly refuted at the time, there were moments of self-examination when her conscience could not quite acquit her. (177–78)

This passage suggests that from time to time Emma's mind allows her to glimpse her behavior judicially, and, with her own conscience as a judge, find that she is unable to "acquit" herself of some accusations.

The three great scenes when Emma confronts her own terrible mistakes are all occasioned by powerful new evidence of what she has done wrong, not by a decision to pay attention to her mental warnings. It requires shocking discoveries for her to face the ghastly reality of her own misconduct. In the first of these great scenes, the reader is prepared for Mr. Elton's proposal to Emma instead of to Harriet, but his declarations in the carriage are a stupendous shock to Emma, forcing her to try to understand how she could have been so totally mixed up.

Emma's thoughts that night as she absorbs the reality of Mr. Elton's proposal to her and his emphatic insistence that he has never for a moment considered Harriet Smith his object capture another habit of Emma's mind, her pattern of alternating self-criticism and self-justification. Emma begins with

an exclamation and with exaggerated diction: "It was a wretched business, indeed!" (145). The hyperbole of "wretched" and the comforting vagueness of "business" (just as she has let herself think about the Martins: "it was a bad business") both sound exactly like Emma.

That statement is followed by three parallel exclamations separated by dashes, as so often characterizes Emma's habitual patterning of her thoughts: "Such an overthrow of every thing she had been wishing for!—Such a development of every thing most unwelcome!—Such a blow for Harriet!" (145). The first two of these thoughts reflect Emma's disappointment about her failed scheme, but in the third she recognizes that Harriet will suffer more than she will. Correctly grasping that the blow to Harriet "was the worst of all," Emma then enumerates three punishments that she wishes she could trade for Harriet's suffering: "she would gladly have submitted to feel yet more mistaken—more in error—more disgraced by mis-judgment" if only "the effects of her blunders" could "have been confined to herself" (145). Here, even as she partly admits her own mistakes, she still thinks of what she did wrong as merely "blunders." In these sentences, the narrator's presence comes through in the language referring to Emma as "she" and wishing the harm might come to "herself," but the pattern of thinking in threes and the exclamations are distinctly Emma's own.

The next three statements are in Emma's own voice, with quotation marks around them and concluding with an exclamation point. Then, again in indirect discourse, Austen presents Emma's mind in the process of trying to sort out how she could have made so many mistakes. As Emma tries to remember her past observations and assumptions, she speculates that she "had taken up the idea, she supposed, and made every thing bend to it" (145), but even as she grasps her own guilt in twisting the evidence to fit her wishes, she is unable to resist mentally blaming Mr. Elton and criticizing his "thick-headed nonsense" (146). In fairness again, she recalls both John Knightley's warning that Mr. Elton is courting her and George Knightley's assurance that Mr. Elton will never marry indiscreetly, forcing herself to see how much more accurate their observations and predictions have been than her own.

Finally, her thoughts turn and allow her more justly to compare Mr. Elton's conceit and self-importance with her own conceited interference, and from that review she is able to make a much fuller confession to herself of her own blamable behavior and purposes. Again, the narrator captures Emma's thoughts in the characteristic way of piling up insights: "The first error and the worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part

in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple." Finally, Emma rightly perceives that she is most to blame in the massive failure of her attempt to engineer a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton, and she even draws the correct general conclusion that she should never try matchmaking again. Her contrition and regret are serious but mild: "She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more" (148).

Still, in her very next sequence of thoughts, Emma congratulates herself for persuading Harriet not to marry Robert Martin, claiming to herself, "'There I was quite right. That was well done of me'" (148). The assured tone and satisfaction in "'that was well done of me,'" is both a shocking and a comic return to her arrogance about managing Harriet's life. Emma absorbs the painful discovery of "having blundered most dreadfully" by going to sleep in a temporary gloom. However, she rebounds with fresh cheerfulness in the morning, and she rises ready to find "alleviations" to her feeling of guilt and ways of "getting tolerably out of it," though she can't rid herself of a nagging dread of the coming conversation with Harriet (149).

Emma is forced to recognize her horrible mistakes with Mr. Elton and Harriet Smith on Christmas Eve. Not until May, at the Crown Inn ball, does Emma admit to Mr. Knightley the truth of her gross misjudgment. He says, "'I shall not scold you. I leave you to your own reflections,'" rightly surmising that she has already gone through the humiliations of discovering her misjudgment about Mr. Elton and having to reveal the truth about it to Harriet Smith, which Emma did do, on December 28. In her reply to Mr. Knightley on that May evening, Emma acknowledges that her inner thoughts, her "reflections," are not trustworthy: "'Can you trust me with such flatterers?'" she asks. "'Does my vain spirit ever tell me that I am wrong?'" (357). Mr. Knightley again rightly surmises that she has probably had many inner warnings: "'Not your vain spirit,'" he says, "'but your serious spirit.—If one leads you wrong, I am sure the other tells you of it'" (358). Often when Emma silences her "serious spirit," the language suggests that quelling her uneasiness requires a big effort. But when she is forced, as now, she is capable of absorbing new knowledge.

Emma's second great epiphany in the novel—her deep mortification at recognizing how cruel her casual remark was to Miss Bates on Box Hill—comes only because Mr. Knightley forces her to understand what she has done. At first, she tries to "laugh it off," to claim that she had no choice: "'how could I help saying what I did?—Nobody could have helped it,'" and to argue that probably Miss Bates had not understood the joke about how dull she is (407).

It requires vigorous argument, unfolding point by point, for Mr. Knightley's scolding to break through Emma's resolute resistance to criticism and her reliance on her usual methods of excusing her own bad behavior.

The litany of reasons Mr. Knightley reviews in contending that "'[i]t was badly done, indeed,'" finally stuns Emma's consciousness (408). Her shame arises, as if in answer to the novel's opening sentence, and makes Emma "vexed beyond what could have been expressed" (409). She is swamped by "anger against herself, mortification, and deep concern" (408). She actually experiences the loss of self-esteem implied in the word "mortified": "Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life." Emma's habit of expressing herself in triads is here compressed, and this compression makes the blow palpable: "She was most forcibly struck." In a surprisingly clinical word for Emma's mood, the narrator says, "She never had been so depressed." Unlike her buoyant return to her mind's youthful cheerfulness the morning after Mr. Elton's proposal, this time, "Time did not compose her" (409), and she is "just as determined when the morrow came" to fulfill her resolution as she was in her night of remorse (410). The difference between these two nights of painful self-criticism suggests she has actually changed and is now more capable of truthful self-examination.

Emma's third epiphany also comes to her because of an external event. When Harriet Smith reveals that she loves Mr. Knightley and that she believes he returns her love, it does not take Emma long to understand why the thought is so unbearable: "It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself" (444). Her mind at this moment is comically quick: the thought darts through her whole self "with the speed of an arrow," as though both from the deepest physical level and also from the outside, as if from Cupid's bow. This moment is the apotheosis of speed and velocity in Emma's thought, captured with quiet irony by the narrator: "A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like her's, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress" (444). But how is it possible that this most important part of her own mind is unknown to Emma? Why did she never before this moment recognize that her deepest feeling is her love for Mr. Knightley?

The novel finds ways repeatedly to allow the reader (and especially the rereader) to perceive Emma's wholehearted respect for Mr. Knightley's judgment, habitual consciousness of him even when he is not present, and vivid awareness of him when he is. Yet the unfolding narrative makes it plausible for Emma herself to remain utterly ignorant of this part of her own mind. The

obstacles are explicit: he is sixteen years older than she, so they both intuitively discount the idea of romance. "She dearly loved her father" (5), a devotion that blinds her to other insights and makes her unable to imagine deserting him to get married. Mr. Knightley is such "a very old and intimate friend of the family" that he often seems to be the concerned parent that Emma so conspicuously lacks (8). His brother married her sister, so at the beginning of the novel they both conceive of themselves as in-laws. Early in the novel, he even tells Mrs. Weston, "'Isabella does not seem more my sister'" (41). Mr. Knightley is "one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (9), and though she doesn't like this much, she defends herself against his criticisms by always attempting to tell herself and him the ways that he is wrong: she may have made a "'lucky guess,'" but there was "'talent'" in it (11); she is "a better judge . . . of female right and refinement than he could be" (69); and Mr. Knightley could not have "the skill of such an observer on such a question, as herself" (71). Her earlier formulation to Harriet about being "always first and always right" in her father's eyes indicates her conception of marriage as never involving any disagreement or any criticism of herself—which suggests why she cannot imagine Mr. Knightley as her husband.

At key moments, Emma defends herself from comprehending her own strong feelings. When Mrs. Weston tells Emma at the Coles' dinner party that she has "'made a match between Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax,'" Emma hotly exclaims: "'how could you think of such a thing?—Mr. Knightley!—Mr. Knightley must not marry!—You would not have little Henry cut out from Donwell?—Oh! no, no, Henry must have Donwell. I cannot at all consent to Mr. Knightley's marrying'" (242). Preoccupied in mentally refuting Mrs. Weston's guess, she does not watch Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax but instead obsesses about the horrible idea of Mr. Knightley's marrying. Her mind may be "quick and decided," but it can be jolted into reverie by a deeply disturbing thought. "A Mrs. Knightley for them all to give way to!—No—Mr. Knightley must never marry. Little Henry must remain the heir of Donwell" (246).

Why does Emma not perceive something excessive in her adamant objection to Mr. Knightley's marrying? Self-deceiving about her own motives, yet vain about her power of penetrating other people's, she is indignant about Mrs. Weston's foray into matchmaking, telling her, "'You do it very ill'" (242) and suggesting a competitive edge to Emma's belief in her own talent for planning matches. Fixed in her vehement argument that John Knightley's eldest son

must be the heir of Donwell, Emma does not question her own potent feelings against a match between Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax when she says, "'every feeling revolts'" (243). Perhaps she faintly grasps that her intense dislike of Jane Fairfax makes unbearable the idea of Jane happy and secure. Even imagining them married makes Emma perceive that it would be "a very great deduction from her father's daily comfort," and she cannot "endure the idea of Jane Fairfax at Donwell Abbey" (246), but at this point she does not think, "Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!"

Likewise, she does not recognize the significance of her habitual consciousness of Mr. Knightley's presence: "'I do remember it. . . . I perfectly remember it.—Stop; Mr. Knightley was standing just here, was not he?—I have an idea he was standing just here'" (368). Emma's awareness of Mr. Knightley's presence far surpasses her enjoyment of Frank Churchill's flirtation. At the Crown Inn ball:

> She was more disturbed by Mr. Knightley's not dancing, than by any thing else.—There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing,—not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, . . .—so young as he looked!—He could not have appeared to greater advantage perhaps any where, than where he had placed himself. His tall, firm, upright figure, among the bulky forms and stooping shoulders of the elderly men, was such as Emma felt must draw every body's eyes; and, excepting her own partner, there was not one among the whole row of young men who could be compared with him. (352)

The very language of Emma's observation of Mr. Knightley's handsome appearance suggests that in this public setting, she is seeing him afresh, recognizing his youth and vigor, though still mentally guarding herself from his expected criticism and misreading his thoughts: "He seemed often observing her. She must not flatter herself that he thought of her dancing, but if he were criticising her behaviour, she did not feel afraid" (353).

The thought Emma tells herself to ignore is the possibility that Mr. Knightley admires the way she is dancing, but his imagined criticism of anything else she is doing she mentally refutes by assuring herself that she is not interested in Frank Churchill nor he in her. Even as she enjoys dancing with him, Emma plainly perceives that there is "nothing like flirtation between her and her partner. They seemed more like cheerful, easy friends, than lovers" (353). Her thought makes clear that she reads Frank's feelings correctly, but not her own, and not Mr. Knightley's. Her persistent belief that she "'never

[has] been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall'" (90) perhaps keeps her from recognizing such a feeling. That same evening, when Emma asks Mr. Knightley with whom he will dance, she says, "'we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper.'" His vigorous reply, "'Brother and sister! no indeed,'" indicates how far ahead of her he is in rejecting any idea that they are merely in-laws (358).

When Emma is finally catapulted into shock, jealousy, and remorse at imagining Harriet Smith—her protégé, her creation—as the Mrs. Knightley she has so vehemently resisted, her agonized soul-searching occupies two long nights and days and many pages of prose as Emma becomes acquainted with the part of her mind that she now thinks of as "her own heart." Fascinatingly, Emma tries to get her "mind" to "understand, thoroughly understand her own heart" (449), as though until now mind and heart had been unacquainted, unconnected. This new struggle again leads her to review the past and to compare what she had ever felt for Frank Churchill with her feelings about Mr. Knightley.

This review produces the passionate secret wish that such a thought had ever shot into her mind before: "oh! had it, by any blessed felicity, occurred to her, to institute the comparison" between them. She discovers that "there never had been a time when she did not consider Mr. Knightley as infinitely the superior, or when his regard for her had not been infinitely the most dear." The "knowledge of herself" that this thinking produces brings her to an astonishing word to describe her own mind: she is "ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her—her affection for Mr. Knightley.—Every other part of her mind was disgusting" (449).

At last, her language of indignant self-criticism is categorical: "With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny" (449). The full exploration of Emma's ghastly remorse, astonishment at her own mistakes, and complete envisioning of a future with Harriet as Mrs. Knightley and living at Donwell, with an end to all Mr. Knightley's visits and the end of all "cheerful or of rational society" (460)—all caused by her own "insufferable vanity" and "unpardonable arrogance"—at last make Emma, like so many other Austen heroines, face dispossession, not of her home, but of happiness in her home.

> The prospect before her now, was threatening to a degree that could not be entirely dispelled—that might not be even partially brightened. If all took place that might take place among the circle of her

> friends, Hartfield must be comparatively deserted; and she left to cheer her father with the spirits only of ruined happiness. . . . Mr. Knightley to be no longer coming there for his evening comfort!—No longer walking in at all hours, as if ever willing to change his own home for their's!—How was it to be endured? (460)

She will still have a home, but "Hartfield must be comparatively deserted." At last, deeply facing herself, her "wretchedness" is compounded by "the reflection never far distant from her mind, that it had been all her own work" (460). In the long, melancholy evening, as Emma comes to accept her bleak future, bereft of the security she has been so used to, the weather, as if reflecting her mood, is bleak, too: a "cold stormy rain set in," and the "weather added what it could of gloom" (459).

The same weather of the night before continues the next morning, and "the same loneliness, and the same melancholy, seemed to reign at Hartfield" (462). But in the afternoon, the clouds disappear and the sun appears, and Emma eagerly seeks to be outdoors as soon as she can. When Mr. Perry comes to give her father a "disengaged hour," Emma hurries out, thinking of Mr. Knightley as sixteen miles away in London, when he, too, enters the garden, requiring of her the "quickest arrangement of mind" and a resolve to be "collected and calm" if he were going to confide to her his intention to marry Harriet (462).

In this exquisitely realized scene, both Emma and Mr. Knightley recognize that the other is "agitated and low" (472), each attributing to the other the wrong reason for the mood: Mr. Knightley imagining that Emma is crushed by the news of Frank's engagement, and Emma imagining that Mr. Knightley has been disappointed at his brother's response to the news of his plan to marry Harriet. Their long-standing mutual kindness and perceptive reading of each other's words and feelings allow them, step by step, to clear up their profound misunderstandings, each one wrongly imagining that a love for someone else has produced the sadness they each rightly perceive. Mr. Knightley's kindness in attempting to comfort Emma inspires her truthful confession that she has never been attached to Frank. At the next moment, Emma's dread that Mr. Knightley is going to tell her that he loves Harriet makes her stop him. His tone of "deep mortification" (467) conveys his hurt to Emma, and because she "could not bear to give him pain" (468), she kindly invites him to go on, mentally bracing herself to help him, to let him confide in her, consult her, be reassured by her in his decision to marry Harriet.

Her kindness at this moment frees him to declare himself and call her

"'my dearest, most beloved Emma'" (468). Almost unable to speak with happiness, she listens silently. The narrator with comic poignancy says that "Emma's mind was most busy, and, with all the wonderful velocity of thought" she fully understands Mr. Knightley's love for her, knows that Harriet's hopes have been a delusion, that she, Emma, is "every thing herself," and manages at that very same moment to "rejoice that Harriet's secret had not escaped her," knowing that she will never reveal it to anyone, for her kindness now can extend to "her poor friend" (469).

At last, in the narrator's satisfying language of instantaneous knowing, in "all the wonderful velocity of thought," Emma fully knows her own mind, encompassing her grief over losing Mr. Knightley forever, discovering her own passionate love for him over the last two days, and fully grasping his long-felt and enduring love of her. The narrator, capturing Mr. Knightley's point of view—and probably the view of Jane Austen, too—thinks of Emma as the "sweetest and best of all creatures, faultless in spite of all her faults" (472).

WORKS CITED

Austen, Jane. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen.* Gen ed. Janet Todd. Cambridge: CUP, 2005-2008.

Peltason, Timothy. "Mind and Mindlessness in Jane Austen." *Hudson Review* 67.4 (Win. 2015): 609–33.

Wiltshire, John. "The Heroine." *The Cambridge Companion to Emma.* Ed. Peter Sabor. Cambridge: CUP, 2015. 105–19.

_____. *Jane Austen and the Body.* Cambridge: CUP, 1992.