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Austen. After all, it is this Jane who, far more consistently than her namesake in the novel, exhibits "such coldness and reserve—such apparent indifference whether she pleased or not"; and who thus may be seen to acknowledge here the incontrovertible truth of what, under the *nom de guerre* of Fairfax, Emma can't bear in her. The melancholy of Austen Style lies not in the fact that its renunciation of the world—the renunciation that has allowed it to make a world—is never complete, but in the fact that its renunciation of the world may never be *in*complete, may never be modified or muted. What most argues the melancholy of the passage at hand is not the reluctance of the withdrawal, so much as the dry, wittily mechanical necessity of it. To a large extent, as I suggested in the first chapter, Austen's persistent moral condemnation of style—as by turns trivial, factitious, misleading, dangerous, evil—is a strategy of camouflage: shameful sign of the Woman, style must always be "over there," in Robert Ferrars's empty toothpick case. But surely what also motivates this condemnation is Style's own sense of the untruth in its exclusive self-sufficiency: the knowledge that with its constant and rigorous self-denial it does not simply counter a fear of reverting to the abject subject who would no longer have even the dubious protection of style; it also seeks to advance a dream that it might correspond to the plenitude of a Person. The beauty of Style, I have claimed, lies in the way it shuts out the world that would otherwise shut out the stylothete. This beauty, though, is also the melancholy of Style; its exclusive plenitude obliges Style always to harbor a dialectical reminder not just of that excluded self it had to give up, but also of that included self it never had, and so never *will* give up, for it is what we might properly call its ego ideal. Ultimately, then, Austen's God is not Schelling's, with the perverse need of perfection for imperfection; on the contrary, her deity presents one kind of perfection melancholically longing to be coupled with another. That is why, to anyone with the smallest sense of style, of Austen Style at any rate, *Emma* must be considered both the most perfect *and* the most melancholy of her novels, because here the perfection of Style, of No One, opens the secret of its impossible desire to possess the perfection of a Person who has, who is, everything. "Harriet was nothing . . . [Emma] was every thing herself." Though Austen could not have known the Germanic origin of the name, the stylothete is full of appreciation—full of nothing, finally, but appreciation—for the fact that "Emma" means *whole*.

* * *

EMILY AUERBACH

An Imaginist Like Herself†

* * *

Emma asks readers * * * to open their minds to new ideas about what a marriage should be. The novel opens and ends with wedding days and presents various forms of union. Mr. Knightley calls Miss Taylor "very fit for a wife" for Mr. Weston because she has learned "the very material matrimonial point of submitting [her] own will, and doing as [she is] bid." Mrs. Weston seems not to mind that her husband opens her mail. Although Austen has her hero praise such traditional subjection, she presents him as one who in actuality prefers a strong-willed woman, a counterpart. When Emma quips that "such a girl as Harriet is what every man delights in" rather than women with "well informed minds," Mr. Knightley retorts, "Men of sense . . . do not want silly wives." He wants equality with Emma ("Cannot you call me George?") and romance ("Brother and sister! no indeed"), not a continuation of the teacherly role he has played in the past. Unlike his brother John, George Knightley does not seek a wife who will merely murmur "Very true, my love" with uncritical devotion.

As in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen contrasts traditional notions of romantic courtship with a slowly developing relationship. Mr. Knightley and Emma take their time on the way to the altar. As in *Mansfield Park*, semifraternal ties evolve into a conjugal union. Early on in *Emma*, Mr. Knightley admits that Emma seems as much his sister as does his sister-in-law, Isabella. He teases Emma with the air of a fond, rather patronizing older brother. Emma never even thinks of Mr. Knightley as a prospective husband until near the end, though her distress at his lack of dancing suggests she does not wish him relegated to the fuddy-duddy corner. Emma says to Mr. Knightley of the feasibility of their dancing together, "You know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper."

In a sense, Mr. Knightley and Emma have been behaving like a husband and wife for quite some time. From the beginning of the novel, Austen makes a point of showing Mr. Knightley and Emma functioning at dinner parties like a married couple skillfully maneuvering conversation to keep from distressing their guests. They share in their love of nieces and nephews and already seem to have created a cozy feeling of "home." Each is acutely aware of the other one's

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comings and goings. They talk with openness and equality: "We always say what we like to one another." With years of friendship "all right, all open, all equal," it is not surprising that their eventual marriage can possess "something so like perfect happiness."

As in the case of the animated Elizabeth Bennet and reserved Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen presents her happiest marriages in *Emma* as those where the union benefits both partners, like a completion of self. Presumably Emma, Harriet Smith, and Frank Churchill will acquire discipline and rationality; in turn, Mr. Knightley, Robert Martin, and Jane Fairfax may gain imagination and playfulness. As Mr. Knightley observes of the marriage between Frank and Jane, "I am very ready to believe his character will improve, and acquire from her's the steadiness and delicacy of principle that it wants . . . with such a woman he has a chance." Frank and Emma realize in their final conversations that they would have been far too alike—both of them too fanciful, manipulative, and willful—to complement each other well as husband and wife. As Austen wrote in a letter, "Marriage is a great Improver" (20 November 1808).

But marriage can also be a great De-prover if partners bring out the worst in each other. The rejected Mr. Elton acquires a Mrs. Elton with "delightful rapidity" and soon becomes nearly as "hardened as his wife . . . growing like her." The only "finery" in their marriage is on the outside of their bodies. Every thing about this marriage is artificial, including Mrs. Elton's affected use of *caro sposo* to refer to her husband and her pretense that he is her "lord and master" when in fact she has the upper hand. Mrs. Elton gets the final spoken words in *Emma*—a condemnation of Emma and Mr. Knightley's wedding as a pitiful and shabby business because it lacks lace. One suspects that far too many modern-day Mrs. Eltons focus on display rather than substance, valuing the wedding day more than the perfect happiness of the union.

Austen adds a feminist twist to the ending of *Emma* by implying that her bossy, competitive heroine may still be scheming to stay more in control of her life than most married women. In a letter, Austen had discussed "pitying a young woman . . . because she cannot live in two places at the same time, & at once enjoy the comforts of being married & single" (8 February 1807). Emma comes the closest of any Austen heroine to proving a young woman *can* do just that. Emma will marry yet stay at home, remaining "always first and always right" to her father. Emma still thinks in competitive, egotistical terms, counting "on being *first* with Mr. Knightley."

Like all other Austen heroines, Emma marries and supposedly lives happily ever after. Yet readers never forget the astonishing conversation Austen offers on celibacy between Emma and Harriet. Emma begins,

> "My being charming, Harriet, is not quite enough to induce me to marry; I must find other people charming—one other person at least. And I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all. . . . I must see somebody very superior. . . . I cannot really change for the better. If I were to marry I must expect to repent it."
>
> "Dear me!—it is so odd to hear a woman talk so!"
>
> "I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. . . . 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." . . .
>
> "But still, you will be an old maid! and that's so dreadful!"
>
> "Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! . . . [A] single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else."

It is indeed, as Harriet Smith says, "so odd to hear a woman talk so." *Emma* contains some of the most direct discussions of women's hampered existences and threatened destinies in all of Austen. Emma speaks in the same bold voice Austen adopts herself in a letter to her niece: "Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor—which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony" (13 March 1817). Remove poverty as a factor and women acquire the freedom to say no.

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GABRIELLE D. V. WHITE

[*Emma* as Subversive of the Slave Trade][†]

* * *

Jane Austen takes for granted the guilt of the slave trade. The impression can be given that because she takes for granted agreement on the slave trade she focuses on governesses. But authorial focus is not so likely to be on the job of a governess if it was not after all the focus for her character Jane Fairfax. The author does not herself in the narrative seem to focus on protest at the job of a governess. In any case, where governesses are concerned the description

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