

Fourth Norton Critical Edition of *Emma* Offers Surprising Manuscript Changes

Emma: Norton Critical Edition

By Jane Austen.

Ed. George Justice.

W.W. Norton, 4th ed., 2011. 462 pages.

Paperback. \$15.62.

Review by Marc DiPaolo.

On December 13, 2011, Mervyn Holland discovered an original draft of Jane Austen's *Emma* misfiled amongst the personal papers of Katherine Harris Baddeley that are part of a permanent collection of Victorian Decadent papers housed at UCLA. What makes this find significant for Austen scholars is that this clearly very early version of the novel ends with Emma Woodhouse moving to Donwell Abbey with Mr. Knightley over the objections of her father. Still more surprisingly, it also concludes with Frank Churchill taking his own life after Jane Fairfax succumbs to the ravages of her long and notably undiagnosed illness.

Of course, none of the above is remotely true. But wouldn't it be nice if it were?

W.W. Norton has released a fourth critical edition of Jane Austen's *Emma* edited by George Justice, and reviewing it presents something of a challenge in that, in many ways, this is the same book we all know and love already, or we wouldn't be members of JASNA. There is no new ending, and the prose is not radically different – but it is a *little*

different, at least from the text of the three previous Norton editions edited by Stephen Parrish. As Justice explains, Parrish based the prose of his Norton editions on the R.W. Chapman edition of the 1930s, which had made several notable amendments to the 1816 John Murray edition. In contrast, Justice has accepted *some* of Chapman's edits, as well as *some* of Parrish's, but he has hewn closer to the John Murray manuscript. Why? As Justice explains: "My aim has been to provide a clear text that remains faithful to the spelling, punctuation, and grammar of early nineteenth-century writing and publishing practice, even when that practice does not conform to ours." Consequently, the experience of reading *Emma* may become strange to us again, helping us once more see the text anew and look upon it with fresh eyes.

Aside from the text of the novel itself, what makes the Norton Critical Edition valuable to both Austen aficionados and instructors is its supplemental material, which offers a sweeping overview of *Emma* criticism, from Austen's contemporaries up to today's most respected scholars. There are those selections that one comes to expect from previous editions, including excerpts from Austen's surviving letters and the biographical sketches drawn by Henry Thomas Austen and James E. Austen Leigh, as well as reprintings of opinions of *Emma* and Austen by Sir Walter Scott, Henry James, Charlotte Bronte, and Virginia Woolf. Sadly, Mark Twain's hilarious verdict on Austen rarely makes the cut in these anthologies because it is offensive to the sensibilities of Austen fans.

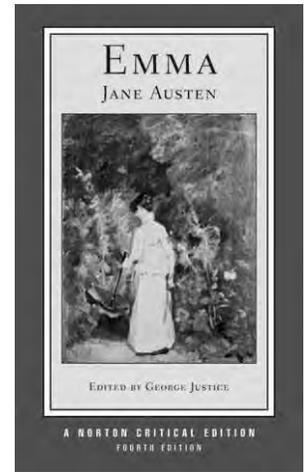
In terms of more recent scholarship, it is to be expected that the entries by Claudia Johnson, Marilyn Butler, and Mary Poovey included in the third edition have been retained. They should be and need to be. Some of the other selections made by Parrish have been dropped and replaced, presumably both to update the

selection of scholarship and justify the publication of a new edition. I miss some of the cut pieces, including John Wiltshire's. It is also unsurprising that Ian Watt's entry

has been cut as his star in the academic firmament has faded. Nevertheless, I maintain that his declaration that *Emma* is the first complete novel—and Jane Austen the first "novelist" in the truest sense of the term—goes a long way towards mitigating the fact that his *Rise of the Novel* (1957) otherwise leaves women writers out of the story of—well—the rise of the novel.

These quibbles aside, in most instances, the replacing of some third edition essays with new selections has resulted in a net gain for readers, as the fresh excerpts are often superior to the omitted ones. David Monaghan is, indeed, the last word in scholarship on *Emma* adaptations, and his selection is superior to the omitted essay on *Clueless* by Suzanne Ferriss. Significantly, the newly reprinted entries by Maaja A. Stewart, Tony Tanner, and Gabrielle D.V. White are excellent and more than make up for my disappointment over the absence of texts that I enjoyed in the previous edition.

The next time I teach *Emma* to my students at Oklahoma City University, I will most certainly assign this text. My Millennial students can learn from (and make do with) the eccentricities of the 1816 manuscript that have been retained by Justice, and they can certainly learn a lot from the scholarly essays included in the back. After all, these essays, like the novel itself, are must-reads.



Marc DiPaolo, an assistant professor of English and Film at Oklahoma City University, has written the books *Emma Adapted: Jane Austen's Heroine from Book to Film (2007)* and *War, Politics and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film (2011)*. He is the editor of *The Conscious Reader* and a contributor to *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *The Pater Newsletter*, and *Religious Studies Review*.