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The Impact of Emma: Destroying Stereotypes through Nuanced Characters in Text and Film

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The Impact of *Emma*: Destroying Stereotypes through Nuanced Characters in Text and Film

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A Thesis

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Introduction

Jane Austen predicted that the heroine of her novel *Emma* would not be well-liked. She begins her novel by describing the titular character, breaking her usual mode, and indeed, the widely recommended advice given to creative writers: “show don’t tell”. Austen’s first line of *Emma* tells the readers many things about her heroine. This first line, though not her most famous (“It is a truth universally acknowledged...”), is undoubtedly my favorite: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (3). It’s clear, I think, from the first line alone why Austen thought Emma would be unlikable. To make one’s character “handsome”, “clever” and “rich” means to give them most every quality, feature, and privilege that one could wish for. To add salt to the wound, Austen tells readers that she also has a “comfortable home” and “happy disposition”. Again, she’s affirmed that her heroine is rooted in privilege. Unlike Elizabeth Bennet, Emma is rich. Unlike the Dashwood sisters and Anne Elliot, she has a comfortable home. Even one of Austen’s wealthiest characters is clearly missing the benefit of Emma’s “happy disposition”. The end of the first phrase tells us that she “seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence”-- Austen is ensuring that we, as readers, realize how blessed this heroine is, just in case we somehow missed picking up on it (3). Finally, she ends this first sentence with another line packed with meaning and destined to make readers resent the character: she “had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (3). In addition to her numerous privileges, readers now know that the heroine of the novel has lived a relatively peaceful life. There’s no solace in learning that the rich, beautiful Emma

has struggled greatly in spite of her fortune. Austen takes away the average reader's ability to relate to the titular character in her very clear description of her qualities.

When Emma is examined next to Austen's other heroines, the likes of a prideful but witty Elizabeth Bennet, a naive but charming Catherine Moreland, a wealthy but aging and heartbroken Anne Elliot, Emma stands out— beautiful, privileged, smart. The contrast of Emma's seeming perfection, and an incredibly telling first line that goes against Austen's typical style, draws me into the novel immediately. Why does Austen open her novel in this way? Why, with her relatable heroines, does Emma stand out as privileged in position, disposition, and physical beauty? Aside from her privilege making her unrelatable, Austen also likely doubted Emma's potential likability because of her flaws. Indeed, manipulation and vanity are certainly difficult flaws to swallow, especially in 19th century women. But Emma's flaws and privilege are, I think, the most important aspect of her character. Looking at the context of the novel published in 1816, it followed a few decades after Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Austen's clear description of Emma in the first line of the novel, along with the clear portrayal of her flaws, seems to be inspired by many of the "moral tales" of the time. In conversation with Mary Wollstonecraft, Austen transforms the stereotypical portrayal of privileged manipulative women in literature. My first chapter will explore this idea, and dive further into the 18th century stereotype to which *Emma* is responding.

Many have endeavored to understand Austen's least likable main character: labeling the story as feminist or antifeminist, diagnosing her father with syphilis, or questioning her sexuality. Austen's Emma is unique and, I would argue, special because of her transformative role in literature. Emma stands not only as a critical character for 19th century literature, but also still functions as a critical character in the 21st century through adaptations.

Emma has been adapted numerous times in numerous ways; the web-series *Emma Approved* from some of the creators of the groundbreaking *Lizzie Bennett Diaries*, both of the 1996 period films (one starring Kate Beckinsale and one starring Gwyneth Paltrow), and the 1990s teen cult classic *Clueless* starring Alicia Silverstone, to name a few. But to explore the question of if adaptations have chosen to embrace the unlikability of Emma and truly show her connection to and departure from 18th century stereotypes, I have decided to examine Autumn de Wilde's colorful 2020 period adaptation *Emma.*, starring Anya Taylor-Joy. Autumn de Wilde's film and Anya Taylor-Joy's portrayal work together to once again transform the standard. While there are numerous adaptations of *Emma*, few are truly able to capture the essence of what makes Emma so unique. This idea is also discussed in J.P.C. Brown's "Screening Austen: The Case of *Emma*": "Modern adaptations have curious difficulty realising this impressive, capable, intelligent woman" (Brown). While I would argue that de Wilde's *Emma.* does realize the full potential of the heroine, this adaptation follows the lead of Austen's novel—transforming characters in a more feminist light.

One example of this transformation can be seen in Jane Fairfax. Jane is often touted as the picture of domesticity—she's demure and extremely musically gifted—contrasting Emma's moderate talent and occasional outspokenness. Many view Jane as a foil for Emma; she is argued to be the picture of domesticity. Erin Blakemore even argued that, because of Emma's unlikability, the more pleasant Jane should be considered the heroine of the novel. Amber Anderson's portrayal of Jane Fairfax also adds new depth to her character. Anderson's Jane moves away from the "ideal." In many scenes throughout the film, Jane is revealed through word and deed to be spunky, and, unlike other versions of the character, more confident to stand up for herself.

One first hint of this is the scene when Emma first interacts with Jane in the film. Some adaptations show Jane's concern and distress at her aunt's impropriety in oversharing with Emma. Anderson's Jane looks around the room, rarely making eye contact, and seeming extremely bored. Her lack of concern for playing the perfect, attentive conversationalist is the first hint of change. In the following scene, after a dinner at Hartfield, Emma sits at a piano forte and plays a song, singing gently, even sighing, and dramatically pausing during her performance. She looks at Jane at the end of the performance clearly reveling in the reaction and applause of the audience. Everyone, but especially Harriet, is in awe of Emma. Emma loves the attention and admiration, and is trying to prove her skill, establishing herself as the most accomplished lady in the room. She's obsessed with image. Against this, Jane shows humility as she is the next to play when Emma challenges her saying "what a pity you forgot your music." Jane responds almost too demurely "I hope I can recollect the tune" before she plays with masterful skill, clearly besting Emma. Her piece is exponentially more difficult and is played with incredible accuracy. As Jane starts playing, it is clear that Jane's "demure" line was a sassy retort to mess with Emma.

As opposed to other adaptations of Jane, and even, readers could argue, the source material, this portrayal of Jane is not a demure, quiet woman. Though she's clearly different from Emma in many ways, she's not pictured as a perfect woman as many adaptations portray her. The 2020 *Emma*'s take on Jane is just one example of its feminist take on characters in the source material. For my argument, I will explore the adaptation's focus on female friendship, rather than romance, and highlight Mr. Knightley's appeal to the female gaze. Through these two features of the film, de Wilde's adaptation adds new layers of feminist interpretation to the world of Emma adaptations and criticism.

In examining Jane Austen's *Emma* in light of 18th century stereotypes, I hope to show how the source material reinterprets stereotypes to create a new, feminist story. Additionally, I will explore de Wilde's *Emma*. as a feminist film, that over two hundred years after the publication of *Emma*, adapts the source to provide viewers with a fresh, feminist take on the novel. I will argue that *Emma* accomplishes the dismantling of a vicious 18th century female stereotype, and that de Wilde's 2020 adaptation of *Emma*. once again transforms stereotypes through its focus on female friendship and portrayal of Mr. Knightley.

Chapter 1

The Lady Puppet Master: Subverting Stereotypes in

Emma

As the English novel became popular in the 1700s, certain archetypes and stereotypes appeared as well; unmarried, upper class women with strong, decisive opinions became villains in novels like Edgeworth's *Belinda* and Burney's *The Wanderer*. After the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, novelists, philosophers, and politicians began to contemplate the equality of the sexes, and Jane Austen explores some of these early feminist ideologies through the character Emma. Austen shows readers that characters like Emma can learn that their manipulation is wrong while still remaining strong-willed and opinionated. Many novels preceding *Emma* were written prior to, or as an immediate response to, the ideas of Wollstonecraft. As novels with moral tales were the common type of the day, many authors took it upon themselves to send warnings to their readers by describing the downfall of liberated female characters. After the villainization of opinionated females became a bit of a pattern, Jane Austen's *Emma* brought fresh life into the archetype. Through Austen's complex character, detailed character arc, and happy ending for Emma, she revolutionized the portrayal of powerful female characters in literature.

Elinor Joddrel in *The Wanderer*, Alovisa in *Love in Excess*, The Marquise de Merteuil in *Dangerous Liasons*, Lady Delacour in *Belinda* and even Lady Catherine in Austen's own *Pride and Prejudice* fall into the pattern of typical female villains of late 18th and early 19th century

novels that Jane Austen seems to be responding to with *Emma*. Austen is known to have read both Burney, Edgeworth, and Haywood, and, in fact, Burney and Haywood's novels are even mentioned by Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*. Though it is not confirmed that she read *Dangerous Liasons*, it seems likely considering her vast library, and many scholars have tied that novel as an influence on Austen's *Lady Susan*. Whether or not she read all four of these novels, though, they all contributed to the creation of the stereotypical female villain of whom Austen was absolutely aware. Other novels have female characters with similar characteristics and were in the library of Austen, including Maria Edgeworth and Mary Hays (Steeves). The stereotypical character that emerged from these novels contained a few key characteristics: they were wealthy, independent, manipulative women with firm opinions and vanity. Occasionally their manipulation is more criminal, but at times it can also present as simple matchmaking. Above all though, this type of character thinks they know best. The name I would like to propose for this type of character is the Lady puppet master. I have chosen this working title to reference the two dominating characteristics: "lady" references the wealth and class of the character, while "puppet master" references the controlling and manipulative tendencies. Examining Burney, Choderlos de Laclos, Edgeworth, and Haywood's characters more closely will provide further clarification on the characteristics of the "Lady Puppet Master".

Haywood's *Love in Excess* was published in 1720, and her character Alovisa captures the characteristics of the Lady Puppet Master. Alovisa is determined to be both independent and wealthy from the start of the novel:

Alovisa, a Lady descended (by the Father's Side) from the Noble Family of the D' La Tours formerly Lord of Beujej, and (by her Mothers) from the equally

Illustrious House of Montmorency. The late Death of her Parents had left her Coheiress (with her Sister,) of a vast Estate.

Alovisa is descended from a noble family, so her wealth and estate come with influence and a title. Her inheritance, of which she is the master, makes her independent. Alovisa has no motivation or need to marry to maintain status or comfortability. Haywood also establishes Alovisa's elevated opinion of herself early on. As Alovisa considers other women interested in D'Elmont, the man she loves that is not pursuing her, Haywood writes that Alovisa "disdaining to be rank'd with those, whom her Vanity made her consider as infinitely her Inferiors, suffer'd her self to be agitated almost to Madness, between the two Extrems of Love and Indignation". Even though there is no indication that Alovisa is in any way superior to the other women in love with D'Elmont, she disdains to be amongst them and considers them "infinitely her inferiors". The extent of her own pride goes so far that the thought of being grouped with these women causes her to become agitated "almost to madness". With Alovisa's wealth, independence, and pride established, one of the few remaining characteristics is manipulative tendencies.

Alovisa's puppet mastery begins immediately; though she would like to keep up the appearance of following the traditions of the day and waiting to be pursued by D'Elmont, she orchestrates a secret delivery of an anonymous love letter. The love letter backfires-- D'Elmont never realizes it's from Alovisa and instead falls in love with another woman named Amena. Alovisa's master orchestration continues to accelerate after this failed attempt. She attempts again with a secretly delivered letter to control the situation and dissuade D'Elmont from loving Amena. Finally, Alovisa takes drastic measures to control the situation and reveals Amena and D'Elmont's relationship to Amena's father. Alovisa sends Amena's father into a rage, sharing lurid, falsified details, and then says to him, "think if you have no Friend in any Monastery

where you could send her till this Discourse, and her own foolish Folly be blown over. If you have not, I can recommend you to one at *St. Dennis*". After he agrees to her proposal, Alovisa further secures her plan by suggesting he not "take her Home, or see her before she goes ... for I know she will be prodigal of her *Promises* of Amendment, 'till she has prevail'd with your Fatherly Indulgence to permit her stay at *Paris*". Though this is not the only example of Alovisa's puppet mastery in the novel, the act of sending her romantic competition to a monastery where she will eventually become a nun is a diabolically calculated move. Eventually Alovisa does marry D'Elmont, but their marriage is unhappy. Alovisa must continue to scheme behind her rake of a husband's back, and eventually she dies after running into a sword. Though many of the main characters in the story are flawed, Alovisa is undoubtedly one of the villains of the story. Haywood's dramatic end for Alovisa too demonstrates the author's opinion of the character, and Alovisa's death marks her as a character not to model oneself after.

Another example of the Lady Puppet Master can be found in the novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, or *Dangerous Liaisons* written by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos and published in 1782. Written as an epistolary novel, readers have the opportunity to see inside the head of the conniving Marquis de Merteuil. As is customary for the Lady Puppet Master, the Marquise has an influential role in society. And, although she did rise in influence when she married, she maintained her position after her husband's death by pursuing education and curating a specific image. Her wealth, widow status, and prominence in society grant her a certain level of independence. The Marquis reveals her pride in a letter while responding to some claims by her former lover that hurt her pride, "But to pretend that I, who have taken so much pains, should not receive any benefit, after having raised myself so much above other women by my assiduous labours ...". The Marquis reveals that she "raised" herself with "assiduous labors", which clearly

indicates both a sense of superiority in her high status. Another sign of the Marquise's pride is found in a later letter. After the Viscount questions a plan of hers, she responds that his doubts, "convince me of my superiority over you! So you want to teach me how to conduct myself! Ah, my poor Valmont! what a distance there is still between you and me! No; all the pride of your sex would not be sufficient to fill up the interval that is between us". In a blow to the male ego, the Marquis states that not only does she see herself as superior to the Viscount, she also sees a major distance between the two of them. In addition to her clearly established vanity and pride, the Marquis hits another aspect of the Lady Puppet Master: independence. She specifically addresses her own independence and the benefit of being a widow in another letter to the Viscount:

Do you know, Vicomte, why I never married again? It was certainly not for lack of advantageous matches: it was solely so that no one should have the right to object to anything I might do. It was not even for fear that I might no longer be able to have my way, for I should always have succeeded in that in the end ...

Again the Marquis affirms her status and influence by mentioning her "advantageous matches", but she also states that her singleness essentially allowed her to do whatever she pleased. With that acknowledgement, though, she is sure to mention that even when people disagree with her she "should always have succeeded in the end". This final line indicates another aspect of the Lady Puppet Master: namely, influence and manipulation.

The novel is filled with the Marquis's constant puppet mastery; she spends the whole novel orchestrating an affair and destroying the reputation of others. The examples are too numerous to fit here, but one line from a letter to the Viscount captures her admission of intending to manipulate: "I am your good genius. You languish in absence from the beauty that

possesses your heart; I speak the word, and instantly you are with her: you wish to be revenged of a mischievous woman: I point out the place where you are to strike, and deliver her up to you..." In these few sentences, the Marquise admits, and indeed is even bragging about, her ability to control the Viscount. The players that Merteuil manipulates throughout the entirety of the novel all wind up ruined or dead. The Viscount and Merteuil eventually turn on each other, and both end up ruined. The Viscount dies, and, in true villain fashion, Merteuil contracts smallpox and runs, disgraced and pox covered, to a small town. Merteuil is an iconic female villain, she ticks every character trait of the Lady Puppet Master and exceeds expectations in every category.

These Lady Puppet Masters violent ends certainly seem far off from what Austen's Emma experiences, but examining more LPMs in literature will reveal the wide array of portrayals of these villainous ladies. An interesting example of the Lady Puppet Master comes from author Frances Burney, who not only occupied space in Austen's library, but her novels as well. Elinor Joddrel in Burney's *The Wanderer*, published the year before *Emma* in 1814, serves as the story's Lady Puppet Master. Joddrel, like all the other anti-heroines and antagonists so far, is a single heiress. Joddrel mentions in the novel that she is recently twenty-one, making her (because of her wealth) an independent, wealthy woman. Joddrel also demonstrates her independent spirit by constantly arguing philosophy with other characters in the book, breaking off an engagement in favor of freedom, and proposing to the man she loves. Elinor also demonstrates a sense of superiority; she constantly argues with the people around her and insists she knows best. She treats Ellis/Juliet as a servant after inviting her to her home. Elinor's pride shows the most in her debates when her condescension comes through often, "'And you, Ellis, you!' she cried, 'endowed with every power to set prejudice at defiance, and to shew and teach the world, that

woman and man are fellow-creatures, you, too, are coward enough to bow down, unresisting, to this thralldom?'"'. When anyone acts even slightly differently from what she would like, Elinor raises her voice and is called "coward".

The last element of the Lady Puppet Master formula, manipulation, is something Elinor wields in a strange and concerning way. Elinor's main method of manipulation, other than arguing of course, is attempting suicide. Elinor threatens to commit suicide numerous times in the novel; sometimes she has guns, sometimes knives, sometimes she just yells, and sometimes she sends impassioned letters. Whatever the scenario, though, Elinor most often uses her contemplations of suicide to scare the man she loves, Harleigh, into loving her. Though Harleigh never returns her affections, Elinor is able to successfully delay an engagement between Harleigh and Ellis for quite some time. The novel ends with Elinor somewhat reformed, and finally comprehending the danger of threatening suicide.

Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* will serve as the final source example of a "lady puppet master". Fittingly, this character is actually referred to as a "Lady" throughout the novel— Lady Delacour. Published in 1801, Edgeworth's *Belinda* is mentioned by the heroine of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Edgeworth's popular works are moral tales, and *Belinda* is no exception. Lady Delacour serves as the Lady Puppet Master throughout the novel, and her character certainly fits the description. Though readers will know that Lady Delacour's financial situation has fluctuated throughout her life, the novel establishes that Lady Delacour is a self-proclaimed "rich heiress". Lord Delacour, too, not only holds a high rank and title, but significant wealth as well. Even after many financial blunders, including Lady Delacour's own extravagant spending, the couple are saved from their numerous debts when Lord Delacour inherits money from a will. Lady Delacour, despite being married, is also clearly independent. She often boasts of her

control over her husband, and her lack of attachment to her daughter gives her the freedom to act independently: “You see I had nothing at home, either in the shape of husband or children, to engage my affections”. Though, it’s true, none of the other examples of independent women were married during the action of the novel, Lady Delacour clearly does not let her husband dictate her actions. The narrator makes this clear in this description of her: “a lady, who would not yield an iota of power to her husband.” In addition to her wealth and independence, Lady Delacour is overflowing with vanity. The word is often used to describe her, both by Belinda, Lady Delacour herself, and more. Mrs. Delacour states that “Lady Delacour is too vain ever to have a friend ... she has more vanity than ever woman had.” Lady Delacour’s vanity is accompanied by a general mistreatment of people throughout the novel, making her an unlikable, if complex, character.

For the puppet mastery of Lady Delacour, readers of Edgeworth’s novel need not look too far. Lady Delacour reveals to Belinda her history of manipulation started long ago when she agreed to marry Lord Delacour in order to make another of her suitors jealous. After her marriage, her manipulation continued as she endeavored to control her husband: “My lord’s case was desperate. Kill or cure was my humane or prudent maxim. I determined to try the poison of jealousy, by way of an alternative”. Lady Delacour’s reputation is widely known, and Belinda quickly becomes aware of her flirtations with other men. In Lady Delacour’s long explanation of her own history, Belinda learns that Lady Delacour’s flirtatious reputation began as a method of manipulation. Lady Delacour states that in making her husband jealous, “The poor man was cured of his obstinacy, and became stark mad with jealousy. Then indeed I had some hopes of him; for a madman can be managed, a fool cannot. In a month’s time I made him quite docile.” In addition to Lady Delacour’s manipulation of her husband, she also manipulates numerous

characters throughout the novel through her status and oft-touted “wit.” Additionally, Lady Delacour uses her illness to manipulate people around her: she reveals the secret of her illness to bring people into her confidence, garners pity for herself, etc.. Through her transformative friendship with Belinda and the discovery that her injury was not the cancer she thought, Lady Delacour is wholly transformed by the end of the novel. Her person has changed to focus on the domestic, and the final scene of the novel shows Lady Delacour happily reunited with her husband and daughter and orchestrating the domestic felicitude of her friends. Lady Delacour’s transformation is a clear indictment of her former focus on a life outside of home and family.

Austen’s own example of a Lady Puppet Master character is infamous—Lady Catherine DeBourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*. Lady Catherine certainly checks the first box of wealth. Her sprawling grounds at Rosings are evidence of her fortune. Lady Catherine is also a widow, which gives her a larger measure of independence. Throughout Lady Catherine’s appearances in the novel it is clear that the only person who has any say in her life is Lady Catherine herself. Lady Catherine’s vanity and pride are shown in the way she treats others, and it is also obvious in many of her interactions with Elizabeth. When Elizabeth is about to meet Lady Catherine for the first time, Mr. Collins tells her that “Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved.” Lady Catherine is very concerned with maintaining class and social order, and her rank puts her above everyone she regularly interacts with. One of Lady Catherine’s most well-known lines, “Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted” is shouted at Elizabeth when she believes she is engaged to Mr. Darcy. It’s clear that Lady Catherine believes herself better than everyone else in the novel.

In addition to all of the other qualifications for the Lady Puppet Master, Lady Catherine also manipulates the people around her. She has a clear hold on Mr. Collins who follows every

piece of advice she gives him with intense diligence. Lady Catherine attempts to manipulate Darcy by grooming him to marry her daughter; she constantly talks about their impending marriage in mixed company and often mentions that it was the wish of her dead sister, Darcy's mother. The most egregious example of attempted manipulation was ultimately unsuccessful, but it was a clear attempt at manipulation. When Lady Catherine hears a rumor that Elizabeth is engaged to Mr. Darcy, she immediately rides to Elizabeth's home and forces her into a conversation. First, she attempts to degrade Elizabeth by stating how ridiculous their engagement would be. She continues to insult Elizabeth and attempts to dissuade her from an engagement with her nephew by telling her that their engagement would degrade Mr. Darcy. Lady Catherine also tries to force Elizabeth into an agreement with wielding her title and rank over her. Even though this attempt at manipulation was ultimately unsuccessful, it is clear evidence that Lady Catherine is used to manipulating and orchestrating the lives of the people around her.

With the stereotype of the Lady Puppet Master established (a wealthy, independent, manipulative woman with vanity), we should assess whether Austen's *Emma* fits into this stereotype. After all, the characters described above are villains while Emma is a heroine. But this view of Emma's character comes from Austen's feminist, nuanced take on the Lady Puppet Master trope. Austen transforms the stereotype by revolutionizing its misogynistic roots. Austen begins the novel by affirming that Emma matches one qualification of the Lady Puppet Master: wealth. Emma is "handsome, clever, and rich... with very little to distress or vex her" (3). Emma has a fortune and comfortable home that allow her the same assets and influence of the other Lady Puppet Masters. Though her father is still living, Emma has full access to their home at Hartfield and no limitations on her spending. Austen also makes it clear that Mr. Woodhouse's estate is not entailed, so Emma is in no danger of losing her fortune.

Emma, like the other women discussed, is independent. Again, despite her father living, Emma is her own master. In fact, the novel opens with the last person who could have limited Emma's independence marrying and moving out of her home. Mrs. Taylor's marriage is in many ways representative of Emma's entrance into responsible adulthood. Emma's independence is also seen in her control of her home Hartfield. As the true mistress of the house, Emma manages invitations to guests, accepts invitations to parties, handles charity, schedules and plans menus, and handles any other needs that arise in the home. She wields authority as the head of the home, even with her father there. When Harriet asks Emma why she is not married, Emma responds, "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" (77). Emma is happy with her wealth and station, and asserts she's not in want of any material position of possession. Later in the same conversation, Emma also mentions she is only interested in a marriage with love. Emma feels content with her current station and independence. This wealth and independence sets Emma apart amongst Jane Austen's heroines. When discussing *Emma*, her wealth is a crucial part of any analysis of her character. Many scholars have written entire papers on the implication of that wealth, and according to Robert Hume's chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Emma* titled "Money and Rank," Emma's fortune as listed in the novel would have equated in 2015 to "between £3,000,000 and £4,500,000" (52). Calculating the difference between the pound and the US dollar and adjusting for inflation, today Emma's fortune would fall between a whopping \$4,700,000 and \$7,150,000. Her multimillion dollar inheritance certainly qualifies her as an heiress.

Her wealth and independence must exist along with other traits in order to cement her as an LPM—pride is another crucial element. Emma's sense of superiority is perhaps less obvious

than other previously mentioned characters, but it is a motivator for many of her actions. Certain characters in the novel expose Emma's pride in her status and rank, like the Martin family and the Campbells. When Harriet questions how Emma could not know Mr. Martin when Mr. Martin knows Emma, Emma responds:

The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is, therefore, in one sense, as much above my notice as in every other he is below it. (25)

Emma shares with Harriet that the rank of the Martins means she cannot associate with them. Essentially, lower class people are only worthy of her attention if she can benefit them. Even though Emma couches this blow by saying that Mr. Martin is "in one sense, as much above my notice as in every other he below it," her true meaning and thinking is clear. Emma's tricky wording only serves to make her pride less apparent (25). Another example of Emma's vanity is her relationship with the Coles, a family in Highbury with new money. When Emma learns her friends have been invited to a party at the Coles, she feels conflicted. Emma believes that it's an overstep for the Coles to send Emma an invitation, but her pride is hurt by not being included. Eventually, the Coles do send an invitation and Emma is able to overlook the breach of protocol because of the pains they took to secure her father's comfort. Emma also shows her pride in her interactions with Jane Fairfax. In all her interactions with Jane, Emma admits to not paying her the attention she is due, "Emma was sorry;—to have to pay civilities to a person she did not like through three long months!—to be always doing more than she wished, and less than she ought!" (148). The thought of a young woman of her rank coming to visit distresses Emma, and Emma

has no real reason for her dislike. Mr. Knightley accuses Emma of being jealous of Jane's accomplishments, which I would argue is the true answer for her dislike—Emma's pride is hurt when Jane is around because Jane's accomplishments humble Emma.

Emma's pride and vanity established, the final key to the Lady Puppet Master is the manipulation. Aside from Emma's everyday control of her life and schedule, one way that Emma controls those around her is through matchmaking. And, indeed, this manipulation has been the subject of many scholarly critiques and explorations of *Emma*, with Eugene Goodheart writing "Emma is willful, manipulative, an arranger or rather a misarranger of other people's lives" (589). This "misarranging" of people's lives is seen at the start of the novel, Emma claims to have set-up Mr. Weston and Mrs. Weston, and because of her enjoyment in making the match, Emma decides she must find a match for Mr. Elton. After meeting Harriet, Emma quickly decides that Harriet and Mr. Elton would be a perfect pair, but because Harriet is already in love with Mr. Martin, Emma manipulates Harriet into both rejecting a proposal from Mr. Martin and falling for Mr. Elton. Emma admits to her control over Harriet when Mr. Knightley confronts her, "as to the refusal itself, I will not pretend to say that I might not influence her a little" (58). But Emma is surely understating her influence here. Emma essentially wrote the rejection letter for Harriet even though Harriet initially intended to accept. Emma willfully ignores Harriet's desire in favor of attempting her own plan. Even after seeing Harriet's joy with Mr. Martin, Emma is still resolved to squash her dreams: "They remained but a few minutes together, as Miss Woodhouse must not be kept waiting; and Harriet then came running to her with a smiling face, and in a flutter of spirits, which Miss Woodhouse hoped very soon to compose" (27). Emma does successfully compose Harriet's spirits, in an egregious display of selfishness. Additionally, Mr. Knightley fervently tries to get Emma to discontinue her relationship with and

control over Harriet, but Emma refuses. By the end of the novel, Emma has encouraged Harriet in and out of love with three men, and has had to repair Harriet's broken heart because of her mistakes multiple times. Emma treats Harriet like a puppet, and only truly regrets her actions when she fears Harriet may be in love with Mr. Knightley, whom Emma loves.

Emma fits the formula of the Lady Puppet Master, but somehow, Austen's Emma is still a character that readers root for. There is no moral ending with Emma running into a sword, or disgraced to a village with pox on her face, or even sadly resigned to having an inferior niece-in-law. Ultimately, Emma achieves a happy ending without sacrificing the some of the feminist tendencies that other authors demonized. Austen's portrayal of a nuanced woman, with real and troubling flaws, but also very real attributes, allows the audience to see the character as a whole person rather than a stereotype. Throughout the novel Emma is able to learn from her mistakes and soften some of her faults in a pattern that seems inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote, "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves" (69) Indeed, the feminism that Austen is espousing and was reading at the time is shown through Emma's character arc. Emma learns the danger of manipulating others, whether male or female, and instead learns how to have power over herself, her situation, and occasionally her tongue.

There are several elements of Austen's *Emma* that contribute to the transformation of the Lady Puppet Master stereotype. The first is that, although Emma is manipulative, there are a few male characters that are shown to be manipulative throughout the novel as well. Although this does not excuse the behavior, I believe that describing the manipulative tendencies of men alongside Emma's manipulation decodes the behavior as a strictly feminine evil. Though it is immoral, it is, unfortunately, a human tendency at times. Frank Churchill and Mr. Woodhouse are two of the male manipulators, and though Frank Churchill is a bit more unlikable, he is not

fully an antagonist. Frank is constantly manipulating people around him; he desires time with Jane and occasionally wants to make her jealous, so he lies to Emma and flirts with her under false pretenses. In fact, almost everything Frank Churchill does in *Highbury* is a manipulation. His influence, too, is attributed by Mr. Knightley to Emma's impropriety toward Miss Bates. Frank, though, like Emma, is redeemed somewhat at the end of the novel when he explains his actions to his stepmother. The letter, which is present in its whole in the novel, highlights Frank's selfishness towards his family, Emma, and even Jane. But all parties (excepting a still hesitant Mr. Knightley) agree to forgive Frank's selfishness in light of his clear affection for Jane. His end is a happy one, resulting in his marriage to Jane Fairfax.

Mr. Woodhouse's manipulation is more subtle and is treated comically, but it manipulation nonetheless. Throughout the novel, Mr. Woodhouse attempts to control what the people around him do, especially in regards to their marriages, the food they eat, and the hours they keep. One cannot help but wonder if Emma's penchant for manipulation is an inherited trait. Perhaps it was nurtured into her by her overbearing father? And though Mr. Woodhouse's suggestions are largely ignored, Emma takes great pains to accommodate his preferences. His influence has had a great impact on Emma, who has never left *Highbury* because of his concerns for her health. Mr. Woodhouse's own unique brand of attempted manipulation especially, which is often accompanied by the advice of his physician Mr. Perry, normalizes the small ways that all genders can attempt to manipulate the people around them. Mr. Woodhouse's particularity even causes Emma to think that he may prevent her marriage to Mr. Knightley, and it takes the positive effusions of Mr. Knightley, Emma, Mrs. Weston, and Isabella to bring him around to the idea. By including these two male manipulators, Austen uncodes manipulation and selfishness as female—men as well as women fall prey to this particular flaw. Emma, too, is arguably the only

one of the three that really comes to terms with her own selfishness. Though many forgive Frank, his letter is mostly excuses without real accountability. Mr. Woodhouse, too, never learns the error of his ways. Until the last, his emotional manipulation impacts Emma as she attempts to set a date for her wedding: “he was not happy. Nay, he appeared so much otherwise, that his daughter’s courage failed” (439). It’s not until Mrs. Weston’s chicken house is robbed that Mr. Woodhouse finally consents happily to the wedding— he looks to the wedding with joy now, not at the prospect of his daughter’s joy, but from a selfish desire for the safety the presence of his son-in-law provides him. Emma’s flaws, therefore, are not just universal temptations, but they set her apart because of her ability to grow from them.

A second way that Austen dismantles the stereotype is through the nuanced portrayal of Emma. Her flaws are clear, but so too are her attributes. Though Barbara Z. Thaden argues that “Emma was not intended to be or become a sympathetic character,” she has certainly garnered the sympathy of readers for over two-hundred years, and largely due to her positive attributes. Even before what many consider her transformation, Emma is shown to be very loyal and caring to her friends and family. Readers constantly see Emma planning for her father’s needs, attending to Mrs. Weston when Frank Churchill slights her by not visiting, and going out of her way to apologize to Miss Bates when she offends her. Emma also acts as a peacemaker between her brother-in-law and father when her sister’s family visits. Even in the midst of Knightley’s confession of love, Emma is concerned about Harriet’s feelings and broken heart. Emma’s charity towards the less fortunate is also an attribute that Austen is quick to praise in detail: “Emma was very compassionate; and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse” (79). Emma’s charity goes beyond money; she also is generous with her time and attention. Austen is clear to

praise Emma for her charity, and makes it obvious that this charity comes from the goodness of her heart and not a desire for praise or attention. She continues by writing that, “She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as goodwill” (79). Her patience and compassion with those less fortunate is also clear, as Austen says she “understood their ways”. By writing a character with a mix of bad and good qualities, Austen supplies her readers with a fully rounded human. Austen’s Emma is not a one-dimensional woman, demonized because of her manipulation. Yes, Emma is manipulative and vain, but that does not make her wholly evil.

Austen also dismantles the stereotype by allowing Emma to grow from her mistakes without truly altering her character. By the end of the novel, Emma has experienced things that lead her to realize the error of some of her ways. Emma’s pride is revealed to her by Mr. Knightley who tells her, “badly done, indeed!” when she injures Miss Bates at the Box Hill picnic (339). She also learns the error of her puppet mastery when she discovers Harriet is in love with Mr. Knightley: “How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had led her on!” Emma recognizes the full weight of the damage she has done to Harriet by manipulating and controlling her (370). Ultimately, Emma is even happy for Harriet when she marries Mr. Martin. Emma learns the error of her vanity and manipulation.

But how does Austen destroy the stereotype if Emma simply grows from her mistakes? Is that a true dismantling? Or is Austen just advocating for a more complex view of women? Though Austen’s Emma certainly learns from her mistakes and admits the error of her ways,

Emma maintains some elements of her character that prove Austen is not demonizing Emma's authority and control. Though Emma does marry at the end of the novel, Mr. Knightley is certainly not her master. And though some readers may see Mr. Knightley's censure of Emma at Box Hill as a paternal, belittling critique, the truly necessary (because Emma does not feel the unfairness of her comments until Mr. Knightley points them out) exhortation of his friend actually shows that he views Emma as a fallible human. His actions go against the advice of Dr. Fordyce, heavily criticized and quoted by Mary Wollstonecraft for his totally irrational view of women and angelic creatures: "They are timid and want to be defended. They are frail; O do not take advantage of their weakness" (qtd in Wollstonecraft, 104). By censuring her as opposed to blindly praising her, Mr. Knightley is demonstrating his view of Emma's strength to bear censure. Austen's Emma does not submit to Mr. Knightley. Mr. Knightley certainly advises Emma along the way, and Emma eventually learns from his advice, but Emma is ultimately won over and changed by her experience and own reason. Even Mr. Knightley acknowledges that his attempts to direct Emma over the years have not been effectual: "Nature gave you understanding:—Miss Taylor gave you principles... I do not believe I did you any good" (419). Emma's growth, therefore, is attributed to her own *reason* and the moral instruction of her governess, not Mr. Knightley.

In the end too, Austen sends a clear signal that Emma has an equal partnership with Mr. Knightley: the two settle not in his home of Donwell Abbey, but in her home of Hartfield. Following the lead of Wollstonecraft who wrote, "I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man" (39) Emma's relationship with Mr. Knightley is clearly a partnership. In fact, the settling of Emma and Mr. Knightley at Hartfield comes as an

idea from Mr. Knightley first. Austen makes it clear, too, that this decision is a sacrifice on his part, with Emma acknowledging that, “he must be sacrificing a great deal of independence” by moving to Hartfield (408). Emma’s end is unlike that of those other Lady Puppet Masters: there is no sickness or death to punish her for her behavior, and certainly no push to a new, domestic life. No, Emma’s life will retain its former independence, with Mr. Knightley being the one to sacrifice independence in their marriage. In fact, Emma’s situation changes in an entirely positive way in respect to her situation, as she will now bear a lessened domestic load in the care of her father. In convincing her father of the benefit of her marriage to Mr. Knightley, Emma asks Mr. Woodhouse “Who was so useful to him, who so ready to write his letters, who so glad to assist him?” (424). Emma anticipates that Mr. Knightley will be willing to assist her father in his needs. Emma also states that she will have “Such a partner in all those duties and cares to which time must be giving increase to melancholy” (408). Emma views Knightley’s move to Hartfield as one that will assist not just her father, but *her*. She foresees Knightley as a “partner” in those domestic affairs which have occupied her attention so much. And, of course, the term “partner” does denote an equality in the relationship. This coincides with Mellor’s assessment: “Throughout her novels, Jane Austen endorses Wollstonecraft’s belief that the best woman is a rational woman, a woman of sense as well as sensibility, who seeks a psychologically egalitarian marriage” (Mellor 18). Knightley’s move to Hartfield signifies him as a “partner” in her domestic concerns; he will be residing in *her* place of residence, forgoing his own independence. All of these factors certainly indicate that he views Emma as an equal partner. By allowing Emma to settle into her happy ending without sacrificing her control (which she states at the beginning of the novel she exerts more control over Hartfield than any wife over their home), Austen gives a new perspective to the Lady Puppet master.

While many scholars have explored feminist interpretations of *Emma* and some scholars have written about stereotypes in the novel, this exploration of Emma as combined with this Lady Puppet Master is unique to me. Anderson does affirm the point that, while Emma grows she does not inherently change: “that Emma succeeds in circumventing her society’s treasured pitfalls for women with her selfhood intact accentuates at once Emma’s exceptionalism and the treachery of the social order all women inhabit” (Anderson 198). Her point, too, emphasizes the unique strength of Emma’s character and the unfortunate circumstances of “social order” that women faced at the time. Pamela Vazquez interprets *Emma* in light of the feminism of Wollstonecraft with the help of Leroy Smith’s *Jane Austen and the Drama of Women*. Her piece affirms that Wollstonecraft’s ideas appear in *Emma*: “Austen... just defended women’s rational capacities. The study of *Emma* thus shows the degree of the influence of the eighteenth century feminist ideas on Austen and her representation of women...” (Vazquez 40). Vazquez does miss the mark though, arguing that Emma’s marriage is proof of her lack of self-sufficiency. While Mr. Knightley does offer to share in the domestic load, that offer does not take away from Emma’s clear capability to run Hartfield that is shown throughout the novel. Vazquez and other critics do acknowledge Austen’s *Emma* as a feminist text, but interpreting the text as a response to the stereotypes in 18th century literature helps contextualize analysis of the novel in response to Wollstonecraft even further.

Austen effectively shows that the demonized characteristics of manipulation and superiority, the flaws so often pointed out in Emma, are flaws that both men and women can have. Emma’s growth and good qualities alongside her flaws show that the popular villain trope lacks the nuance of real life women. Emma’s happy ending and reform show audiences and other writers alike that change and growth can occur, and strong-willed women need not submit to

men in order to be happy and fulfilled. The Lady Puppet Master stereotype that became popular in 17th century certainly reflects the culture towards women at the time. Jane Austen, with the help of the philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft revolutionizes the portrayal of women in novels and influences the future of the Lady Puppet Master stereotype in literature. Famous characters like Dickens' Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations* are both chillingly manipulative and complex. Emma paved the way for a new brand of heroine, and Jane Austen's writing certainly influenced novelists for generations. Austen gave her characters the dignity of being written as rational creatures, a sentiment that Wollstonecraft certainly would appreciate considering her own words: "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone" (9) *Emma* certainly ends the novel as a rational creature.

Chapter 2:

Female Friendship & the Female Gaze in *Emma*.

Given the complexity and richness of the redemptive arc and story of Emma Woodhouse and considering the rich tradition and popularity of adapting Austen's novels, it's worth exploring if the depth of Emma's story is present in adaptations. True, Austen acknowledges the potential for Emma to be unlikable, and, too, filmmakers have a tendency to want likable heroes and heroines. Nonetheless, Emma's story has been adapted in various ways over the years. In each adaptation, the titular character is approached differently. I chose to examine the 2020 *Emma*. for a few reasons— it is highly divisive among Jane Austen fans (self-labeled as “Austenites”), it is the first period Austen adaptation written *and* directed by women, and because it has a unique, feminist approach to the story.

The Focus Features' adaptation of *Emma* starring Anya Taylor-Joy approaches the source material in a different way than many of the adaptations preceding it. The film has bright pops of pastel colors appear though both the interior sets and costumes, a unique *Peter and the Wolf* inspired soundtrack interspersed with sacred-harp hymns, and a lively, humorous energy suffused throughout (“The Music of the Heart”). Though all Jane Austen's novels could be classified as comedies, period pieces rarely emphasize the humorous aspects of the work in favor of a moody, romantic vibe. The high energy of the production fits well with Emma's youth and vitality, but the critical aspects of her character that are crucial for an adaptation to highlight (in

order for the significance of the nuanced, revolutionized puppet master to character to shine) lie within the portrayal of Emma's personality— and even more so, in her penchant for manipulation. An interesting technique used by the filmmakers of *Emma*. helps to illustrate Emma's duality: yes, she is spoiled and manipulative, but she also has the capacity for great kindness. De Wilde understood the key balance to strike according to her interview with producer Focus Features:

‘By letting Emma be unlikeable at times, we can watch her with amusement and want to strangle her at the same time,’ explains de Wilde. Catton adds that Emma ‘is exemplary because she makes mistakes and we all do, and I think a version of feminism which says, “Look at this faultless woman, you should be more like her,” is kind of unhelpful’ (“Autumn de Wilde Lets *Emma* Be *EMMA*. For Women's History Month”).

In scene after scene, moments of Emma's intensity or arrogance are followed by moments of her softer side. This serves as a reminder that Emma is not *just* prideful and arrogant; she is also caring and smart.

Additionally, though, while the audience can clearly see Emma's attributes, one notable diversion from other adaptations is this film's approach to her flaws. Anya Taylor-Joy's flaws as Emma are dramatically noticeable. From her very distinct mannerisms as Emma, her nose often tilted up toward the sky, her curt directions to her staff, and her lack of acknowledgement of characters like the Martins, all highlight her pride and vanity. When Harriet and Mr. Martin interact in front of Emma, she continues walking past them a few paces with her nose in the air and her eyes focused directly ahead, completely ignoring the man to her side. She parks herself a few feet away, back toward her new friend interacting with the farmer. Some adaptations try to downplay her faults by emphasizing other characteristics to soften her. In the 2009 BBC mini-series starring Romola Garai, for example, the series begins the adaptation with the on-screen death of Emma's mother. A young, toddler-age Emma is even seen looking over her mother's

casket with her devastated and nervous father. Additionally, Garai's Emma lacks some of Taylor-Joy's refinement in favor of highlighting Garai's youth. Garai is shown matchmaking first as a teenager— her first victims being her sister and brother-in-law. In adding this scene, Emma's matchmaking now seems as if it's a leftover element of her childhood. Two professors of English make compelling statements about this phenomenon within the adaptation: "this Emma seeks not correct behavior, not an ordered society with herself at the top, but the distraction of fun, having not yet outgrown her toys" (Greenfield and Troost). Too, Garai's mannerisms are much more youthful than Taylor-Joy's deliberate, precise mannerisms. Garai often waves exuberantly at her friends, it's endearing and goofy, and decidedly childish. In highlighting the early death of her mother and her youth, the 2009 adaptation softens her flaws. Though they still exist, the intensity of her flaws are not nearly as dramatic.

De Wilde chose to fully embrace Emma's flaws. And, though they are more clear in this adaptation than any other, she does still build Emma as a rounded human. The movie does depict her flaws, but it also highlights her attributes. She is not just a vain shrew, she is also a caring friend. A pattern of showing the duality of Emma's character in a cycle begins from the first scene. Autumn de Wilde's 2020 adaptation of *Emma* begins with Austen's opening line: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (1:01). Following the on screen text (which just so happens to be pink), the audience is immediately oriented— it is clear exactly why Emma has been able to live with little distress. A young male servant holding a lantern has to shake a flower off of his head that he must stand under to ensure Emma has light exactly where she needs it. As light operatic music underscores the scene, Emma serenely points out each flower to be cut in her greenhouse. A maid receives a curt and abrupt, "Not that one. The next," when she almost cuts the wrong flower. Each little detail reveals the flawlessly smooth household Emma is attempting

to maintain, as described in the novel. The workers behind the scenes bend over backwards to please their mistress, quickly nipping in the bud anything that could vex her.

Following this abrupt opening, Emma is immediately softened for audiences in the next scene. Anya-Taylor Joy's voice as Emma breaks and is weak, a stark contrast to her confident tone with her servants. As a single tear rolls down her cheek as she asks Miss Westin through the door, "How am I to bear it when you are gone?" Emma then tearfully presents the carefully curated bouquet to her Governess, Miss Westin, for her wedding. As she hands over the flowers, Emma tells her she has been, "Little short of a mother in affection". Clearly, the departure of her much beloved governess is distressing to her. The duality of Emma is already seen in the first two scenes of the film, with less than three minutes of action. Emma is established first as the controlling mistress of the household, and then rounded by her care for and vulnerability with Miss Westin. Though Emma clearly wields authority in this house, her youth is highlighted in the clear emphasis on her tender attachment to her governess.

But, indeed, the back-and-forth from likable to unlikable and from manipulative to caring is never more clear than when Emma is dealing with Harriet. It's not surprising that this would be the case, given that Harriet is the main object of Emma's manipulation tactics throughout the novel. Even in the midst of her manipulation, de Wilde takes pains to show the complexity of Emma and Harriet's friendship. But what is the significance of this back-and-forth? Yes, it does illustrate that Emma is a nuanced character, but many Austenites would argue that every period adaptation of *Emma* at least attempts to show the titular lady as a fully-rounded character (how could you avoid it with the significance of her character arc driving the plot?). The true impetus of *Emma*. is the relationship between the women and, particularly, the relationship between Emma and Harriet. Though her romance with Mr. Knightley is still present, the driving relationship is that of Emma and Harriet. In focusing on Emma's relationships with her female

companions, this adaptation portrays multiple nuanced, female relationships. From the twisted friendship between Harriett and Emma, the competition between Emma and Jane, and the affectionate relationship between Emma and Mrs. Taylor, Autumn de Wilde's *Emma* adaptation triumphs in its empowering display of the complexity of relationship dynamics between female friends/frenemies.

The first scene between Emma and Mrs. Taylor, therefore, signifies more than just the highlight of Emma's nuanced Lady Puppet Mastery, it also serves the purpose of emphasizing the deep connection and love between Mrs. Taylor and Emma Woodhouse. The intimacy between the two women is the cause of the first tears in the film, not a relationship with a man. This poignant scene, with the aforementioned single tear rolling down the cheek, also foreshadows Emma's newfound independence and loneliness— a driving factor in her relationship with Harriet.

Emma's relationship with Harriet becomes the driving force of the film not only because their interactions together take up more screen time than any other pairing in the film, but also because the transformative nature of the relationship is highlighted in almost every interaction between the two. This film puts Harriet's influence and friendship with Emma at the forefront— it is the clear impetus of Emma's character arc. When Harriet arrives on screen for the first time in a Red Riding Hood-esque cloak, there's a *Peter and The Wolf* inspired soundtrack behind her. One cannot help but imagine that, as Harriet appears before Emma, the audience is to imagine Emma as a wolf. During their following interaction, Emma is all composure and eloquence, Harriet sitting next to her trembles and shifts nervously. It is in this scene that Emma says one of her most infamous lines. After Emma warns Harriet about the importance of keeping good company given the mystery of her parentage, Harriet mentions the Martin family. Emma states that, "The Martin's are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do.

A degree or two lower and I could be of help to them, but a farmer can need none of my help. And he is therefore as much above my notice as he is below it.” Almost a direct quote from the book, Emma remains, though it seems difficult, upbeat in her delivery of this line to Harriet. She’s feigning perhaps some kind of sympathy for Harriet’s inevitable regret at the prospect of losing her friendship with the Martins. And, indeed, this is what Emma clearly intends. This is her first true attempt at manipulation of Harriet— she seeks to improve the company Harriet keeps.

Though Emma never directly orders Harriet around, her wishes are obvious. Her reflection on the Martins, too, shows Emma’s vanity and misapplied logic. By stating that if he were “a degree or two lower and I could be of help”, Emma is not-so-subtly highlighting her own charity work. But her final statement on the matter—“he is therefore as much above my notice as he is below it”—reveals her clear lack of understanding and classism. She is attempting to control her image to be seen as charitable, maintain her status class distinction, and clearly set the precedent that the Martin family is below both Emma and Harriet.

Later, after Robert Martin has proposed to Harriet, Emma’s disdain for Mr. Martin is clear, represented in the way she casually lolls his thoughtful proposal letter in front of her companion; the same letter Harriet has been lifting with tender care. Harriet’s distress at discovering that Emma believes she should refuse Robert Martin is obvious. Yet Emma persists calmly, pretending she is not going to tell Harriet how to answer while still making her feelings clear. Harriet’s drop in mood from her exultation when announcing the proposal to the defeated, deflated way she questioningly states she will refuse him shows that Emma has manipulated the situation to her will, ignoring the feelings of all others involved. And, aside from Harriet’s obvious disappointment, the audience sees another moment that affirms the cruelty of Emma’s interference during an interaction with Mr. Knightley. Emma (in a briefly impressive moment) loyally sticks up for Harriet, but stubbornly ignores Mr. Knightley when he reveals troubling

information about Mr. Elton— the object of Emma’s matchmaking to Harriet. Emma lies to Mr. Knightley, saying that she wishes to keep Harriet for herself, attempting to manipulate Knightley into ignoring her matchmaking. After attempting to reconcile with Emma, Mr. Knightley, in a romantic, candle-lit moment punctuated with happiness by the niece in Emma’s arms and their laughter, Emma shows the endearing side of herself that keeps viewers on her side when she inquires about whether Mr. Martin was disappointed. When Mr. Knightley states that, “A man cannot be more so” in a serious tone before exiting the room, Emma appears to briefly ponder this before literally shrugging off the guilt, indicating that she is far from her final form. And, again, it foreshadows that it is not the words or musings of Mr. Knightley that will ultimately inspire change in Emma.

Again, this scene emphasizing Emma’s thoughtless disregard for the feelings of those “beneath” her is punctuated by a moment of selfless care for Harriet. Emma goes to visit a sick Harriet, and once she has composed herself after the initial shock from Harriet’s “disheveled” appearance, the audience sees another glimpse of Emma’s tenderness. Though she clearly sees the ridiculousness of Harriet’s school-girl-crush motivated dedication to transcribing Mr. Elton’s Sunday sermons, she nevertheless offers to transcribe the sermon Harriet will miss in her absence. This scene and Emma’s offer to assist Harriet even in a task she sees as silly show a selflessness that endears Emma to the audience, and also again shows that, though she does not always treat her well, Emma does care for Harriet.

When the scene cuts, Emma interrupts a parlor game at the Goddard school to tearfully break the news to Harriet. The parlor game that precedes this conversation shows Harriet giddy and laughing, and ultimately the game leaves her with a face covered in sand. This moment reinforces to the audience the innocence, youth, and naivety of Emma’s young friend. Just as Harriet bends to retrieve a coin out of the sand with her mouth, Emma is revealed behind her

looking on in horror. Emma's horror is, presumably, because of the lack of decorum in this game that's left Harriet's face covered in sand. In her sandy giddiness, audiences are reminded of the lengths Emma took to manipulate Harriet and how innocent, young, and undeserving of pain Harriet is. This scene also rounds Harriet for audiences as well; rarely do adaptations give glimpses of Harriet within Miss Goddard's school. Regardless of the silliness of the activity, this glimpse into the innocent past-times of these boarding school girls gives depth to Harriet's life apart from Emma. Harriet, therefore, becomes not just the friend of Emma, but, too, the delightful companion and silly parlor game player.

When Emma finally reveals to Harriet that Mr. Elton proposed to her, they sit side-by-side on a bed in Harriet's room, emphasizing their intimacy and mimicking modern teen sleepover confessions. Still sandy-faced and looking quite sheepish, Harriet looks to Emma for clarity. Initially, Emma seems to avoid eye contact with Harriet and mentions in an annoyed tone that Mr. Elton sought to "aggrandize himself". The remark in conjunction with Emma's posture oriented away from Harriet shows the audience that Emma is avoiding responsibility; she's thinking about her anger with Elton to squash her own shame for her actions. Indeed, it causes the audience to wonder if Emma will take, or even feel, any responsibility for Harriet's heartbreak. This moment seems to be another example of Emma's manipulation—until Emma turns to Harriet for the first time in the scene and says, "Harriet, you might never have thought of him but for me". Her face shows true remorse, and Harriet responds with nothing but kindness for Emma—letting her completely off the hook. In the end, the audience sees the complexity of Emma, and Emma has shown for the first time that she is able to take accountability, although truly facing little repercussions aside from her own guilt. This confession, too, is more clearly motivated by her care for Harriet than any outside force.

In the very next scene between Harriet and Emma, less than a minute in the time of the film with just one brief scene separating this moment from the tearful confession, the two are riding in carriage together. Harriet bemoans, in a child-like whine, that Mr. Elton is away and the curate's sermons don't live up to Elton's standards. She begins to read a sermon of Mr. Elton's aloud from her own dutiful notes when an annoyed looking Emma sharply cuts her off, "Enough about Mr. Elton". Harriet turns to Emma, scanning her face, but Emma simply drops her smile. Harriet promptly throws her formerly beloved diary of sermon transcripts out of the carriage and into a river, indicating to viewers once again that Harriet is under Emma's thumb. In an analysis of female competition in *Emma*, Lyman stated that, "Emma's female relationships are caught in a shifting web of competitive behavior and alliance, which strikes the reader as compelling but also undeniably accurate" (Lyman 70). This interpretation is certainly highlighted in the back-and-forth between Harriet and Emma. Though the confession scene showcased Emma's adaptability and possibly her growth, this scene following so quickly highlights Emma's somewhat calloused behavior and impatience toward her young, broken-hearted friend. Emma's curtness towards Harriet shows that Emma still has a long way to go.

When Harriet runs into the Martin family in the Haberdashery, the audience sees Emma in the role of puppet master once again. Harriet is obviously in immediate distress conversing with the two Misses Martins; her brow is furrowed and her eyes are brimming with tears. Harriet is trained at this point; when the Martin sisters ask Harriet if she could visit, Harriet's immediate, almost conditioned response is to quickly turn to Emma to give permission. Only after Emma slowly nods does Harriet answer the question. Later, when Mr. Martin follows after she races out of the shop, Emma runs to the window to watch the interaction. Emma is clearly bothered by the secondary location because she no longer has control over the interaction. After the scene cuts, Emma and Harriet are seen sitting in an open carriage a few hundred feet from the Martin home.

Emma again controls Harriet by giving her explicit instructions on how to conduct herself, micromanaging her behavior down to the appropriate length of time for the visit. Harriet is forced to walk the rest of the way to the Martin home, presumably because Emma's sense of superiority will not allow her to be any nearer to the Martin home. The picture of Emma alone in the carriage, facing away from the house sends a clear message, the Martins are a family to whom Emma feels she is too far superior to even look at their home. Emma remaining stationary with a brake underneath the wheel of the carriage long after Harriet exits the shot sends another message to the viewers regarding the level of control Emma has over Harriet. Not only is she giving her directions and time limits for the interaction, she will also be waiting outside in order to ensure her friend abides by her rules.

Following this all too controlling moment and a few less than cordial interactions with the new Mrs. Elton, Emma and Harriet seem to be once again on the most agreeable of terms. Emma and Harriet are shown in nightgowns and hair curlers, playing make-believe as they dance during a sleepover. Emma is softened once again in this moment, as she hugs Harriet after Harriet compliments her dancing. Though Emma has shown her jealousy and manipulation, this scene reminds viewers of the authenticity and true regard in her relationship with Harriet. Harriet is indeed more than just a puppet to Emma; Emma appears to derive true joy from their interactions.

After the ball, misunderstandings begin to brew once more when Mr. Churchill rescues Harriet from a band of people in the woods. When Harriet confesses she's in love again, Emma presumes that she is referencing Mr. Churchill. This misunderstanding does not become a problem until later on in the movie, but one thing is clear in this scene: Emma is approaching Harriet's new match differently. She lets Harriet know that she will not be giving her advice this time: "I was very wrong before, I will be cautious now against any interference". She then gives

Harriet a sisterly, encouraging kiss on the hand and a determined smile. Emma relinquishing authority again affirms that she is striving to change her behavior. Though Emma has not reached her final form, she is still showing signs of growth and maturity. She is staying out of the way intentionally.

When Harriett and Emma next discuss Harriet's love life, Emma has experienced the infamous Box Hill fiasco. She has also just learned about Frank Churchill's engagement and has come to break the news to Harriet, who Emma still believes is in love with Frank. When Harriet realizes the misunderstanding, it is clear the tables have turned and the power balance has shifted some in their friendship. Harriet says in a soft voice, "Dear Miss Woodhouse, how could you mistake me" as she gently brushes Emma's hair off her forehead. Harriet's gentle brush of Emma's hair is significant and almost infantilizing. It is the first moment in the film that Harriet takes care of Emma. And as the shot shows them sitting together, held up to equal heights and facing each other, something in the motion seems to indicate that she perhaps feels equal with Emma. What's more, Emma, who has been almost on the brink of tears ever since the box hill event is the one who is immediately flustered. Emma's shock and delay are illustrated in the blocking: Emma is still seated while Harriet stands in the middle of the room. Emma reels, takes a shaky breath, looking dizzy, and whispers "Good God", indicating how flustered she is at the confusion. When Harriet accuses Emma, "You think of Mr. Knightley for yourself", she looks angry as a tear falls from her face. She is not resigned and defeated, Harriet seems powerful in her anger as she stands tall. Mia Goth as Harriet lets the sudden realization that Emma has treated her selfishly show all over her face, and her betrayal at Emma's selfishness is evident in her next line. She states, "I refused Mr. Martin because of you", then turns and leaves the room, slamming the door behind her. This moment indicates Harriet's growth— she's no longer willing

to be Emma's puppet and she finally sees the strings, just as Emma realizes that her show could only ever have ended in tragedy.

Unlike Emma's reaction earlier in the film to learning of Mr. Martin's disappointment, Emma clearly takes this to heart, finally realizing the damage of her manipulation. Next we see Emma walking in a field, crying, feeling the full weight of her transgression. This walk is when Emma encounters Mr. Knightley and hears his proposal. Her response to him, a nosebleed and yelling her rejection, are a departure from the novel. Emma's response to Mr. Knightley's proposal is: "I cannot break her heart again". Emma is acknowledging the full weight of her responsibility in Harriet's heartbreak. In responding this way, she is also putting Harriet's happiness above her own for the first time. When Mr. Knightley suggests that he can reach out to Mr. Martin, Emma's response again affirms her growth. She states: "No, I must do it", then takes action to actually right her wrongs. Her pride and prejudice are humbled. Later, Emma crosses the gate into the Martins for the first time; she pauses in this seemingly symbolic moment, she is lowering herself. She is in control, but she is subduing her arrogance and pride. She takes accountability, not just for meddling, but for causing the suffering of both Harriet and Mr. Martin. When Harriet comes to tell Emma about her engagement, she also shares a piece of information that departs from the cannon— her father has revealed to her that he is a tradesman in Bristol. Harriet holds her head high as she says this, eyes looking watery, and the audience can rightly infer that Harriet assumes based on Emma's behavior that she will be judgmental of this. But Emma responds kindly, "I hope you will invite him to Hartfield" without a trace of disappointment or condescension in her voice. Harriet and Emma embrace, and this reunion feels final and healing.

Emma's friendship with Harriet is the true driving force of the film, with their relationship opening the door into both the manipulative and caring sides of Emma. By focusing

so much time on Emma and Harriet's friendship, the film shows the growth of both women: Harriet's growth into confidence and Emma's growth into self-awareness and humility. Emma is certainly not perfect, but through this female friendship, she transforms. Neither, though, is Harriet perfect. Her naivete causes her to appear over dramatic and too easily influenced throughout the film. Adaptations of the novel often focus Emma's transformation (though, granted, the transformation is largely due in these films to Mr. Knightley's influence) on the moments she has with Mr. Knightley. In focusing the majority of the transformative moments with Harriet instead, the bond between Emma and Harriet is given a positive power. In Karen Hollinger's book *In the Company of Females: Contemporary Female Friendships in Films*, she writes that some film critics argue that, though some films shed new light on women when placing female friendships at the center of their narratives, ultimately they "end by suggesting that women should discount and distrust their relationships with other women and look to men as their true allies" (5). This adaptation could not be further from that, though. It is only with the help of each other that both women are able to find growth and happiness. Indeed, Emma's personal growth is clear in her relationship with Harriet more than anyone else in the film. Her attention to Harriet and sensitivity to her feelings is what obviously transforms her, rather than the influence of anyone else.

The focus on the friendship between Harriet and Emma certainly does not inhibit the romantic storyline between Emma and Mr. Knightley. The film highlights throughout the balance and equality between the two characters, and even translates this to their falling for each other seemingly at the same exact instant: the very last moment of their dance together. The moment of Mr. Knightley and Emma's romance seems to clearly begin at the same instant. This shot in the 2020 *Emma.*, though only 4 total seconds, achieves so much for the tension of the film and the depth of Emma and Knightley's relationship. The period costumes already set the

tone of the scene to be romantic, Emma's off-white dress with its leafy appliques, ribbon flowers, and shimmery gold belt at her empire waistline serve as the romantic, feminine background (alongside Knightley's slightly ruffled white sleeve poking teasingly out of his jacket) for the real star of this shot: Anya Taylor-Joy and Johnny Flynn's hands. The subtle acting between these two stars conveys so much in so little time. Johnny Flynn plays the part perfectly: after the music ends signaling the end of the dance, his hand sits on Taylor-Joy's waist just a beat too long—his movement to remove his hand is not immediate, and he does not lift his hand off of her, instead, he keeps his hand on her, sliding it along her back as she turns to face him. Taylor-Joy's hand, too, adds to the intensity of the moment. Her hand seems to tremble slightly atop Mr. Knightley's, and when his hand retreats, she makes a movement to catch the end of his fingers with her hands.

This hand motion is the entire focus of the shot—the close-up shows waist and their two hands are really the only things that the viewer can make out clearly in the shot. The clip is cut with match-on-action to the scene before and prior, and those moments also add to the intensity of the scene, with Emma and Knightley staring intently into each other's eyes just before the cut to their hands. The lighting in the shot seems warm and low, and matches the aesthetic of the prior shots of their dance together—the natural light has left the room, and many shots feature multiple candelabras, giving the impression the hall is lit entirely by dozens of candles. The lightning also adds to the romantic atmosphere of the moment. The lack of movement from the camera in the shot and the closeup of the hands brings close attention to the intimacy of the moment, almost as the time stands still as the dance ends. The shots surrounding this moment often follow the characters through movements and are medium or medium close up shots, so by bringing the audience closer to the action and holding still on the moment, attention is drawn to the intimacy and almost gives the impression that this moment is happening in slow motion.

A major contributing factor to the intensity and intimacy of the moment is the way the sound is edited in the shot. The dance sequence brings the diegetic string music to the forefront—occasionally there's the sound of a skirt rustling, a tink of a glass or a piece of jewelry, or a titter from another couple. During this shot, however, the music has ended. The ambient noise seems almost nonexistent. Instead, two diegetic sounds seem to be amplified— Mr. Knightley's hand makes a rustling noise as he runs his hand along Emma's back, and Emma's bracelet tinkles as she moves her hand to catch his fingers. The amplification of these two diegetic sounds and the elimination/reduction of ambient noise adds again to the intimacy of the moment and highlights the significance of these motions. Hearing those two noises and only those noises makes it feel like Emma and Knightley are the only people left in the room— they are the only people we can hear and see. Because of this zoom, the romantic lightning, and the sound, this brief shot helps the audience understand the weight and significance of this moment for these two characters.

Especially given the second shot after this scene— the film cuts to outside the dance hall after the dance is over, the sun has risen, Knightley looks disheveled, and the ambient noise is shockingly loud— this shot is important. In this context, the quiet, intimate moment in the dance hall seems even more dream-like. This scene as a whole works to help the audience see, and functions too as a moment for Emma and Mr. Knightley, to transition from friends to lovers. Throughout the scene, Emma and Mr. Knightley share a few intimate moments, which are all enhanced by the soft string quartet playing in the background. The music, lighting, and costumes all add to romantic intimacy of the dance, but the hand shot emphasizes once-and-for-all that both Emma and Knightley had time stand still for a moment with each other—and both are hesitant to let the other go.

In addition to this powerful moment that beautifully alerts the audience to the feelings between Mr. Knightley and Emma, establishing them on equal footing as their romantic feelings

progress together, there are other elements of the film that further the sense of equality between the characters. One scene that highlights the difference in Taylor-Joy and Flynn's dynamic is the conflict after the Box Hill incident. In the most popular adaptations of *Emma* (the 2020 film with Anya Taylor Joy, the 2009 mini-series with Romola Garai, the 1996 film with Gwyneth Paltrow, and the 1996 series with Kate Beckinsale), all have scenes portraying this incident— and each *Emma* is aware of her faux pas to a different extent. So too does each Knightley handle the delivery of the famous (or infamous) line “Badly done, Emma” very differently. In each adaptation the line is delivered, but I would argue that in de Wilde's 2020 *Emma*, more than any other, the line is delivered from a lover. Both Johnny Lee Miller in the 2009 series and Mark Strong in the 1996 series yell at Emma, clearly very angry. Strong even shuts Emma up angrily in her carriage after he pulls her off from the crowd. His “Badly done” is delivered as he frowns angrily at the back of her head after shutting her carriage door; it seems paternal. Johnny Lee Miller marches straight up to Emma and after telling her he “must speak his mind”, he immediately begins his confrontation with a very intense “Badly done”. As he delivers the line, he stands with his arms behind his back and puts down his foot to stand at attention. He truly delivers the speech like a drill sergeant. Again, his anger and tone come across as paternal. Jeremy Northam in the 1996 film does vary more in his tone— there is more gentleness, and after Emma begins crying he does deliver his second “badly done” as a whisper. The film's score of emotionally charged violin and woodwind music combined with Northam's regretful look at Emma before he walks away does add softness to their interaction. But even still, there are elements of the scene, like Northam's somewhat violent yank of Paltrow's arm to turn her toward him and his deliberate march toward her to confront her that take away from the scene.

What Flynn does differently to move this interaction from a paternal, condescending reprimand to the constructive, emotional criticism of a lover lies largely in the way he

approaches Emma before the confrontation. Unlike in other adaptations where the actors march deliberately to Emma, Johnny Flynn is shown with a furrowed brow walking away from Emma before he turns back to approach her. This simple movement shows how conflicted he is about approaching her. When he first speaks, his voice is higher pitched than normal and filled with emotion. He says with a look of genuine confusion and concern, “how could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates”. Too, his first few lines contain stutters— another indication of his intense emotional state. He only ever raises his voice when Emma, tired of his correction, stands up in her open carriage. Emma, too, has more lines in the adaptation than usual; the two talk over each other often throughout the scene. These simple details show Mr. Knightley’s correction is both clearly from a place of love and not at all paternal. Because of the overlapping dialogue too, the scene reads more like two lovers arguing than an authoritative man berating a woman.

Audiences, too, agree with this assessment. The top, most liked comment on a video compilation of every variation of the “Badly done” scene says, “I prefer the 2020 version of this scene because Knightley's delivery is the least paternalistic. He doesn't come off like a stern father scolding a naughty child the way the others do, but rather as someone shocked and distressed by the behavior of a friend. For me, it's much more affecting” (liannadunten7326) This depiction of the scene, though altered from other adaptations only subtly, makes the relationship appear more equal.

Mr. Knightley’s sensitivity adds to the feminist undertones of the film. In fact, the movie clearly highlights, in a way that is new and unique to *Emma* adaptations, Mr. Knightley’s own sensitivity. Rather than numerous scenes shot for the male gaze of Emma dressing, Emma’s dressing scenes are quick and efficient. De Wilde’s *Emma* goes where few period pieces venture: Mr. Knightley’s dressing room. In fact, the dressing room scene begins with Mr. Knightley

facing away from the camera, fully nude, a state of undress much further than any shot of Emma.

According to Porter:

This Knightley is vulnerable: he is the subject of the ‘natural nudity’ of which cinema-goers are warned at the titles; we see him undress and dress after a long journey, demonstrating that it was not only women who suffered the rituals and constraints of status-appropriate clothing...He struggles with his very high, very starched, collars throughout the film – but his efforts are appreciated. (99)

Viewers see that Mr. Knightley, though seemingly less pampered than some gentleman, is quite as doted on as Emma. His servant draws his bath for him, ties his neck tie, pulls his socks onto his feet and up over his knee while Knightley lounges back in a chair, in other words— almost everything. But de Wilde doesn’t seem to be stripping Mr. Knightley of his masculinity, she’s simply pulling the wool from our eyes and revealing the men of this era were also dressed and pampered. Even more significantly, she’s refusing to engage with the male gaze and, for some viewers certainly, is shooting Mr. Knightley for the benefit of the female gaze.

Again, it is important to note this scene does not come at the expense of Mr. Knightley’s comparative ruggedness to the other male characters in the novel, indeed, right after he’s dressed, the camera follows him through his grandly featured abbey, highlighting his rank and wealth, as a female servant approaches him. She is reminding him that, as a gentleman, he does have a carriage and that to have a carriage and not use it in favor of walking everywhere is “unusual”. Mr. Knightley literally takes this remark in stride and continues his walk to Hartfield. This brief interaction that follows the dressing scene gives Mr. Knightley, just like Emma, depth. He is both upper class and taken care of, while still not caring for certain rules of decorum in favor of time in the outdoors.

After Knightley and Emma dance at the ball and experience the significant hand touch moment, he races to her home after they make eye contact to her carriage window— this moment does not occur in the novel, but it will be clear to readers that de Wilde’s sending the message that viewers should see *this* as the moment where Knightley’s view of Emma shifts from friend to lover. The moment, unfortunately, does not result in a dramatic declaration of love (granted, this would throw even more of a wrench in Austen’s original plot), as Frank Churchill arrives with a screaming Harriet in his arms right after Mr. Knightley. When both of the men turn to leave and Emma cries, “Wait!”, Mr. Knightley’s disappointment is clearly evident in the way his face falls into a subsequent look of confusion. After the scene cuts, a landscape shot shows him enter the door of a room in his home (presumably closed off because of the cloths covering the furniture) and slowly move closer into view. He’s visibly distressed, tossing his hair and staring at the ground. As he makes it to the center of the room, he frantically rips off his jacket and throws it on the ground, then yanks off his vest and kicks it away from him. He finally lays directly on the floor, staring at the ceiling, and takes a few deep, shuddering breaths. In the background, a servant is seen walking into the room, noticing Mr. Knightley, then immediately turning around and shutting the door. This scene emphasizes Mr. Knightley’s emotional distress, and creates a sense of balance— the man in the relationship is shown in an overwhelmed state when men in period pieces are so rarely seen on their own in their emotional moments. The servants quick exit, too, reminds the audience that these displays of emotion may not have been within the bounds of decorum.

Additionally, Mr. Knightley’s semi-dramatic movement in throwing himself on the ground is quite reminiscent of the incredibly common scene in Disney movies when princesses throw themselves on the nearest surface to cry in a moment of emotional distress. Porter mentions that “Flynn is able to make his character’s fondness for Emma clear from the

beginning, while maintaining enough ambiguity to enable the realization that the couple are in love (during a steamy turn about the dance floor) to transform him, briefly, into a lovestruck fool” (Porter 99). In highlighting Mr. Knightley’s vulnerable moment, de Wilde evens the playing field between him and Emma. So often Mr. Knightley is depicted as the strong, mature figure in the relationship to Emma’s emotional immaturity. Though he may hint to his emotional distress in his proposal, it is rarely seen on camera in adaptations any other moment.

Mr. Knightley’s emotions and vulnerability are clearly highlighted numerous times throughout the film. His romantic feeling is, arguably, highlighted even more than Emma’s. In portraying Knightley’s emotions, de Wilde’s adaptation allows viewers a male lead who is in touch with his emotions. The slow build of Mr. Knightley’s feelings for Emma reach a touching climax in the proposal scene. He is in tears as he delivers the iconic line “If I loved you less I might be able to talk about it more”. Through Johnny Flynn, this claim is now believable, because it is spoken frantically, nervously, surrounded by stutters. The audience has seen the profound impact Emma has on him throughout the film. After Emma hands him his newly bloodied handkerchief (newly bloodied because of Emma’s anxious nose bleed [which we will not dive into but is incredibly controversial]), Mr. Knightley smiles to himself and gleefully raises both arms above his head. Happy with himself and his newly betrothed even after she yelled at him and bled on his handkerchief.

Adding to Mr. Knightley’s appeal to the audience is this adaptation’s portrayal of the male lead as a musician. Johnny Flynn, a musician, singer, and songwriter, plays and sings as Mr. Knightley throughout the film. Music is often used in Austen adaptations to showcase the talent of the female stars. Soft piano playing and romantic singing allow actresses playing Emma to shine. And, though Anya Taylor-Joy certainly does sing, her talent is by no means the brightest amongst her Highbury circle. As in the novel, Emma is outshone by the further

practiced Jane Fairfax, and Frank Churchill too demonstrates his singing. In de Wilde's adaptation, Mr. Knightley gets a chance to sing, too. Unlike other adaptations where Mr. Knightley's relationship with music is relegated to simply enjoying it (most often he's seen in scenes involving music quietly appreciating the talent of the ladies in the room— excepting of course his annoyance whenever Frank joins in to sing with Emma), adding musical ability to Mr. Knightley again affirms his refinement.

Just like showing Mr. Knightley taking part in the traditions of upper class men in the way he's dressed, by playing music he is also taking part in those refined, indoor, classy pursuits that are often relegated to women. Too, his foray into singing and playing truly makes him an object of desire. As Mr. Knightley plays the violin, Jane Fairfax plays the piano. The scene is dimly lit and the room is crowded, candles provide the warm, romantic lighting. There's even a roaring fire in the background of the shots on Jane that set up the scene as Mrs Weston tells Emma about her prediction that Mr. Knightley sent Jane the infamous piano forte. After a short musical introduction from the two instruments, Jane sings "Drink to me only with thine eyes, / and I will pledge with mine", as she looks up smiling at Mr. Knightley, the fire can still be seen roaring behind her. When Mr. Knightley's verse comes up, he tucks away his violin, and sings, "Or leave a kiss within the cup, / and I'll not ask for wine". He closes his eyes as he sings these words, prompting comments from viewers that affirm the sensuality of the scene. User noellematerne557 commented on a clip of the scene, "And then bloody Knightley/Flynn begins to sing 'or leave a kiss' with his bloody beautiful voice and then singing 'within the cup' he closes his marvellous bloody eyes. And at this precise point, then i'm bloody dying. Not fair, too much, this should'nt exist". While this comment affirms that this scene certainly appeals to the female gaze, referencing not only the power of his talent, his specific facial expressions, and the sensuality of the lyrics, some commenters are more direct with their thoughts. The simple

comment “That low note impregnated me” from FlashakaViolet has support with forty-four likes and six replies of agreement (more replies than any other comment in the comment section).

Johnny Flynn’s facial expressions, the lyrics of the song, and the mood lighting in the scene add the sensuality of the character and clearly appeal to the female gaze in addition to adding a new layer to Mr. Knightley’s character. Instead of being portrayed as a mere appreciator of the finer, feminine art of music, as in other adaptations, this Knightley actively participates in those arts.

In addition to Mr. Knightley’s duet with Jane, his musical abilities appear one other moment in the film. The credits begin with a lively song sung by Johnny Flynn, a voice movie watchers will still associate with Mr. Knightley. The song is a new composition written for the film by Johnny Flynn called “My Queen Bee” and it truly functions as the last words from this particular world of Emma. The lyrics begin, “All is for my mistress, all is for my maid / Sweetness that I took for sweetness that she gave to me / My queen bee”. In ending the movie with this song, viewers are left with a clear message: Emma’s transformation has not taken away her power. And, furthermore, Mr. Knightley loves and acknowledges her position of authority. Bees are well known to have one queen that rules the hive, a unique matriarchal system. In referencing Emma as a bee, he’s affirming her influence in their society. But, even with this authority, he still sees her as sweet: “sweetness that she gave to me”. Johnny Flynn’s song has much the same impact that an analytical reading of the novel will give— Emma does not end the story relinquishing any power. In ending the film with references to Emma as a “queen bee”, Taylor-Joy’s Emma is clearly affirmed as the ruler of her circle of Highbury. Just like Emma in the novel, her marriage and romance do not change her power.

Autumn de Wilde’s *Emma* achieves something magical: a whimsical, hilarious, aesthetically magnificent story with compellingly over-the-top (and yet somehow still authentic) characters. The script’s focus on the friendship between Harriet and Emma adds depth to the

adaptation. The female friendship is what is championed as transformative. Too, Emma's character is shown in her purest form— unlikable. Her flaws are not explained away or softened—they exist as they often do in real women in reality. As she grows in her friendship, she's shown that she has room to grow into a kinder and more understanding person. In the adaptation's unique portrayal of Mr. Knightly, giving him depth, emotion, and desirability throughout the film, Emma's partner at the end of the film is truly that: a partner. She is clearly not being punished or domesticated, she is not giving up control of Hartfield, she is entering into an equal partnership because of her affection for her husband. De Wilde's adaptation opens the door to explore characters and storylines in new ways, and interprets the text from a feminist lens.

Conclusion

In the examination of both *Emma* and *Emma.*, each piece uniquely contributes to the world it inhabits. Interestingly, both *Emma* and *Emma.* have their fair share of critics. Funnily enough, one of the critics of Austen's novel was Maria Edgeworth, author of *Belinda*. She wrote:

there was no story in it, except that Miss Emma found that the man whom she designed for Harriet's lover was an admirer of her own – & he was affronted at being refused by Emma & Harriet wore the willow – and *smooth, thin water-gruel* is according to Emma's father's opinion a very good thing & it is very difficult to make a cook understand what you mean by *smooth, thin water-gruel!!*”(qtd. in Todd, 94)

There's very little substance in the review— half of it is Edgeworth's complaint about the neurotic Mr. Woodhouse. Her opinion that *Emma* lacks story is, actually, one of the more common complaints from Austen's contemporary authors at the time. It's interesting that a lack of story is the main fault Edgeworth finds. There is a set-up, conflict, and resolution; which, after all, are the key elements to a story. I would argue that Emma's lack of a moral end is the real source of discontent. After all, while Emma does marry, she does not let go of her authority of Hartfield. Emma's growth happens inwardly, and her character is treated fairly when she makes mistakes. Rather than the drastic ends of the other Lady Puppet Master's, Austen's resolution serves to show both the growth and worthiness of her heroine. Austen's titular character serves the purpose of subverting sexist stereotypes, paving the way for future novels. Though *Emma* did face criticism, it has certainly earned its spot as a classic novel since then.

Criticism of the film is a bit more harsh. The Rotten Tomatoes Audience score stands at a (barely) fresh 72% for Autumn de Wilde's *Emma*, 14 points lower than the critics score at 86%. The BBC *Emma* on the other hand holds an impressive audience score of 93%, which is 8 points

higher than the critics score. The 19 point difference between the two audience scores suggests that, though many fans acknowledge Emma is an unlikable character, they do not enjoy that aspect of the story portrayed on screen. On anonymous reviewer wrote:

Emma has a very annoying accent. Very snooty, unlikeable and condescending. This is the first thing I noticed when watching... You just wish very bad things happen to her so she gets a grip on reality the hard way. A lot of suffering would do her character a world of good or at least make me feel good, the latter being more important (Emma. Reviews)

It's interesting, I think, that people dislike this adaptation largely because they find Emma too "snooty". That, after all, is one of Emma's main flaws in the novel; without her vanity, there would be no growth— no Box Hill incident— no coercing Harriet from accepting Mr. Martin— that is to say, no plot. Adaptations have watered down Emma's flaws so that when viewers see them clearly, they feel offended. Many compare Taylor-Joy's Emma to what they view as superior, the much more demure Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma (Emma. Reviews). Even in the 21st century viewers have trouble accepting flawed heroines, and, indeed, some audiences still seems to crave a moral end for the heroine: "You just wish very bad things to happen to her so she gets a grip on reality". It's interesting that some modern audiences still crave punishment for outspoken, opinionated women, but it should further prove the need for the continued portrayal of complex female characters and transforming harmful stereotypes. This paper has hopefully shown the way that de Wilde's unique adaptation subtly adjusts certain focuses and characterizations for a more feminist retelling of the story. My hope is that we will continue to see Austen's *Emma* adapted and transformed— that filmmakers and actresses will continue interpreting classic texts in a feminist light.

Both the novel *Emma* and the 2020 adaptation provide a lot of room for further research. For the novel, additional research into this topic could explore the response of readers at the time, or the opinions of the other authors of the novels that formed the tradition that *Emma* departed from. Further research could also examine how the Lady Puppet Master stereotype continued to transform after the publication of *Emma*. As for the film *Emma*., Further research for this topic could focus on the rising idea of the “female-gaze”, particularly in period pieces, or into the portrayal of female friendship in other Austen adaptations.

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