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The demasculinization of Emma by Jane Austen's early illustrators

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When searching for adjectives to describe Emma Woodhouse, "feminine," "frail" and "submissive" are not common descriptors for this Austen heroine. In fact, Emma is often described as "masculine" because she challenges the traditional notions of gender during Austen's period. However, when we look to the illustrations of Emma by C.E. Brock, Hugh Thomson and Chris Hammond, we find that the images of Emma do not reflect the controversial reputation she has gained among scholars. In these editions of the novel, Emma is portrayed as a petite, fragile woman who assumes a submissive attitude in the presence of men. Emma is often drawn either seated, while her male companion is standing or with her head down, while her male companion is speaking. In my paper, I explore the dichotomy of Emma's female maleness as it extends to the visual representations of her. Much has been said of Emma's gender in literary criticism, but little has been said about illustration as a form of visual commentary on the text. In my paper, I ask the question, do the visual images that accompanied Emma in the late 1800's and early 1900's soften Emma's masculine qualities in the text? Are these images meant to lead a reader away from the opinion that Emma is both a likeable character and a dominant woman? By looking to Susan Korba, I will demonstrate the controversy that surrounds Emma's sexual identity in literary criticism. I will argue that this controversy extends to visual representations of Emma. I investigate the societal stigma faced by women at the turn of the 20th century by looking to texts, such as Behling's *The Masculine Women in America 1890-1935*. My research demonstrates that these illustrated editions of Emma are an effort to demasculinize a heroine who readers generally define by her masculinity.

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