

In her course *The Novel (ENG 307)*, Professor Jessica Yood incorporated student posts from Blackboard into several of the midterm exam questions.

Sample Midterm Exam Questions:

1) On Blackboard, one of our classmates writes this about *Emma*:

Emma does have interesting characters in the novel, and develops their relationships very well; there just are not any characters I would be interested in reading about. Her use of dialogue becomes very tedious and boring. I just wish something would happen. Maybe they should have thrown a few more Gypsies into the mix, and had some more people get attacked by them, or kidnapped—this would definitely be something to talk about at home and read.

In this comment, our classmate-critic is arguing that what makes something realistic is ALSO what makes the book interesting and exciting, “something to talk about at home...”. What would novel critic Ian Watt say about this definition of realism?

2) In the following passage from Blackboard, one of your colleagues cites a passage from *Emma* and remarks on the way Austen describes some of her characters in a way that marks them, somehow, as different.

“I believe I have been very rude; but really Miss Fairfax has done her hair in so odd a way—so very odd a way—that I cannot keep my eyes from her. I never saw any thing so outré!— Those curls! . . . I see nobody else looking like her!— I must go and ask her whether it is an Irish fashion.” This quote said by Mr. Cole is out there. There is nothing wrong with being gay, but Mr. Cole seems so gay when he comments on Miss Fairfax’s hair at the party on page 207. Mr. Cole insults Miss Fairfax over a hairdo and makes a comment about the Irish. Apparently Ireland wasn’t that popular with hairstyles. Yes it sounds ridiculous but it’s funny, and maybe it’s just me but I think Mr. Cole is a bit on the fruity side.”

A more substantive character “slight” is found in the description of Miss Bates, spoken by Mr. Knightley, on page 351 after Emma insulted her at the picnic at Box Hill:

Were she our equal in situation . . .—but Emma, consider how far this is from the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more.

In a short essay, consider two characters from *Emma* and one from *Mansfield Park* (the film) who are portrayed as different or unique. From whom are they different (i.e. who are they being compared to as the “norm”)? Knowing what you do about the period in which Austen is writing (early 19th-century, late 18th-century Britain) why do you think these characters are being shown to us?