

Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen, edited by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, is an excellent reference work. The valuable essay on *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* by Wiltshire places *Emma* in the context of the novels Austen wrote just before and after it. Wiltshire compares the social, physical, and conceptual worlds of Austen's last three novels and captures the distinctive tone of wit, optimism, energy, and warmth of this novel, in contrast to its predecessor and successor. McMaster's essay on class, Copeland's on money, and John F. Burrows's on style are well written and informative.

I still read and value *The Jane Austen Companion* (1986) edited by J. David Grey, A. Walton Litz, and Brian Southam. This older "companion" is a compendium of sixty-five short essays written by outstanding scholars on a wide range of topics. Titles include, for example, "Jane Austen and Bath," "Dancing, Balls, and Assemblies," "Education," "Games," "Houses," "Letters and Correspondence," "Jane Austen and London," "Medicine," "Military," "Pets and Animals," and "Jane Austen's Reading." The book is reliable, well written, and rich.

Indispensable resources for the serious reader and a great help to teachers are two works edited by Deirdre Le Faye. One is *Jane Austen, a Family Record*, Le Faye's completion of *Jane Austen, Her Life and Letters*, compiled and published in 1913 by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh. Le Faye painstakingly revised and enlarged their work after consultation with family archives, letters, journals, and memoirs, to produce a definitive source for all Austen biographies. The other recommended Le Faye work is *Jane Austen's Letters* (1995), which she annotated with astounding attention to detail (the volume is entered in the works-cited list under "Austen").

Of all the modern biographies of Austen, I am most convinced by (and grateful to) Claire Tomalin's *Jane Austen: A Life*, a perceptive exploration of the Austen family and its forebears; the worlds of Steventon, Bath, and London; the relation between the juvenilia and later works; and the social dynamics of Austen's childhood friends, kin, and neighborhood. The biography will appeal to students who are curious about Austen's life and world, and specific chapters might be assigned for student presentations. Among critical books on Austen by a single author, I return most often to Johnson's *Jane Austen* and to Wiltshire's *Jane Austen and the Body*. Both are inspired and inspiring books by brilliant scholars. *Jane Austen: A Literary Life*, by Jan Fergus, provides essential background on the conditions for authorship in the late eighteenth century. Fergus places Austen's literary accomplishments in the context of publishing as a *business*, book production, audiences, libraries, apprenticeship, and payments and commissions. A fairly short book, it is packed with information that will make Austen's achievement more understandable to students—and more remarkable than ever to experienced readers.

The *Emma* Films

In most courses instructors do not have time to show complete movies, but in Film and Fiction or in a film studies course, teachers might show parts of the three *Emma* movies released in 1995 and 1996. Books and articles on the cinematic *Emma* are also available. The collection *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, contains thirteen essays, many of high quality, employing the language of literary criticism and of film studies. The book is essential reading for teachers who play any of the Austen films in class. Two essays in the collection are specifically about film adaptations of *Emma*, and several others offer insights into the difficulties, successes, and oddities of the many attempts to render *Emma* in the truncated form of a two-hour film. Carol Dole's essay in the Troost and Greenfield work sorts out some of the problems of presenting British social class in Austen films aimed at an American mass market. The collection includes an excellent bibliography, "Selected Reviews, Articles, and Books on the Films, 1995–1997." Among those titles cited is a memorable comment by Louis Menand.

Dole has also contributed an essay to the present volume; she suggests that teachers show excerpts of the two costume-drama versions of *Emma* in class and ask students to compare them with passages from the novel. Dole's succinct summaries of the directors' techniques in filming the scenes can serve as keys to underlying assumptions of each movie. Dole also explains why Heckerling's *Clueless* is truer to the spirit of Austen's project than the other two movies. An assignment that Dole recommends is to have students write screenplays of a scene, as a way to explore the difficulties in making a cinematic version of *Emma*.

Teaching about *Emma*'s Chronology

As I explain in the introduction, the chronology of *Emma* is carefully constructed, although Austen does not call attention to the dates and days that she had figured out so precisely. An extensive chronology like the one that follows would probably not be helpful to first-time readers of *Emma*, because it might imply that they should concentrate on certain details rather than on bigger issues of the novel's structure. Instead, teachers can point out (and students will be intrigued to learn) that Austen conceived of the novel as taking place over fourteen months, during which *Emma* must have had a birthday, so that she would be twenty-one when she marries. But I include this detailed chronology

for the benefit of teachers, and students who are rereading the book, because it suggests so much about Austen's way of conceiving the connection between the passage of time and Emma's growth into adulthood.

The Chronology of *Emma*

September

The action begins late in September (details in the novel fit the years 1813–14). Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston get married (6; 1: ch. 1). Emma will have "many a long October and November evening" to be "struggled through" until the John Knightleys come at Christmas (7; 1: ch. 1). Frank Churchill's letter on Mr. Weston's marriage is dated 28 September (96; 1: ch. 11).

October and November

Unfolding friendship of Harriet and Emma, involvement of Mr. Elton (vol. 1, chs. 4–15).

December

Emma's stratagem at the vicarage was the "middle of December" (83; 1: ch. 10). Dinner at Randalls is Friday, Christmas Eve (108; 1: ch. 13); Saturday is Christmas (138; 1: ch. 16); Sunday (138) is 26 December. The John Knightleys' Christmas visit is to last ten days, and since John Knightley must be back in town on 28 December (79; 1: ch. 9), the family is to leave on Monday, 27 December. Mr. Elton sends a note on the "evening of the very day on which they went," saying that he would leave "the following morning" (140; 1: ch. 17), so he departs on 28 December.

January

George Knightley argues that Frank Churchill might have found a time to visit his father "between September and January" (145; 1: ch. 18). On Wednesday, 26 January, Emma hears of Mr. Elton's engagement (173; 2: ch. 3), after, as Miss Bates says, "he has been gone just four weeks . . . four weeks yesterday" (176; 2: ch. 3).

February

Mr. Elton returns to Highbury the first week of February (181; 2: ch. 4). Emma hears that Frank Churchill is to arrive the next day and will stay a "fort-night" (two weeks) (188; 2: ch. 5). Mr. Elton goes back to Bath on the same day Frank arrives (186, 190; 2: ch. 5), a Wednesday (221; 2: ch. 8), making it 9 February. After two days in Highbury, Frank goes to London on Saturday for a

haircut (205; 2: ch. 7). Jane receives a pianoforte on Monday—14 February, Valentine's Day, although the narrator does not mention the date (214–15; 2: ch. 8). The Coles' dinner party is Tuesday, 15 February. At the party, Frank tells Emma that he has already stayed "a week to-morrow—half my time" (221). Frank leaves Highbury the following Tuesday (22 Feb.), which Modert points out is Shrove Tuesday. The date of the holy day would explain why the Eltons marry so hurriedly, since weddings were not performed during Lent. Later, Mr. Weston mentions to Mrs. Elton that Frank "was here before," in February (309; 2: ch. 18).

March

Emma remembers (with embarrassment) being in the vicarage "three months ago, to lace up her boot" (270; 2: ch. 14).

April

Mrs. Elton says to Jane Fairfax, "Here is April come!" Emma's dinner for the Eltons is on a "cold sleety April" Thursday (299, 303, 304; 2: ch. 17). Subsequent events mark this as the second week in April, so it was on 14 April, Easter Thursday.

May

The Churchills take a house in Richmond "for May and June." Mr. Woodhouse thinks, "May was better for every thing than February." At the Crown Inn ball, the "whole party" observes that "though *May*, a fire in the evening was still very pleasant" (317, 318, 320; 3: ch. 2). Modert suggests that although no weekday is given, the Crown Inn ball takes place on Thursday the 12th, which would be "Old May Day Eve," and Harriet's encounter with the Gypsies would occur on "Old May Day," Friday the 13th.

June

By inference, we can discover that the exploring party at Donwell takes place on 23 June, at "almost Midsummer" (357; 3: ch. 6), Midsummer Eve. This date is also Harriet's birthday (30; 1: ch. 4). The Box Hill party is on 24 June, and that night Frank goes back to Richmond (377, 383; 3: ch. 8), and the holiday on 24 June is "Midsummer." Thirty-six hours later, Mrs. Churchill dies, on 26 June (387; 3: ch. 9; 440; 3: ch. 14).

July

"One morning, about ten days after Mrs. Churchill's decease, Emma was called down stairs to Mr. Weston" (392; 3: ch. 10). We later learn that this was a

Monday. Modert interprets "about" as meaning "nearly" or "almost." By counting 26 June and the Monday as full days, Modert suggests that Frank returns on 4 July, nine days after Mrs. Churchill's death. On this day, Frank had visited Randalls (392, 394; 3: ch. 10). On the same day, Harriet tells Emma whom she loves (405–09; 3: ch. 11). Mrs. Weston visits Emma on 5 July (Modert) after calling on Jane Fairfax (417–20; 3: ch. 12). In the afternoon, a "cold stormy rain set in, and nothing of July appeared" (421). Chapman notes, "We find out later . . . that the day of the storm was a *Tuesday*" (436; 3: ch. 14). Modert points out that Tuesday, 5 July, the day of the cold July storm, is "*Old Midsummer Eve*." Mr. Knightley returns from London the next day, by implication, Wednesday, 6 July (424; 3: ch. 13), the date of "*Old Midsummer*." Emma writes her letter to Harriet on 7 July. Frank's letter is dated only "July—Windsor" (436; 3: ch. 14). The date when Emma reads the letter must be 7 July, two days after Mrs. Weston's visit (436). She reads it in the morning; Mr. Knightley reads it in the afternoon (444; 3: ch. 15). Harriet is invited to London "for at least a fortnight," and goes there (451; 3: ch. 16). The next day, Emma visits Jane Fairfax (452). That would be Friday, 8 July, as we learn that the planned meeting at the Crown Inn will be "to-morrow," which is also clearly named as "Saturday" (456). Mrs. Weston has a baby girl in July, nine months after the wedding in September (461; 3: ch. 17).

July, August

Harriet stays in London where "her fortnight was likely to be a month at least." The John Knightleys "were to come down in August, and she was invited to remain till they could bring her back" (464; 3: ch. 17). Before Harriet returns, Emma is relieved to hear news about Harriet so different from her "doleful disappointment of five weeks back" (475; 3: ch. 18); therefore, Harriet probably returns after 15 August (481; 3: ch. 19).

September, October, November

Weddings take place (482–83; 3: ch. 19).

See also Chapman's "Appendixes"; Modert 57.

One Idea for Initiating Class Discussion: "Opinions of *Emma*"

It is a fascinating fact that Austen copied down into a notebook, probably in 1816, every comment that she read or heard from *Emma*'s readers in that first

year of publication. These remarks—inadequate or lukewarm as they sound to those of us who know the novel well and love it—were evidently important enough to Austen that she preserved them. This short section from her *Minor Works* is reprinted in this volume as an appendix (179–82), because teachers may find in the evocative comments a way to start a conversation in class, to frame a discussion, or to suggest a writing assignment. The essay in this volume by LeClair explains a little of the identity of the readers whose comments Austen recorded, and LeClair offers insight into the way the "opinions" may shed light on the scenes in *Emma* in which the heroine works on her portrait of Harriet Smith.

LeClair points out that most of the comments begin with "personal preoccupations." The various readers express highly divergent views, mention (as first-time readers usually do) whether they "liked" the book or not, and then proceed to criticize it on idiosyncratic criteria: whether the book is "moral," whether it is "natural" (and whether it is desirable for a book to be "natural"), whether it is "interesting," and whether the reader likes the treatment of characters who share the reader's age, profession, or point of view. Students of mine sometimes sound exactly like those original readers as we start *Emma*: "I don't like it." "I don't like it as much as *Pride and Prejudice*." "It's really boring." "My sister says it's good, but I like mysteries better." "These men never do anything." "The characters all talk about trivia."

In the face of such daunting initial responses (occasionally stated outright in class), a teacher might give voice to some of Austen's audience—for example, Mrs. Dickson, who "did not like" the novel because there are a "Mr. and Mrs. Dixon in it," or Mrs. Digweed, who, "if she had not known the Author, could hardly have got through it." But then the class might turn to the second comment from Austen's friend Alethea Bigg, who "on reading it a second time, liked Miss Bates much better than at first," and to the comment by Austen's seafaring brother, Captain Charles Austen. Captain Austen, attentively rereading *Emma* while at sea, might inspire a student: "Emma arrived in time to a moment. I am delighted with her, more so I think than even with my favourite *Pride & Prejudice*, & have read it three times in the Passage." For initially resistant readers of *Emma*, this promise and the teacher's conviction, goodwill, and enthusiasm may help lure them through a second or third reading, either "in the Passage"—or later in life.