

Handsome, clever and rich: "Emma." lives up to expectations

"Handsome, clever and rich." Those words were originally written in Jane Austen's 1815 novel "Emma." to describe the female protagonist. The same words, appropriately, serve as both the tagline to and apt descriptions of the novel's 2020 remake, which came out on March 3.

"Emma.", based off of the Jane Austen novel of the same name, follows the source material relatively faithfully. It follows Emma Woodhouse, played by a wide-eyed and affected Anya Taylor-Joy, a rich 21-year-old matchmaker. She prefers meddling in the love lives of others rather than finding love herself, mostly due to her ailing father, played by a scene-stealing Bill Nighy. Mr. Knightly (Johnny Flynn), her brooding longtime friend, doesn't approve of her meddling nature, especially when Emma begins searching for a partner for her young, impressionable friend Harriet (Mia Goth).

With a color palette indicative of a box of Parisian macarons and set pieces enchanting enough to make Wes Anderson cry, "Emma." is certainly as handsome as its eponymous main character. The visuals of this movie were one of its biggest strengths, serving both as eye candy and powerful parallels to the shallow frivolity of the main character and her peers. From the first scene, in which Emma glides across a serene field to a glass gazebo filled with flowers so gorgeous you can nearly smell them, it's clear that Emma has grown up surrounded by beauty, privilege and class. That two servants accompany her on this walk only solidifies this point.

Though the films' beauty is its most noticeable feature, the clever nature of the script by Eleanor Catton cannot be denied. It can be difficult to add much in the way of cleverness when handed source material as hilarious and smart as Austen's "Emma," but the film managed to find its stride comedically by taking advantage of its medium. Visual jokes playing on the affectedness and privilege of the character, both subtle and not so subtle, were littered throughout the film. Nighy manages to steal scenes with a mere sniff, step or eyebrow raise. Though period pieces are often viewed as dry and serious, Nighy brings some added levity to an already delightful interpretation of the genre.

Finally, "Emma." is emotionally rich. Initially, I felt the film lacked much genuine feeling. The first half of the movie is dominated by beautiful visuals and twee humor, but packs little emotional punch. However, the second half of the film was just as rich as I had hoped, as Emma comes to face the consequences of her privileged and oblivious nature. In fact, the lack of consequences in the first act of the film may have deepened the second act in comparison.

The infamous picnic scene, much dreaded by those familiar with Emma due to its cringeworthy nature, starts off just as decadent as the rest of the film. Emma and her peers gather on a picturesque hill for a picnic. At one point, Emma oversteps and makes a cruel comment about Miss Bates (Miranda Hart), a character who is irritating but ultimately kind and delicate. Rather than skating on the surface of social awareness as she had for the rest of the movie, Emma is called out by her peers and sees the negative effects of her actions. This moment, negligible in the grand scheme of things, elicited an audible gasp from the audience. Much like Emma herself, the audience was lulled into thinking Emma is untouchable, and moments such as the picnic scene ground the film into the realm of true emotional depth.

Ultimately, "Emma." is a film worth seeing for its beauty, wit and emotion. Though it isn't as impactful as other recent period pieces ("Little Women" set a new bar for the genre, in my opinion), it is worth the watch.