ISSN 1304 - 0057

İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ - EDEBİYAT FAKÜLTESİ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI DERGİSİ

LITERA

CİLT 24 – SAYI 1 (2011)

VOLUME 24 – NUMBER 1 (2011)

İSTANBUL
2014

Litera:
İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Dergisi.--
İstanbul:
İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1954 –

24cm.
Yılda iki sayı
LITERA Süreli-Hakemli Dergidir.
ISSN 1304-0057
Elektronik ortamda da yayınlanmaktadır:
http://www.dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/iulitera/

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LITERA Yayın Kurulu

MISINTERPRETATION, MISJUDGEMENT, MISMATCHING
&
EMMA'S EPIPHANIES IN JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*

Özlem KARADAĞ*

ABSTRACT

This article aims to focus on *Emma* to investigate the themes of personal prejudice and misinterpretations and the chaos that is led by them and the reestablishment of order after a general introduction to Jane Austen's novels, her use of characters, social order, plot patterns and her both criticized and praised preferences in her works. Following the prejudices, fictions and mistakes caused by them, enlightenments and formations of formerly and specifically the main character Emma and of other characters in *Emma*, which can also be considered as a bildungsroman, it will be interpreted how the social order, class distinctions and the institution of marriage are taken up by Austen.

Keywords: Jane Austen, *Emma*, Austen's novels and style, social order, prejudice, early nineteenth century literature

ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı Jane Austen'in romanlarına ve romanlarında kullandığı karakter, toplumsal yapı, tekrar eden konular ve hem eleştirilmesine hem de övülmesine neden olan seçimlerine bakarak genel bir giriş yaptıktan sonra *Emma* romanına odaklanarak, bireysel önyargı ve yanlış yorumlamalar ve bunların sonucu olarak ortaya çıkan kaos ve dolayısıyla düzenin sağlanması temalarını incelemektir. Bir bildungsroman olarak da okunabilecek olan *Emma*'da, öncelikle ve özellikle başkarakter Emma'nın ve diğer karakterlerin önyargıları, kurguları ve bu nedenlerle yaptıkları hatalar, aydınlanmaları ve değişimlerini takip ederek romandaki toplumsal yapı, sınıf farkları ve evlilik kurumu gibi konuların nasıl ele alındığı çözümlenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jane Austen, *Emma*, Jane Austen romanları ve tekniği, toplumsal düzen, önyargı, erken on-dokuzuncu yüzyıl edebiyatı

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Austen's works were generally criticised negatively for lacking political and historical background of her time in their plots and lacking picturesqueness and passion as well, yet she is able to depict the daily life of a town and its people. Thus, she is criticised harshly by some of the readers of her works including Charlotte Brontë who prefers the gothic elements and romantic tradition of her time to Austen's cultivated sceneries and characters. She criticises Austen for being "only shrewd and observant":

> An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses. (139)

Jane Austen's novels, as Brontë suggests, seem to lack steep hills, open country and passionate characters yet Austen's desire to set her novels in cultivated gardens and carefully fenced societies is a sign of her avoiding wild nature and passions deliberately. She shows the destructiveness of crowded city life, the decomposition and deterioration in cities like Bath and London and whenever she introduces the reader with a scene in nature or a scene that includes a natural event she shows that it brings disaster or future problems for the characters. In *Sense and Sensibility*, she introduces the reader with nature around her characters and makes them leave their fenced, cultivated gardens:

> The whole country about them abounded in beautiful walks. The high downs which invited them from almost every window of the cottage to seek the exquisite enjoyment of air on their summits, were an happy alternative when the dirt of the valleys beneath shut up their superior beauties; and towards one of these hills did Marianne and Margaret one memorable morning direct their steps, attracted by the partial sunshine of a showery sky, and unable longer to bear the confinement which the settled rain of the two preceding days had occasioned. (*S&S* 49)

Although the weather seems perfect and hills inviting, the occasion ends with an accident and with the introduction of an inevitable intruder because of the pouring rain:

> They set off. Marianne had at first the advantage, but a false step brought her suddenly to the ground, and Margaret, unable to stop herself to assist her, was involuntarily hurried along, and reached the bottom in safety.
>
> A gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him, was passing up the hill and within a few yards of Marianne, when her accident

> happened. He put down his gun and ran to her assistance. She had raised herself from the ground, but her foot had been twisted in the fall, and she was scarcely able to stand. The gentleman offered his services, and perceiving that her modesty declined what her situation rendered necessary, took her up in his arms without farther delay, and carried her down the hill. (*S&S* 50)

The gentleman, Willoughby, a man that enchants people with his physical beauty, is actually a beau who seduces women, and as a consequence seduces Marianne, makes her fall in love with him but in fact betrays her and causes her illness: "Poor Marianne, languid and low from the nature of her malady, and feeling herself universally ill, could no longer hope that to-morrow would find her recovered […]."(S&S, 348) And as we see in *Emma*, on Christmas Eve, when all parties visit Westons, the intrusion of nature into their daily life disturbs the characters. Snow and strong wind makes a safe return home impossible and force them to separate into groups and furthermore, this occasion leads to Mr Elton's passionate confession of love to Emma when they are alone in the carriage and it displeases both.

Austen's tendency to create such scenes or choice of leaving wild nature or passionate characters out or drawing these characters as cunning ones can be read as her choosing reason and cultivation over passion and wildness. One can put forward the idea that Austen knows the fairy tale tradition well and employs the same pattern in her scenes of nature; young girls, who leave their company, also leave the civilization, culture, cultivation and reason behind and a wolf in disguise is ready to intrude all the time. Whenever nature and passion enter the scene, Austen tries to show that the characters become unable to act according to reason and are forced to meddle with disasters or undesirable outcomes at the end. As Richard Simpson points out in a review in *Memoir, North British Review*, Austen has her own hierarchies of literary elements she uses:

> [N]othing is to be said for her, except that she had tried the love at first sight, and found it a failure. In this we see clearly enough her habitual exaltation of judgment over passion, of the critical over the poetical and imaginative faculties. And this is perhaps even more perceptible in the manifest irony of her whole mass of compositions. (246)[1]

When it comes to her works' lack of historical and political background, it can be said that it is faulty to criticise her in that area, too. Austen is very

[1] Patricia Menon also in **Austen, Eliot, Charlotte Brontë and the Mentor Lover** quotes the same paragraph.

aware of her age's concerns and so successful in including these concerns, but in the limits of importance of these events to the community she depicts. When Jane Fairfax, in *Emma*, talks about being a governess as the trade of the human intellect, Mrs. Elton is shocked to hear her:

> "[…] There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something—Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect."
>
> "Oh! my dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition."
>
> "I did not mean, I was not thinking of the slave-trade," replied Jane; "governess-trade, I assure you, was all that I had in view; widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies.[…]" (*E* 301)

The characters of *Emma* are aware of the fact that slave-trade exists, which is also a fact about England, and they criticise it, yet their own community does not include the same trade and what is left to them is to just talk about the subject as a far away but wicked reality. Yet, the same conversation also reveals Jane Fairfax's realization of employment as a governess; she sees it as the trade of both human flesh and human intellect which readily comments upon the way the leisure class sees those working for them. In *Mansfield Park*, too, Austen gives hints about colonization; Sir Thomas Bertram has estates in Antigua in the West Indies and has to leave Mansfield for twelve months for a business concerning his plantation (MP 25). The reader sees that how Britain holds a colonizing power and how important these colonies for the income of those families who have plantations in the colonies. She is very successful in feeding these important realities of the outer world into the daily lives of the families in her novels yet she uses these elements to a certain degree. However she puts so much importance on class distinctions, social im/mobility, depicts the problems of inheritance, need for profession, and the situation of the women who are without inheritance, annual payments and in need of a father/brother/husband who will give them title, economic power and a social standing. Thus, with an ironic tone she both criticises her characters and deconstructs the system they live in.

When we go back to her depiction of the daily life of the people of a town, she has her supporters as well; G. H. Lewes applauds her ability to depict scenes from daily life:

> What we most heattily enjoy and applaud, is truth in the delineation of life and character: incidents however wonderful, adventures however perilous, are almost as naught when compared with the deep and lasting interest excited by any thing like a correct representation of life. That, indeed, seems to us to be Art, and the only Art we care to applaud. (137)

Austen's art is not only applauded by Lewes but also seen as being directed to cultivated minds which leads him to criticise Charlotte Brontë's ideas on Austen's fiction:

> The absence of breadth, picturesqueness, and passion, will also limit the appreciating audience of Miss Austen to the small circle of cultivated minds; and even these minds are not always capable of greatly relishing her works. We have known very remarkable people who cared little for her pictures of every-day life; and indeed it may be anticipated that those who have little sense of humour, or whose passionate and insurgent activities demand in art a reflection of their own emotions and struggles, will find little pleasure in such homely comedies. Currer Bell may be taken as a type of these. She was utterly without a sense of humour, and was by nature fervid and impetuous.[2] (*TGA* 173)

Sir Walter Scott also praises Jane Austen for her artistic capability in depicting ordinary life:

> We, therefore, bestow no mean compliment upon the author of *Emma,* when we say that, keeping close to common incidents, and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life, she has produced sketches of such spirit and originality, that we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events, arising from the consideration of minds, manners, and sentiments, greatly above our own. In this class she stands almost alone […] the author of *Emma* confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society; her most distinguished characters do not rise greatly above well-bred country gentlemen and ladies; and those which are sketched with most originality and precision, belong to a class rather below that standard. (67-8)

Thus, although she is criticised harshly and thought to be in need of spirit in her novels on one hand, on the other Austen is actually being praised for her ability to create such scenes and scenarios in the closed community of her fictions which generally livens up with the introduction of new characters or with a turn in the story.

Emma is a distinguished novel in which Austen's ironic tone as narrator reaches its peak. She combines every material that was at work in her other

---

[2] Charlotte Brontë is referred to as Currer Bell.

novels like prejudgements/prejudice, misconceptions, misrepresentations, fancy, jealousy, rivalry or the need for knowing oneself. *Emma* is her only novel that takes its name from the novel's heroine and it is considered by some critics as the perfection of her art. It is one of her humorous novels which also include criticism of society and the individual, because the main basis of the story is the prejudgements and gossips that lead to misinterpretations of the characters and events. The novel employs and comments upon the ideas of misjudgement, mismatching and the need for reasoning in thoughts, the importance of taking the thoughts and/or feelings of others into consideration while acting, and most importantly the necessity of learning self and self- criticism.

In *Emma*, too, Jane Austen depicts the daily life, this time in Highbury. We see what happens in Donwell Abbey, Hartfield, Randalls or in Bates' house, we witness their gatherings, their charity visits, marriage ceremonies and dinner parties. She also furnishes us with characters that the nineteenth century reader was accustomed to, as Walter Scott points out Austen's characters like Miss Bates and Mr. Woodhouse are existent in real society:

> Characters of folly or simplicity, such as those of old Woodhouse and Miss Bates, are ridiculous when first presented, but if too often brought forward or too long dwelt upon, their prosing is apt to become as tiresome in fiction as in real society. (71)

Miss Bates, an unmarried woman whose position fell from good to bad, is depicted as a nuisance with her never ending, hard to follow and hard to understand speeches, while old and doddering, valetudinarian, Mr Woodhouse, is depicted as a gentleman who is hard to satisfy. Both of them begin to disturb the reader after a while with the repetition of the same speeches they make. Yet, at the same time, Austen turns these characters into Shakespearean fools, who with their simplicity and folly add up to the plot. On this point we should again quote Lewes and Macaulay who see Jane Austen as the contemporary Shakespeare of their time. Macaulay places her near Shakespeare:

> Shakespeare has had neither equal nor second. But among the writers who, in the point which we have noticed, have approached nearest to the manner of the great master, we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen, a woman of whom England is justly proud. (136)

Lewes takes this praise further and explains her art, sees her as Shakespeare's equal:

> She makes her people speak and act as they speak and act in every day

> life; and she is the only artist who has done this with success and pleasant effect. Macaulay styled her a Prose Shakespeare. We cannot, for our parts, conceive Shakespeare under prosaic conditions, poetry being so essentially involved in the whole structure of his works; but if we divest him, in thought, of his winged attributes— if we set aside his passion, imagination, fancy, and rhythm, there will remain a central power of dramatic creation, the power of constructing and animating character, which may truly be said to find a younger sister in Miss Austen. Observe, however, that in place of his poetry we must put her daring prose—daring from its humble truthfulness. ("Jane Austen as a 'Prose Shakespeare'" 145)

Austen's web of events and "dramatis personae" in her novels prove them to be right. When we consider the events in Emma, we can consider the novel as a Shakespearean comedy, in which misrepresentations and misjudgements lead to misunderstandings and everything comes out well at the end as in T*he Twelfth Night or The Comedy of Errors*. Patricia McKee summarizes the plot of *Emma in Public and Private: Gender, Class, and the British Novel (1764-1878)* as follows:

> To Emma's confusion of self and other Austen adds many mistaken identities, leading to a situation resembling Shakespearean comedy, as Emma recognizes (…) Mr. Elton thinks he's courting Emma, who thinks he's courting Harriet. Emma thinks Harriet is fond of Frank Churchill because of a kindness he did her, when in fact Harriet is fond of Mr. Knightley because of a kindness *he* did her. Mr. Knightley and the Westons think Emma is fond of Frank, who has seemed to be courting her; but it is really Jane Fairfax whom Frank loves, and Emma cares not for Frank but for Mr. Knightley. This means that characters often seem to be in the place of someone else and subject to extraordinary exchangeability. (62)

Thus, Austen gives the reader a humorous and colourful story, to put it in another way as J. F. Kirk suggests "the plot of Emma is equal to that of any of Ben Jonson's comedies." (158)

One of the important themes in *Emma* is the class distinctions in a closed community. The Knightleys in Donwell Abbey are the top of the hierarchy in Highbury with their aristocratic background; Mr Knightley gets his income from his lands. Thus, from the very beginning the reader has an image of Mr. Knightley in his/her mind, and as the narrator's and Emma's comments add up, it becomes clear that Mr. Knightley is a distinguished person in his environment, and that we can trust upon his judgements for he is the only person who sees the people of Highbury from a distance above in his house, Donwell Abbey. As

Emma feels important to mention, Woodhouses are in no way inferior to Donwell Abbey's owner. Woodhouses, second in rank, also belong to aristocracy, they are long been established in Hartfield, theirs is a respectable and a rich family. Thus, Emma, unaware of her awareness of her state, in a way reclaims her superiority over others, she is the most distinguished and well-off female in Highbury, and she lets the readers meet with her arrogant self, too. While Mr Elton is the vicar of the vicarage of Donwell Abbey, who is most probably have aristocratic ties but no inheritance, he is in need of a wife as long as she has a good dowry. Mr Weston is a middle class man, who was once Captain Weston and married to Miss Churchill who was an aristocrat, yet after his wife's death and sending his son Frank away to his uncle's, Captain Weston quits the army and engages in trade and becomes Mr Weston, makes his fortune and begins to lead a comfortable life at Randalls:

> Some scruples and some reluctance the widower-father may be supposed to have felt; but as they were overcome by other considerations, the child was given up to the care and the wealth of the Churchills, and he had only his own comfort to seek and his own situation to improve as he could.
>
> A complete change of life became desirable. He quitted the militia and engaged in trade, having brothers already established in a good way in London, which afforded him a favourable opening. It was a concern which brought just employment enough. He had still a small house in Highbury, where most of his leisure days were spent; and between useful occupation and the pleasures of society, the next eighteen or twenty years of his life passed cheerfully away. (14-5)

Thus, Austen depicts the rise of bourgeoisie; a middle class man is able to raise his fortune by trade. His second wife and Emma's late governess Mrs Weston (Miss Taylor) can be considered as an in-between character, she works as Isabelle and Emma's governess for sixteen years, and she also becomes a member of the family. As for her class, it can be said that she belongs to lower gentry, who without an income has to choose being a governess, and her marriage enables her to establish a bond with the middle class. The same in-betweenedness is existent for Mr. Weston's son, too. Although Mr. Weston makes his fortune, he never takes his son back, thus, his son Frank is middle class by birth, yet by carrying his mother's family name Churchill and being the only inheritor of Churchills' fortune, he is a member of the gentry. This ambiguity also leads to an ambiguity in his character; one cannot label him as good or bad because he requires a study of his aims and actions from the reader. Mrs and Miss Bates follow Westons, who fell from a better state, Mrs Bates being the wife of a

teacher, knowing Mr Woodhouse from long before, stands as a respected yet the poor family of Highbury. Martins on the other hand continue an old habit; they are a farmer family, who live on the land they rented from Mr Knightley, and work upon it, yet at the same time, as Knightley says, Robert Martin is a respectable, fine man who is above Harriet. Harriet, "being the natural daughter of somebody" (22) is educated by Mrs Goddard to a degree and is employed as "a parlour border." (22) In the community of Highbury she is without family, status and economic power, thus she lacks a certain identity which will be readily created by Emma herself.

In this colourful comedy, though we are intertwined with many lively characters, and introduced to the various characters from different backgrounds, as the novel's title also suggests, our focal point is Emma and what she goes through in the novel. Emma is the only heroine among Austen's heroines who is "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and *she* had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."[3] (3) She is the second daughter of Mr Woodhouse, and loved by him and all the other characters around her, yet at the same time she has her faults too, though most of them are unseen by her friends: she is selfish, depends upon her own judgements believing that she has the ability to read the feelings and thoughts of everyone around her, and she does not question herself. Mr Knightley is "one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them." (9) Others do not see or do not have the courage to see and tell Emma's faults because of her superiority to everyone else around her except Mr. Knightley. What gives Mr. Knightley the power to be the only one who tells Emma of her faults is his unshakable superiority both as the patriarch and as a gentleman in Highbury. He talks of her faults and the reason of all those while he is speaking to Mrs. Taylor:

> She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding. […]You never could persuade her to read half so much as you wished.—You know you could not." […]
>
> "[…] Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family. At ten years old, she had the misfortune of being able to answer questions which puzzled her sister at seventeen. She was always quick and assured: Isabella slow and diffident. And ever since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all. In her mother she lost the only person able to cope with her. She inherits her mother's talents, and must have been under subjection to her." (36-7)

[3] Italics added.

For being the only superior of her, and a true friend, Mr. Knightley is the only one who warns her, and shows Emma her mistakes while the others look upon her as the picture of perfection. Mr. Knightley warns her in two occasions, yet with her inability to question herself Emma is doomed to fail in matchmaking for Harriet. Another fault he finds with Emma is her inability to read the books that she is entitled to read. It is clear that Austen puts so much emphasis on reading, she sees it as a way of establishing a world view and gaining and ability to rightly judge the people around and the society. Emma chooses to read not books but her society, and on its own it is not enough to develop an improved and objective way of looking at her own society. If Emma had chosen to read her books, too, she could very well give up trying to read people around her in a wrong way. Yet her mind is so much occupied with fancy and matchmaking that she is not able to see her own faults. The reader, identifying with Emma, falls to the same traps as Emma do, it is not only Emma's failure but also reader's who has to learn through the novel not to be prejudiced and preconditioned, Austen proves that together with her characters, her reader also misreads and misinterprets. As Murat Seçkin also suggests in his *Reading Texts in Jane Austen: Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice, and Persuasion*, reader has to go through a change as the character does:

> Characters in Austen's novels go through this inward journey in society by reading or interpreting that society and its individuals and we follow this reading process and try to interpret her characters' interpretations so that we can change as they do. Her characters go through a change that can be termed as becoming a mature member of that society; their maturation processes also make them people who understand the problems of that society so that they can become more ethical human beings. Jane Austen seems to make a similar demand on us readers as well, because we read her depiction of her characters' reading others. (1)

The main subject of the novel and what causes Emma's misjudgements and mismatching is the institution of marriage. Austen, through Emma's character continues to make fun of "a truth universally acknowledged" (*P&P* 3). According to Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, this is a universal truth about marriage; men who are well-off are in need of wives. Although Emma's fanciful mind works itself to mismatch her friends, in Emma we are openly introduced with the picture of a man of good fortune who is not necessarily in need of a wife. On the contrary, some are happy to live alone and some other do not like the idea of marriage. Mr. Weston, whose marriage to Miss Taylor opens the novel, had long been living alone, has risen to a better state after his first wife's death, and Emma's speech about his near past, though she mocks those people who

did not believe that he will be married again, gives away how comfortable a life he was living:

> Every body said that Mr. Weston would never marry again. Oh, dear, no! Mr. Weston, who had been a widower so long, and who seemed so perfectly comfortable without a wife, so constantly occupied either in his business in town or among his friends here, always acceptable wherever he went, always cheerful—Mr. Weston need not spend a single evening in the year alone if he did not like it. Oh, no! Mr. Weston certainly would never marry again. Some people even talked of a promise to his wife on her death-bed, and others of the son and the uncle not letting him. All manner of solemn nonsense was talked on the subject, but I believed none of it. (10)

It is not only Mr. Weston who "seemed so perfectly comfortable without a wife", Emma's father Mr Woodhouse also does not favour marriages, he thinks that marriages disturb families and asks his daughter to stop matchmaking: "Ah! my dear, I wish you would not make matches and foretell things, for whatever you say always comes to pass. Pray do not make any more matches." (10) All these men, having experienced marriage once in their lives, do not seem to be in favour of marriage. One reason for this is their experience about what marriage brings to their liberty, status, and lives in general. Robert P. Irvine in *Jane Austen* comments that the female characters of the novel, those who are well off, are the powerful characters so the controlling ones in marriage too:

> On Johnson's view, *Emma* appears as something of a female utopia, in which (Knightley aside) women are in charge: not only Emma, but also Mrs Elton and Mrs Churchill, are the characters who take the decisions that matter in this novel. Clearly, these women are able to do this because they are, themselves, well-off members of the propertied classes. *'Emma* is a world apart from conservative fiction in accepting a hierarchical social structure not because it is a sacred dictate of patriarchy—*Mansfield Park* had spoiled this—but rather because within its parameters class can actually supersede sex' (Johnson 1988: 127). (146)

Then the older generation of men's being comfortable without marriage shows the desire to be far away from being controlled by these women who are in charge. However, in Mr. Woodhouse's case, the early death of his wife adds up to his fear of marriage, it can be thought that he does not want to go through the same experience again by losing another partner and desires to save as many friends from this experience as he could.

Another important problem in these men's marriages is what becomes of them as fathers at the end. Austen depicts all these father figures as lacking characters

full of inabilities. Mr. Weston gives his child away and does not take him back when he becomes rich; Mr. Woodhouse is immobile and so full of himself that he is not able to see his daughter's faults; Harriet's father comes on the scene only at the end of the novel. In all Austen's novels the father figures are either dead or impotent, and in *Emma*, too, it is easy to see that these father figures are not proper males; they constitute improper examples for their children by not fulfilling their duties as a father. The lack of guidance from the father figure leads the sons and daughters to problematic events, because the voice of reason and social norms, which is chronically the voice of the father in Austen's age, is unheard by these characters.

Although Emma is so much concerned about the marriages of the others, she herself does not consider marriage. There she is unable to read through herself, too. However, Emma's misreading and misinterpretations begin when she meets Harriet via Mrs. Goddard:

> (Harriet is) [a] very pretty girl, and her beauty happened to be of sort which Emma particularly admired. She was short, plump, and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness; and before the end of the evening, Emma was as much pleased with her manners as her person […] (22)

These are the only reasons for her befriending Harriet, but she later understands that Harriet's speech is intellectually not satisfying, she is dependent upon Emma on every subject and Harriet's simple nature highlights Emma's own abilities and enables her to use Harriet both as her disciple and her mirror:

> She is attracted to Harriet both because of Harriet's qualities and because of the qualities in herself that Harriet brings out […] Harriet is the object of Emma's interest and kindness, yet it is clear that Harriet is more interesting as she reflects Emma. Increasingly, as the passage proceeds, Emma the subject becomes also the object of her "undertaking," as if she were considering not so much Harriet but herself in the mirror Harriet provides. (McKee 61-2)

She takes pleasure in forming a new Harriet in her own model. Through making Harriet a loveable creature with her manners and style, she tries to make men and other people around her love a person in her (Emma's) liking. They will be complimenting her creation, her success in transforming a girl like Harriet. Although she befriends Harriet and very decided to find her a better match from gentility, Emma herself is very class conscious and ruled by her class prejudices, which will prove itself later on. However, when the subject is "Harriet in Emma's liking", she does not care about the class boundaries, Mr

Elton is a very suitable suitor for Harriet, she misreads and misjudges every act and word of Mr Elton. The only thing that she literally reads all through the novel, Mr. Elton's riddle, is also misinterpreted by her and she makes Harriet believe in her misreading, too. She writes her own fiction around Mr Elton and Harriet which leads to a mismatch that will end in disappointment; as Patricia McKee also suggests, "Emma is, in her imaginative matchmaking, a creator of fictions." (62) Yet, at the same time, when Robert Martin proposes to Harriet, she finds him below Harriet's standing and makes her refuse the proposal. And she is also shocked to find out that Mr Elton was in love with her, that is when she shows her self-indulged, class conscious character:

> Perhaps it was not fair to expect him to feel how very much he was her inferior in talent, and all the elegancies of mind. The very want of such equality might prevent his perception of it; but he must know that in fortune and consequence she was greatly his superior. He must know that the Woodhouses had been settled for several generations at Hartfield, the younger branch of a very ancient family—and that the Eltons were nobody. The landed property of Hartfield certainly was inconsiderable, being but a sort of notch in the Donwell Abbey estate, to which all the rest of Highbury belonged; but their fortune, from other sources, was such as to make them scarcely secondary to Donwell Abbey itself, in every other kind of consequence; and the Woodhouses had long held a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood which Mr. Elton had first entered not two years ago, to make his way as he could, without any alliances but in trade, or any thing to recommend him to notice but his situation and his civility (137).

Mr. Elton's confession leads to her first epiphany, although she realizes her misinterpretation of Mr. Elton's actions, she does not fully acknowledge her failure in reading people's minds, she cannot even realize that she is also class conscious yet tries to blind both herself and Harriet to this reality. She makes Harriet believe in the possibility of breaking these class boundaries, she encourages her to aim high, have self confidence and belief in her superior talents, yet when she learns that Harriet is in love with Mr. Knightley and believes that he cares for her too, Emma betrays herself, she admits herself that she does not think Harriet is worthy of him, because she herself is and wishes that she has never met her. Because while Harriet as her mirror begins to reflect undesired visions, Harriet as her disciple suddenly begins to take her place in Mr Knightley's and through him in all her other friends' hearts.

Indeed, at the very beginning of their friendship, Knightley first warns Mrs Weston, then Emma about the impropriety of the relationship, one may think that it is because of his class conscious mind that he disapproves this friendship,

or just because he does not believe in class mobility:

> "[…]But Harriet Smith—I have not half done about Harriet Smith. I think her the very worst sort of companion that Emma could possibly have. She knows nothing herself, and looks upon Emma as knowing every thing. She is a flatterer in all her ways; and so much the worse, because undesigned. Her ignorance is hourly flattery. How can Emma imagine she has any thing to learn herself, while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority? And as for Harriet, I will venture to say that *she* cannot gain by the acquaintance. Hartfield will only put her out of conceit with all the other places she belongs to. She will grow just refined enough to be uncomfortable with those among whom birth and circumstances have placed her home. I am much mistaken if Emma's doctrines give any strength of mind, or tend at all to make a girl adapt herself rationally to the varieties of her situation in life.—They only give a little polish." (37-8)

(To Emma)

> "I have always thought it a very foolish intimacy," said Mr. Knightley presently, "though I have kept my thoughts to myself; but I now perceive that it will be a very unfortunate one for Harriet. You will puff her up with such ideas of her own beauty, and of what she has a claim to, that, in a little while, nobody within her reach will be good enough for her. Vanity working on a weak head, produces every sort of mischief. Nothing so easy as for a young lady to raise her expectations too high. Miss Harriet Smith may not find offers of marriage flow in so fast, though she is a very pretty girl. Men of sense, whatever you may chuse to say, do not want silly wives. Men of family would not be very fond of connecting themselves with a girl of such obscurity—and most prudent men would be afraid of the inconvenience and disgrace they might be involved in, when the mystery of her parentage came to be revealed. […]" (64)

What he tries to make them see is that it is not only Harriet's being a bad friend for Emma with her low situation in life, but it is also Emma's impropriety for Harriet. As being the only one who finds and tells the faults of Emma, Mr. Knightley openly criticises her for thinking that she has anything to teach Harriet while she is herself in need of learning and experiencing more. He also criticises Emma for her wrongly directed charity, she does not try to be charitable for the sake of it, and she just takes pleasure in having a toy friend who she can control. Emma is like a female Pygmalion[4] tries to creates a Galatea from Harriet but whatever the outcome is she is forcing her to be someone she

[4] J. S. Lawry also draws attention to the similarity between Emma and Pygmalion in "'Decided and Open: Structure in *Emma"* in *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Vol 24. No. 1 (Jun., 1969), pp. 1-15.

is not, and by giving her encouragement about being a lady from gentility, she raises her expectations though the society she aims for will never accept her more than as an acquaintance.

What Emma has to learn is self criticism, consideration of her acts, yet she is not able to see her mistakes until they come out as disasters. Although she is been warned about Mr Elton, she is decided to see things in her way, and when Elton confesses his love for her, she reconsiders all the events, finds her faults, yet her resolution to not to meddle with these matchmaking business anymore lasts only a short time, and she repeats her mistakes. As Sarah Emsley suggests in *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues*;

> *Emma* is about the process of learning to respect other people, to tolerate differences, and to be charitable to others, and it is about the role of misery in the process of education. Although Emma Woodhouse never suffers severe physical pain or loss, in the course of the novel she is required to undergo suffering that contributes to her education, and the kind of pain she endures is the torment of coming to consciousness of her own errors.
>
> Emma acts confidently but has to learn to think about the consequences of her actions; she thus resembles Elizabeth Bennet. The novel describes how a young woman who appears to have everything comes to realize that she does not quite have it all, and, moreover, that she definitely does not know everything. (129)

Although she does not know everything, she thinks that she has all the secrets of other people, she fails not only in Harriet's two (one-sided) love relationships, but also in Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax's situation. In Frank's case though she is tend to misinterpret him, she is not the one to blame, Frank himself leads the way to be misinterpreted, or as Patricia McKee suggests he misrepresents himself:

> In Frank's case, then, what is the situation? Frank's situation is not known. As it later becomes known, however, the situation is much more complex than Emma suggests, to a degree that would probably alter both Emma's and Mr. Knightley's opinions about it. Frank, secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax, has misrepresented the situation, blaming on the Churchills what is in fact his own unwillingness to come to Highbury before Jane arrives. Arguing that his circumstances justify his conduct, Emma has nevertheless misjudged Frank, because he has misrepresented himself and his circumstances. (55)

Emma comes clean out of Frank's case; yet she is still in debt for creating fictions about other people with her fancy at work which is in fact an inferior

talent according to Coleridge:

> FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phaenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

What Emma thinks she knows and believes as the exact reality is only what she is preconditioned to think and as Coleridge's explanation makes clear, all her fiction that she creates for those around her comes from her fancy. She knows that Frank Churchill is seen as a match for her by Mr and Mrs. Weston, thus she comes to believe that Frank is in love with her as she thinks she is in love with him too. When Jane Fairfax is the object of her fiction, the same idea is recurrent; she has a predetermination to dislike Jane, she does not like to hear about Jane Fairfax, she wishes her well yet she is bored to death listening how nice a young girl she is, and when she returns to Highbury, she cannot disengage her fancy making up stories about her and telling them to Frank Churchill without hesitation. Jane is her peer, and a respected nice young woman, very good at music and manners although she is poor and destined to be a governess; she is educated by her dead father's friend Captain Campbell and his family. Only in one point she is inferior to Emma, and that is why Emma cannot bear to hear about her and readily criticizes her manners and says that she is unable to love Jane. Jane is so nice a girl thus a rival to Emma, she openly is jealous of her but cannot admit it, she rather creates a fiction for her about her friend's husband Mr Dixon's being in love actually with Jane and chooses to believe in it herself and tries to make Frank believe in it foolishly. Jane can also be seen as a foil to her, through Jane's silences or short speeches, her resolution and manners Emma's faults are highlighted, while Jane's silence makes her a powerful character who demurs society withholding information about herself, Emma's gossiping around paves the way for her failures. Along with a rival, Emma also has two possible doubles for herself, Miss Bates and Mrs. Elton. As a woman who does not consider marriage and desires to look after her father and have one of her nieces with her at Hartfield, she gives the hints of being a possible but a better-off Miss Bates for being rich:

> "[…] Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's

> eyes as I am in my father's."
>
> "But then, to be an old maid at last, like Miss Bates!"
>
> "That is as formidable an image as you could present, Harriet; and if I thought I should ever be like Miss Bates! so silly—so satisfied—so smiling—so prosing—so undistinguishing and unfastidious—and so apt to tell every thing relative to every body about me, I would marry to-morrow. But between us, I am convinced there never can be any likeness, except in being unmarried."
>
> "But still, you will be an old maid! and that's so dreadful!"
>
> "Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! […]" (86)

The above quotation highlights Emma's self-confidence which depends upon her independence, an independence that is cared for by her father who gives her a title, fortune and all-in-one duty/role as the daughter, the wife, the mother, and the mistress of the house. She shows her class consciousness and her awareness of what her social standing presents her. The same speech also makes a reference to the idea of marriage again, Emma is afraid of marriage as the male characters are. Her life in Hartfield provides her with everything she needs, as suggested above she is the mistress of the house even though she is not married. Although we see that woman characters are much more powerful in marriages like Mrs. Churchill, Emma's fear can be read as the anxiety of losing everything she has, especially her control over others. However, all around her there are powerful 'wife' figures, Mrs. Elton, who is not aware of societal rules and exaggerates herself, is one of those women. She is another foil for Emma; she takes upon the mission of being a patron to Jane, which reminds us Emma's being a patron to Harriet. Emma just cannot understand how this woman sees herself as capable of giving/teaching anything to Jane or how Jane is able to bear her treatment and why she obeys Mrs Elton silently (301) but she is not aware of the fact that all these instances reflect her relationship with Harriet; she also decides what Harriet should do to the extent of her reply to a proposal. These very reasons are also the reasons for her not liking these characters; Austen creates two sharp edges for Emma that she can turn into. While Miss Bates is a future possibility, the other gives light to her present behaviour:

> When Emma tells Harriet that she will never marry, for example, Harriet responds by imagining her "to be an old maid at last, like Miss Bates!" At this Emma makes what is for her an easy distinction between rich and poor old maids, but when she forecasts, "I shall often have a niece with me," Har-

> riet repeats the association Emma has rejected: "Do you know Miss Bates's niece?" (58, 59). Mr. Knightley presents Emma with yet another likeness she would rather deny: Jane Fairfax, as "the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself" (in). Mrs. Elton presents still another reflection of Emma. Her patronage of Jane Fairfax echoes Emma's patronage of Harriet and realizes the least attractive qualities of the heroine unambiguously. (McKee 63)

However, nothing is enough for Emma to change herself, although she is openly warned by Knightley for many times and sees examples of her character she does not question herself, when her misjudgements and mismatched couples turn into disasters she stops for a moment and considers her actions:

Marilyn Butler argues that it is not until Emma learns that Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax are engaged that she finally judges herself clearly. But Emma is forced to criticize her own mind well before the climax of the novel. After Mr. Elton has proposed to her—"actually making violent love to her" (*E* 129)—in the carriage on the way home after the Westons' Christmas Eve party, she is obliged to acknowledge her blindness regarding the object of her charitable matchmaking scheme. She does not yet know how blind she has been to Harriet's feelings in the whole affair with Robert Martin, or how reprehensible it is that she has directed Harriet to love Mr. Elton, but she does see how wrong she has been about interpreting Mr. Elton's behavior, and how her encouragement of his attentions could have been misinterpreted as welcoming his affection for her. (Emsley 133)

These can be seen as her progress yet not her total formation because when she understands that she does not love Frank Churchill she wants to match him with Harriet. The moment she questions her feelings about Frank can be seen as her second epiphany, she at least begins to question herself but not her actions and not her misreading the others yet. When she learns that she was wrong about everything that concerns Frank, she has her third epiphany, upon learning Frank's engagement she continues her faulty judgements. It is when she learns that Harriet is not in love with Frank but with Mr Knightley, she begins to know herself. She realizes that her only love is Mr Knightley and she also realizes that she made a mistake from the very beginning by trying to turn Harriet into someone she is not supposed to be. However, it can also be considered as her desperate need for 'a Harriet' to know herself, to be able to aware of her misjudgements and misinterpretations. It is Harriet's confession about Mr. Knightley that enables her last epiphany:

> Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had let her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world. (410)

However, she is not the only one who has prejudices or jealousy. Although, Mr Knightley is seemed to be the perfect hero, he has his fallacies too. On many points, his judgements are right and his comments are remarkable, yet he has prejudices about no one but Frank who continually delays his visit to Randalls or acts like a dandy when he is in town. Roger Sales in his book *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* sees his dislike of Frank as the dislike of French culture and way of life:

> Mr Knightley believes that Frank's lifestyle is that of a French aristocrat rather than one appropriate for an English gentleman: No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'aimable', have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him. (E, p. 166) […] Knightley displays his own Francophobia before Frank arrives in Highbury. It is Francophobia in a double sense: dislike of the country as well as jealousy of a man called Frank. The detective has scrutinised the evidence, such as Frank's letters, and has made his own deductions. They turn out to be remarkably perceptive ones, which makes his ultimate failure to expose the crime all the more surprising. (146)

As a gentleman who lives in Donwell Abbey, which is "a sweet view – sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a bright sun, without being oppressive." (361), his reaction to coxcomb like behaviour of Frank can be explained as his Franchophobia. However, it is also, as we later learn, his love for Emma that makes him jealous and predetermined about him. Frank is also a foil for Knightley, his dandyism, escaping to London to have his hair cut although he cannot find the time to visit his father show a contrasting character he constitutes for Knightley. While Frank does every action to hide something about his relationship with Jane, his choice of secrecy and misrepresentation of his situation is another difference between the two characters. Mr Knightley is a complete gentleman and as Emma says never shows anything that he is not intended for while Frank requires so much to be a complete gentleman. Thus, Knightley cannot help disliking him, his misreading and misjudgement lies there but with a cause, he believes that Emma is in love with Frank, and even when she confesses that she seemed to be so but she

is not in love with him, he is not ready to comprehend the truth. Austen in a way shows how the power of thinking and judgement are dismantled when one has passionate feelings for another, Knightley himself refers to this idea when Mrs. Taylor does not want to understand why he criticizes Emma, he says that she has too much affection and good opinion for Emma that she cannot see her faults or the reality as it is. As seen in Emma's and Knightley's cases, the good opinion for someone disables one to judge correctly and see faults with the person, while the bad opinion leads to finding faults whenever possible. Mr Knightley helps Emma to get away from this kind of judgements, yet he is only able to be successful in the end. Emma always needs someone to confront her and prove her that what she is doing is a mistake. While the first confrontation comes from Mr Elton, another confrontation comes from Mr Knightley again who scolds her for her behaviour at Box-Hill:

> The reason he reprimands her is that he knows she will not learn by reading. She does learn by thinking things through, but it took Mr. Elton's outburst to provide the occasion for her to reconsider that situation, and there is no way that Miss Bates would ever confront Emma. There needs to be something that instigates Emma's thinking about her conduct. Mr. Knightley's speech here parallels Mr. Elton's declaration of love in that it prompts Emma to think. Mr. Knightley has chided her only for the one public remark, but Emma's conscience tells her that she has been thinking scornfully of Miss Bates all along, even while sending her pork and paying her visits. And she has spoken of her ungraciously to Harriet. In fact, Emma's own conscience is more severe in judging her thought and action than Mr. Knightley is. The realization that she has not loved her neighbor as herself is Emma's second moment of revelation, and it is far more painful than the earlier revelation that she has misjudged the situation with Mr. Elton. (Emsley 142-3)

Yet it is still open to argument whether she realizes her defects and improves them or becomes as Mr Knightley wishes without changing at all. It seems that she goes through a progress, learns through her actions and their outcomes. Sarah Emsley indicates that,

> Some have suggested that the process she has to go through to arrive at that realization is education by humiliation, and that she is required to submit to the better knowledge of her moral superior, her friend/ brother/ father-surrogate, whose testing of her moral worth is rewarded by her hand in marriage. A number of critics have objected to the idea that Emma must be disciplined by Mr. Knightley in order to be worthy of becoming his bride. In contrast, I read Emma as primarily responsible for her own moral education, an education into charitable thought. Her education is dependent on her choosing

> to change, not on her submitting to Mr. Knightley's wishes. I see Emma as independent, even in her education in recognizing her own errors, and there is evidence that Mr. Knightley himself sees her as capable of recognizing her own errors. (Emsley 129-130)

Emma chooses to change yet Austen also shows that misjudgements and mismatching are not limited to Emma or Knightley, Mr and Mrs Weston also thinks that Emma loves Frank; Mrs Weston thinks there is affection between Jane and Mr Knightley, Harriet thinks that Mr Knightley also has feelings for her. Austen in a way shows us the inability to disable our pre-conditioned ideas and our tendency to misread and misinterpret people around us and depending upon our prejudices and preconditioned knowledge our tendency to etiquette people around us.

In contrast to her other novels, in *Emma*, the marriages do not come as a surprise at the last page, she prepares the reader for possible marriages because the novel opens with a marriage and is about matchmaking itself. However, we cannot infer that if these marriages will turn out as happy ones because each requires the devotion and understanding of one partner. Marriage of Frank and Jane is based upon the forgiving nature and devotedness of Jane who bears with all the silly actions of Frank, he openly flirts with Emma though he depends upon his own consideration of Emma's seeing her as a brother, rather than keeping a distance from unmarried women, just to secure his secret he causes pain and hurts Jane's feelings. While the marriage of Knightley and Emma requires one to be a true friend to his wife and show her her fallacies, while Emma should learn to trust in his considerations. Her characters in *Emma*, specifically Emma herself, do not stop learning and should continue improving their defects. As Sarah Emsley indicates,

> Even Austen's most virtuous heroines are not always perfect. Elaine Bander makes the distinction that "Perfection, for Austen, is not being but becoming." Through their contemplation of what it means to live a good life, Austen's heroines work toward practicing, exercising, or becoming virtuous (…) Their life together, therefore, promises to be, like Emma, "faultless in spite of all [its] faults" (*E* 433). The virtuous life is not a perfect life, but in attempting to learn, exercise, and practice the virtues, Austen suggests, one may achieve something like perfect happiness, not happiness as an end result, but as a process open to revision. (141)

Austen balances these relationships by choosing characters that complete each other. Frank's childish nature is balanced with Jane's strong character while Emma who needs guidance is matched with Mr. Knightley who is in need of

more feelings, but Austen also escapes from anything abrupt; she both balances the relationships and roots them in the solid ground of the past:

> Austen achieves three ends in their jousting: she demonstrates Emma's desire to challenge Mr Knightley's moral superiority, she exonerates him from any conscious desire to play Pygmalion, and she also begins to chip away at the problem that his paternal relationship to Emma may colour their developing sexual relationship. The last is achieved by engineering a time-lag between the reader's early perception that Mr Knightley is in love and his own later recognition (resulting from Frank Churchill's arrival, 432) that a different relationship is possible, an effect Austen reinforces by introducing Emma to the reader when she is already a self-confident young woman. Though we are told a good deal about their father–daughter past, what we see are two socially (and potentially sexually) compatible adults. Mr Knightley's "Brother and sister! no, indeed" later, at the ball (331), marks his recognition of his completed passage from father to lover, but this discovery has been long anticipated by the reader. (Menon 37)

Through misreading and misjudgements of Emma and the others around her, Austen shows that faults are a part of everybody's character, she also makes us the readers see our own misreading through these characters. Emma has to know her mind and realize that she misreads and misinterprets, the reader also has to see that he/she is misreading like Emma. As she goes through a change the reader has to change, too, learning from her experience. By employing a highly ironic tone, Austen achieves to criticise every character she creates and brings us to an understanding that nothing is faultless. This is what makes her art and characters timeless; they represent our own selves to us.

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