



JANE AUSTEN'S EMMA AND PRESENT DAY WOMAN: A STUDY ON UNCHANGED SOCIETY EVEN AFTER CENTURIES

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“The profession of ladies, to which the bent of their instruction should be turned, is that of daughters, wives, mothers, and mistresses of families”. – Hannah More

Abstract:

The portrayal of life in a conservative, pastoral setting, and kaleidoscopic breadth of social class, educational background and marital status among the female characters present a social commentary on the inadequacies of the education women received. Against such a rich backdrop, Austen redefines female education by arguing that a holistic form of learning such as Emma Wood house's journey of auto-didacticism trumps a formal schooling which only aims to ensnare a useful marriage. The re-reading of the her Emma by the generations to generations reveal a secret that there is no change in terms of treating woman in the society for which many organizations fighting for. In this light, the present paper presents a comparative study of the circumstances and atmosphere prevailed during 18th century and in 21st century by reading Jane Austen's novel, Emma. Gender discrimination, waves of feminism, championing the plights of woman and many other movements in global society continuously waged war against such situations. However, the expected changes in treatment of woman yet to come in the future by the so called civilized society.

Keywords: Hope, Past, Present, Status, woman

Introduction:

While establishing the background of *Emma* (1982), Austen refers to a macrocosmic picture of the constraints imposed upon women's education and prospects. It revolves around newly consummated or anticipated matches because exclusively through engaging in courtship, and accepting or rejecting proposals, could a young woman play an active role in her own future. Their meager education afforded them few prospects through which they could otherwise exert control over their own lives. Alternatively, women turned to trivial, everyday activities such as evening parties, tea-visits, and harmless gossip, strongly reflecting the monotony and stagnancy which dictated women's lives The novel begins with an introduction to Emma and her neighborhood in High bury, where Austen brings attention to a modest, local school run by Mrs. Goddard. A “real, honest old-fashioned boarding-school. . . where girls scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies,” (Emma, III:16) the school is “in high repute, and very deservedly”. (III:16) From the wry undertones of such praise, it is evident that Austen does not share this approval but is critical of the notion that immoderately accomplished ladies were “screwed out of health and into vanity” (III:16) , thereby running the risk of repelling potential suitors. Far from being encouraged, the cultivation of a woman's mind was dissuaded for a higher chance of marriage. But there continues to be little need and few chances for a married woman to exercise her intellect and authority, as represented by Mrs. John Knightly. Her lack of “strong understanding or any quickness” (IX: 77) in no way interferes with her being a “devoted wife a doting mother”, (IX:77) namely “a model of right feminine happiness”. (XVII:115)



Only the events leading to matrimony opened a small window of opportunity for women to take charge of their destinies before they became trapped in yet another cage. *Emma's* emphasis on women's reliance on marriage to play as the "origin of change" (I:4) in their lives highlights how a deprived education had inhibited their social mobility.

Scope of the Paper:

Formal Education among women carried on varied implications depending on their social and financial backgrounds ultimately pointing the same set of values. In the novel, Jane Fairfax, on account of "the very few hundred pounds which she inherited from her father make independence impossible," (II: 133) her education is a necessary "means of respectable subsistence" (II:133) as she is forced to consider becoming a governess. Yet Jane's situation is viewed a "penance and mortification" to the extent that "governess-trade" (XVII: 248) becomes comparable to the slave-trade; the former is "widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on. . . but as to the greater misery of the victims, not know where it lies". (XVII: 248) The miserable portrayal of a woman's schooling that warranted financial independence and greater social mobility, instead of an idle married life, represents the misplacement of obligations incumbent on women and their education.

In contrast to Jane, Mrs. Elton is a gentlewoman "in possession of an independent fortune" for whom her education is purely ornamental. "Accomplishments," often involving musical and artistic skills, played a key part in a woman's education by drawing admiration from viable suitors, but were usually dropped after marriage. Likewise, Mrs. Elton is "determined upon neglecting her music" since she begins "now to comprehend that a married woman has many things to call her attention". Her education has failed to teach her the importance of self-improvement, whether or not it refers to music or "self-important, presuming, familiar, ignorant and ill-bred" manner. Mrs. Elton, already "extremely well satisfied with herself", is oblivious to the "familiar vulgarity" with which she encroaches on social etiquette and unable to evolve from the "little upstart, vulgar being" (XIV:229) She is. Austen establishes Mrs. Elton as a comedic caricature to illustrate the shortcomings of an education that is reduced to a disposable marketing device.

Against the context of women's lives and education in the period, the privileged and distinctive nature of Emma's status stands out. Jane Fairfax's hardships underscore Emma's endowments which exempt her from "the usual inducements of women to marry": fortune, employment and consequence. Emma additionally enjoys wielding a rare amount of dominance that no eligible suitor can offer. She adds, "I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartsfield". Since she has "very little intention of ever marrying at all," Emma does not limit her education to furnishing useful "accomplishments," as Mrs. Elton does, but pursues her interests freely by virtue of her "active, busy mind". A young woman such as Emma who is bright and inquisitive, and delights in intellectual activity, is Austen's rebuttal to society's condemnation of an education that nurtures an appreciation of learning and growth in women.

Background of the Paper:

Austen does not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of Emma's character and education. Due to her "disposition to think a little too well of herself", Emma is reluctant to

acknowledge and overcome her weaknesses. In her artistic endeavors, Emma always falls short of “[approaching] the degree of excellence which she would have been glad to command, and ought not to have failed of”. Emma continues her willful ignorance in front of others. When Knightly criticize that Emma had drawn Harriet too tall, Emma “[knows] that she had, but would not own it”. This chronic overestimation of her powers, added to her unique position of authority and independence, leads Emma to view herself a superior outsider to the social rituals and day-to-day events of Highbury, and proceed to impose her “kind designs” on those around her. As her “errors of imagination” cause her self-delusions to backfire, however, Emma is forced to take a hard look at her indiscretion and true feelings, and enters the three stages of her education.

Emma's first major blunder and learning opportunity is a series of miscalculations regarding Harriet and Mr. Elton. Her “infatuation about [Harriet] blinds [her]” to Harriet's limited “claims, either of birth, nature or education”, even prompts her to concoct new fancies such as that “[Harriet's] father is. . . a gentleman of fortune”. With Mr. Elton, Emma is likewise “too eager and busy in her own previous conceptions and views to hear him impartially, or see him with clear vision” and gladly mistakes him of “being in the fairest way of falling in love, if not in love already” , with Harriet. Emma gets so carried away by her egotistic imagination that she “actually poor Harriet into being very much attached to Mr. Elton”. Yet when Mr. Elton professes his love not for Miss Smith, but for Miss Woodhouse, Emma's grand scheme reveals itself to be an “overthrow of everything she had been wishing for”.

Shocked into disillusionment, Emma realizes “how much truer a knowledge of Mr. Elton's character had been there shown than any she had reached herself” , and reflects on her irresponsibility, taking to heart that “to take so active a part in bringing any two people together . . . is adventuring too far and assuming too much”. But what mortifies Emma more than anything, and thus drives her to such a resolution, is the pain and humiliation she brings upon Harriet, more so than her own oversight. Emma “would gladly have submitted to feel yet. . . more disgraced by misjudgment than she actually made the effects of her blunders have been confined to herself”. Her repentance owes to her natural charity, which proves to be an asset to her education by providing further incentive to be more “humble and discreet”, and allows Emma to take from this experience a more accurate assessment of her limitations and external reality.

Though she now “[knows] the limitations of her own powers” , Emma's misunderstanding of Jane Fairfax shows that Emma still holds pretensions to keen insight, marking the second development of her education. Even before Jane enters the stage, Emma's animosity towards Jane is clear, which Knightly explains is “because, Emma sees, in Jane the really accomplished young woman which she wanted to be thought herself,” but an “accusation” Emma has “eagerly refuted”. Nevertheless, partly out of contempt and partly out of vain satisfaction from Frank Churchill's “permitted, encouraged attentions”, Emma spins a new “mischievous” drama using her “abominable suspicions of improper attachment to Mr. Dixon”.

Arguments:

Emma's fanciful theories are disproved by the truth of Jane and Frank's private engagement, Furthermore, contrary to society's low expectations of women who displayed their intellect

and knowledge, Emma shows a markedly improved level of sensibility since her previous humiliation. "Determined not to utter a word that should hurt Jane Fairfax's feelings," Emma abstains from probing Jane with "an inquiry or two, as to the expedition and expense of the Irish mails" that Emma suspects were from Mr. Dixon. This display of consideration and self-restraint indicates Emma's graduation from childish impulsivity to mature discipline. When Emma realizes her misjudgment, similar to how she had felt with Harriet, she falls into deep remorse over having "made a subject of material distress to the delicacy of Jane's feelings". This second blow to Emma's conscience cements her understanding of her imprudence, causing her to finally acknowledge "the envious feelings which had certainly been, in some measure, the cause" of her not having sought a closer acquaintance with [Jane]". Already, Emma is beginning to show a consciousness of her habitual indiscreetness, and continues to gain a greater depth of self-insight by coming to terms with some undeniable, albeit unpleasant, feelings.

Explanation:

The development of Emma's budding self-awareness is completed by Mr. Knightly role as Emma's mentor, rounding up the third stage of her personal growth. As "one of the few people who [can] see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever tells her of them", Mr. Knightly has always spoken for Emma's conscience. Hence, Mr. Knightly words dwell powerfully within Emma, most notably during his stern reproof of her for callously insulting Miss Bates at the Box Hill party. Emma is "most forcibly struck" by his reprimand and finds her voice of conscience awakened: "How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued?" Moreover, Emma's subsequent despair of having possibly lowered Mr. Knightly esteem of herself points to her dependence on his sound perception, while hinting that Emma may be holding Mr. Knightly dear to herself more than she realizes.

Emma grasps that she is indeed in love with Mr. Knightly when the thought that "Mr. Knightly must marry no one but herself" hits her. Considering Mr. Knightly ability to incite a part of Emma deep within her but which is often eclipsed by ambition and imagination, it is natural that a full recognition of "the deceptions she had been thus practicing on herself" should supersede her realization of her romantic feelings for him. The feeling of "wretchedness" that overwhelms Emma as she reflects back on all her past mischief's with a "clearness which had never blessed her before" acts as a form of catharsis. Through self-reconciliation, Emma is soon redeemed from her pain. In this climatic finale, Austen proves that education can not only come from within, but also from the outward influences of interpersonal relationships.

Emma's love for Mr. Knightly is reciprocated and their marriage happily draws the novel to a close. In fact, it is her quick-wittedness and vivacity that has "brought [Emma] in brilliancy before him". Yet Emma Woodhouse does not just marry. Instead of relocating to her husband's dwellings, by "marrying and continuing at Hartsfield", Emma maintains a large portion of her valuable independence. By defying the 18th century moralists' views on educated women and marrying, yet living together with her husband at her own home, Emma both breaks and supports tradition, and her marriage marks a shift in traditional gender roles within education and matrimony.

By acquiring wisdom and maturity, and marrying while holding the power to choose between relocating to her husband's residence and daring to break tradition by staying at Hartsfield, Emma Woodhouse debunks the social precept that any sort of cultivation of a woman's understanding is detrimental to her character and prospects of finding a husband. As opposed to one that systematically trained women into set roles and stifled growth, Austen argues for an alternative vision of female education: a comprehensive and dynamic process that acquires self-knowledge and engenders development

In keeping with her name, Aisha dominates her society as Emma does, through her position and her sense of self. The film captures Emma's arrogance and snobbery, rendered less offensive by habitual kindness of address and real affection for her family and close friends.

Comparative Analysis:

As a character, Emma embodies her unsettled social environment. While she aggressively asserts her individuality and follows her free will, she is also the most eligible woman in High bury. She may act like a product of "progressive ideology," but her social position embeds her in a "traditional ideology," that assumes marriage for social benefit. While Emma appears to reject the explanations inherent in this position, declaring never to marry and eventually marrying for love, it is both convenient and contrived that Knightly is not only her choice, but her social equal. The message is clear: follow your heart as long as it is appropriate.

Many values and much of the social stratification found in the 19th century classic Emma. While Heckerling's Clueless does not present an exact duplication of Austen's classic, there are enough similarities in Jane Austen's novel Emma, written in the 19th Century and set in the township of High bury, seems far removed from the fast paced life of late 20th century Beverly Hills. Yet the teen picture Clueless reflects both theme and cultural identification to link both texts. Emma was written in the Realist period of English history and this is reflected in the representation of the characters and themes. Austen presents an historical picture of life at this time; with High bury accurately reflecting English society and culture, with great attention to detail and political correctness.

The context of both texts has enormous bearing on the social structures, ideologies and conventions of the cultures represented. Emma is set in the 19th century English town of High bury and its main character is a member of the English upper class. She moves within the strict social hierarchy of the period and there is clear acknowledgment of class structure and the value placed on birthright. Within High bury, Emma and her father are recognized as social superiors and therefore are very much looked up to. In this society, women such as Emma had very little power, with their sole purpose in life being to make a good marriage and take their place as part of the gentrified classes. Marriage was seen as a vital tool in preserving society as it was known as it maintained the social status quo and it located people within the various social strata's.

Emma was very modern woman for her time, running the household and seeing little reason to rush into marriage. As a woman of independent wealth, she saw no reason to marry, as she was happy without a husband. By her very attitude, she challenges the social constructs of the



time and did what many women of her time had little opportunity to do; she married for love rather than personal gain.

Conclusion:

Obviously, all expect the results to show that Jane Austen's novels did influence middle-and upper-class individuals' attitudes toward women and marriage, education and slavery in the early nineteenth and twentieth century's. However, it acknowledged that individuals' attitudes were influenced only when they were beneficial for them. Furthermore, it is also seen that individuals resisted the novels' influence when they believed that their money, well-being, or reputation to be at threat. Thus her novels had the most significant effect on upper-middle class individuals' attitude towards education, and made many individuals think about education, particularly English education, in a groundbreaking new way. Her influence on individuals' attitudes toward women and marriage was also clear, but not nearly as significant as her influence on people's attitudes toward education. Her approach to education is as a whole, encouraged society's intellectual growth and achievement. The idea that women were best made for marriage kept society stable by keeping a foundational ideal alive, and it also reaffirmed men's dominance in society.

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