

Discussion Questions for “Emma and Fanny: What’s Not to Like?”

4/30/23 JASNA Eastern WA/Northern ID Region

1. Austen explores women and power or lack of it with Emma and Fanny. Emma has more economic and household power than the other Austen heroines. How does she misuse her power and where is she powerless? Fanny is powerless in many regards, yet has and uses “the power of refusal”. Does her refusal of Henry Crawford and standing up to Sir Thomas seem brave or strong?
2. Have your views of either or both Emma and Fanny changed with rereading or reading other people’s thoughts about them?
3. Austen argues in a few places (especially *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*) that couples can make each other better people or worse people (and shows that in *Emma* with the Eltons). What are your thoughts about the Emma-Mr. Knightley couple and Fanny-Edmund couple in this regard?
4. Both Emma and Fanny have a wide range of complex feelings, thoughts and judgments, that we have access to through the way Austen writes the novels. We see their inner conflicts and imperfections. Do you find their faults understandable and humanizing or find them off-putting?
5. Some critics dislike Fanny because they see her as “never wrong”. Do you agree that she is never wrong?
6. One criticism of Emma is how she manipulates Harriet. Are there any ways that her year with Emma benefited Harriet’s final happiness?
7. Austen has Emma and Fanny interact with others (such as Mrs. Elton and Mr. Woodhouse for Emma and Mrs. Norris and her cousins for Fanny) in ways to create sympathy for the heroines. Do you feel that sympathy?
8. In “A History of the Fanny Wars,” Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield present a range of comments about Fanny from critics and common readers. Some of the negative comments are quite vitriolic and nasty. Any thoughts on why Fanny evokes that level of hate?
9. In “‘Liking’ Emma Woodhouse,” Elaine Bander makes a distinction between “liking” a literary character such as Mrs. Elton or Mrs. Norris as “literary

constructions: satiric masterpieces of complacency, hypocrisy, snobbery, and sheer comic nastiness” (17) compared to liking a character as one might like a friend. When thinking about the heroes and heroines of books you read, do you want to be able to like them as you would a friend, as Bander says, “faults and all” (27)?

10. Adaptations: Do you have a favorite portrayal of Emma or Fanny from the adaptations? Which one do you think is closest to the character in the book?

Emma (1972 BBC TV mini-series with Doran Godwin and John Carson, director: John Glenister and screenplay: Denis Constanduros)

Clueless (1995 movie with Alicia Silverstone and Paul Rudd, director and writer: Amy Heckerling)

Emma (1996 movie with Gwyneth Paltrow and Jeremy Northam, director and screenplay: Douglas McGrath)

Emma (1996 ITV series with Kate Beckinsale and Mark Strong, director: Diarmuid Lawrence and screenplay: Andrew Davies)

Emma (2009 BBC TV mini-series with Romola Garai and Jonny Lee Miller, director: Jim O’Hanlon and screenplay: Sandy Welch)

EMMA. (2020 movie with Anya Taylor-Joy and Johnny Flynn, director: Autumn de Wilde and screenplay: Eleanor Catton)

Mansfield Park (1999 movie with Frances O’Connor and Jonny Lee Miller , director and writer: Patricia Rozema)

Mansfield Park (2007 ITV series with Billie Piper and Blake Ritson, director: Iain MacDonald and screenplay: Maggie Wadley)

Mansfield Park (1983 BBC TV mini-series with Sylvestra LeTouzelle and Nicholas Farrell, director: David Giles and screenplay: Kenneth Taylor)