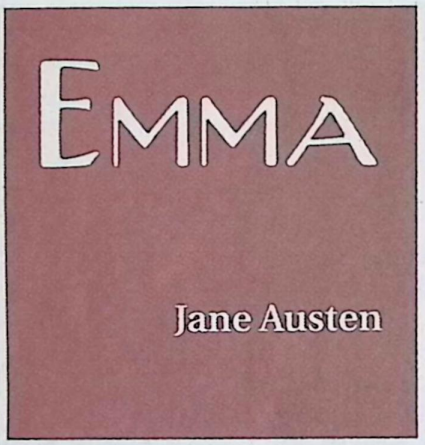
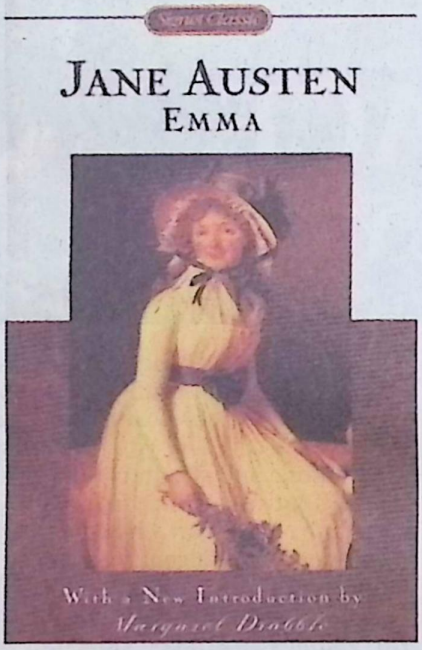


EMMA is a comic novel by Jane Austen, first published in 1816, about the perils of misconstrued romance. The main character, Emma Woodhouse, is described in the opening paragraph as "handsome, clever, and rich" but is also rather spoiled. Prior to starting the novel, Austen wrote, "I am going to take a heroine whom no-one but myself will much like."

Emma Woodhouse is a young woman in Regency England. She lives with her father, a hypochondriac who is principally characterized by excessive concern for the health and safety of his loved ones. Emma's friend and only critic is the gentlemanly Mr. Knightley, her "neighbor" and brother-in-law (brother of her sister's husband). As the novel opens, Emma has just attended the marriage of Miss Taylor, her old governess and best friend. Having introduced Miss Taylor to her future husband Mr. Weston, Emma smugly takes credit for their marriage, and decides that she rather likes matchmaking.

Against Knightley's advice, she next tries to match her new friend, Harriet Smith (a sweet but none-too-bright girl of seventeen, described as "the natural daughter of somebody") to the local vicar, Mr. Elton, first persuading her to refuse an advantageous marriage proposal from a respectable young farmer, Mr. Martin. Her matchmaking scheme goes awry when it turns out that Mr. Elton, a social climber, wants to marry Emma herself not, as she had hoped, the poor and socially inferior Harriet. After Emma rejects his proposals, Mr. Elton goes on holiday. Harriet fancies herself heartbroken, though Emma does her best to convince her that Mr. Elton (who will reveal himself to be more and more arrogant and pompous as the story continues) is beneath them both.

An interesting development for Emma is the arrival in the neighbourhood of Frank Churchill, Mrs. Weston's stepson, whom she has never met but in whom she has a



long-standing interest. Mr. Elton returns with another newcomer--a vulgar wife who becomes part of Emma's social circle, even though the two women loathe each other. A third new character is Jane Fairfax, the reserved but beautiful niece of Emma's impoverished neighbour, the loquacious Miss Bates (another comical character who serves to lighten the scene). Jane, who is very accomplished musically, is Miss Bates's pride and joy; Emma, however, envies her talent and somewhat dislikes her. Jane had lived with Miss Bates until she was nine, but Colonel Campbell, a friend indebted to her father for seeing him through a life-threatening illness, then welcomed her into his own home, where she became fast friends with his daughter and received a first-rate education. On the marriage of Miss Campbell, Jane returned to her relations to prepare (with dread) to earn her living as a governess.

In her eagerness to find some sort of fault with Jane and also to find something to amuse her in her pleasant but dull village Emma indulges in the fantasy invented by Frank that Jane fancied Miss Campbell's husband, Mr. Dixon, and that it is for this reason she has returned home, rather than going to Ireland to visit them. This suspicion is further fuelled by the arrival of a piano for Jane from a mysterious, anonymous benefactor.

The plot becomes quite complex as Emma tries to make herself fall in love with Frank simply because everyone says they make a handsome couple. Emma ultimately decides, however, that he would suit Harriet better after an episode where Frank saves her protegée from a band of gypsies. During this time, Mrs. Weston wonders if Emma's old friend Mr. Knightley might have taken a fancy to Jane. Emma promptly decides that she does not want him to marry anyone, but rather than further exploring these feelings, she claims that she wants her nephew Henry to inherit the family property. When Mr. Knightley scolds Emma for a thoughtless insult to Miss Bates, she finally recognises her own shortcomings, and tries to atone. Around this time, Emma is further discomfited when she learns that Jane and Frank have been secretly engaged for almost a year. When Harriet confides that she thinks Mr. Knightley is in love with her, jealousy forces Emma to realize that she loves him herself. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Knightley proposes to Emma, Harriet reconciles with her young farmer, and everyone lives happily ever after.

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