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### Austen's Use of Emma and Jane Fairfax as Radical Characters

Austen is an extremely talented writer and the novel *Emma* illustrates her willingness to attempt and exploit even the silly aspects of life. She induces irony in most of the relationships that are depicted in the story attempting to ridicule marriage and love which were the only institution's women were basically involved in during this era. Her style of satirically discussing these themes gives her the liberty to make fun of the patriarchy that as overtime oppressed women. With an occasionally induced laughter, Austen uses her main character, Emma, to illustrate a strong, bold and intelligent woman who is portrayed as a heroine but has an aspect of the flaw in the midst of her perfectionism. In as much as she wrote during a conservative time, I believe that Austen was a rather radical author whose themes hinted at the societal stereotypes of women (Benis, 510). Her political attempts to question the society and challenge it is not only engraved in her choice of characters and the powers she gives them but also on the way she exposes her social opinions. It is through her writing and use of heroines that a reader can grasp the feministic viewpoint of Austen in a world where equality was just a word to mention and not practical by any means. A feminist view in a conservative society is indeed radical in its own isolation. Her writing becomes the weapon she uses to make her opinions and disregard for the societal norms through her choice of characters, words, and scenarios known to the world.

Gently but surely, Austen challenges the social norms of the society (Aers, David & Cook et al. 134). She criticizes the practices that were especially put up to regulate women and the extent to which their freedoms could stretch. Using her sense of humor and diction, Austen carefully mocks the traditional practices in relation to the marriage institution. Through her characters, she raises heroine-like women who are intelligent and strong enough. In an era where social conformity is strongly expected, the society denied women the ability to think and be creative. Austen violated the codes of conducts through her characters something that is also well elaborate in her other works of *Pride and Prejudice* to which characters such as Elizabeth break the societal traditions. Through her literature, Jane explicitly expresses her radical thoughts in regard to the prejudice the society cast upon women. Austen as a female writer is bold enough to use characters to ridicule the society's patronizing act by addressing multiple issues that women have had to endure in terms of choices and freedoms throughout time. Through this, she provides an awareness of the shortcomings of the existing systems in the society particularly when it comes to how women rights are shunned. A keen reader will be able to pick up Austen strong and radical thoughts towards marriage in particular (Benis, 513). She uses people like Emma as her own voice of the feelings she has towards and marriage which conflicts with characters such as Harriet who can be termed as rather socially correct for the societal standards. Emma and Jane who is considered rather passive often air out the thoughts of most women in the conventional and conservative society who find it difficult to conform to the already set standards of the world.

Austen uses the character, Emma, to show a misguided strong female character that unlike others expressed the traits of valor and charm. As a reader, it is common to hate Emma but find yourself loving her at the same time. Austen gives her influence over other characters to

which her ideal strength and flaws are illustrated. By illustrating the comparison between Emma and her sister Isabella, the author presents Emma as the heroine that takes a different route from the societal expectations. Isabella meets the conservative requirements of the ideal woman who would relate to most of the conservative readers of that time. Emma is the character that questions these conventions and creative expressed the radicalism of Austen in undermining the social constructs that stereotyped women in this era. Her presentation of Isabella is intentional to act as the contrast of Emma and the appropriate example of the societal ultimate feminine model that is motherly and has time for hobbies. To some extent, the societal pressure influences Emma that she admires Harriet and believes women of Harriet's character are what men seek in women they desire to marry. Emma considered herself irrelevant in the eyes of the society because she is not as obedient and humble as society expects and women like Harriet conform. This is an idea that Austen strongly opposes thereafter. The author debunks this notion and ensures Emma maintains her masculinity in comparisons to Harriet's and Isabella's femininity. In spite of her flaws, Austen does not allow her heroine to be presented as inferior to people like Mr. Knightley or the patriarchy in general.

Austen presents Emma as a character that grows up without a mother. This gives her an extraordinary influence on Emma's dispositions as a heroine. As Austen writes, the mother is long dead that Emma does not have any memory of her caresses. Due to this, she develops her authoritativeness at an early age that she is able to cope and deal with powerful people without any sheer feelings of intimidations which gives her a rather men-like dominant personality. Basically, Austen makes Emma powerful and in charge of her household. Through an expression of her female power, Emma illustrates her radical nature by being able to overpower other including her own governess, Mrs. Weston. As per Austen's description, the extent of Emma's

influence is felt by her own father Mr. Woodhouse who embraces the daughter's authority and cannot match her rationality at any point. He consults the daughter something considered weird in this era by enquiring petty things like the visitors sleeping arrangement. Characters like Mr. Knightley are used to show how society disputes any form of the author coming from a woman. In fact, for a woman to exert such author, it awes other women such as Harriet who seems not to understand the manner in which Emma uses her power so effortlessly in a world where women liberties are constrained.

Emma is one of Austen's exemplary characters presented as heroines (Clark, 56). In the light of her role, Emma is comfortable enough in terms of wealth and intelligence that she does not desire to marry out of pursuit for these things. Her choice to marry is not attached to any form of financial security neither is it embedded in her ability to provide for her sisters. Through the character Emma, Austen outlays her radical opinions by questioning and violating the conservative values attached to the marriage aspect of courtship. Austen gives Emma financial independence that her status in the society and the fact that there is an adequate inheritance to cater for her siblings gives her the freedom to not desire marriage as per the societal paradigms. The author even gives her authority and power which is unlike women of this era to exert pressure over families such as the Hartfield's and the Highbury's. In the abnormality of an independent woman in the society, women like Emma end up being judged as rather arrogant, perfectionist and narcissist yet this is simply a mere act of women seeking her rights just like men. It is actually possible to read Emma by Austen and perceive as an ordinary book. However, a critical reader cannot fail to notice the extent of Austen's radical points that can be derived from her inner thoughts. In reference to the time by which this text was written, a character such as Emma is daring and groundbreaking by all means.

Austen presents Jane as a strong and self-made heroine of this era. Although her character Emma does not really express friendly feelings towards Jane, Austen supports and has likeability for Jane. Jane is a perfect character that highlights the grim choices of women in the conservative era. Additionally, it highlights the essence of financial welfare which highlights the key differences between women like Jane and Emma. Due to lack of financial freedom like that of Emma, Jane has to endure the mistreatments of people like Mrs. Elton. Her reserved nature does not appeal Emma because she feels like she lacks the elegance and mannerism that Jane exhibits. Jane's financial dependence does not accord her the choices that Emma seems to have especially when it comes to marriage. The author gives Emma the independence to choose the type of life she leads and the inadequacy of independence for women like Jane whose life is chosen for her. As per the social constructs, Jane is the typical representation of how regulated and governed women were by society. Her reserve and passivity is the ultimate illustration by Austen to show just how much social freedom women who were financially constrained could afford.

Women like Jane who are considered poor in terms of finances have multiple people controlling them, unlike Emma who has her own liberty and freedoms. At some point, Jane is presented as a governess, which is considered the lowest duty that a woman has to take probably because there is nothing else decent for them to do or because they have not secured a spouse. Austen uses women like Mrs. Elton to illustrate the extent to which the society can patronize women. During this period, the worth of a woman was evaluated by the man you could marry and the extent of his success. Alternatively, the level of financial independence such as that of Emma also counts. For instance, Emma has the choice to use when she does not desire to walk granted by the nature of her fortune. Jane is subjected to submission based on the fact that she

has to exist within the means of other people such as the Campbell's and her family. Educated but poor women are subject to abandonment by society. It entirely reduced her choices that cannot surpass being a governess. It is only under this role that her intelligence and multiple talents are properly utilized by society. Characters like Mrs. Elton have been used by Austen to illustrate the irony of this conservative society. The society attempt to impress Jane into becoming a governess which is something she absolutely despises.

Austen creates what they refer to as a 'carefully educated' woman through Jane to illustrate that fact that education was not adequate enough for women during this era. Women were considered to be a property of the men and marriage sort of gave them value. The society expected total conformity to these norms something that Austen's violate. In fact, regardless of the level of education, Jane does not acquire any special status in society being a poor woman who is brought up in a cultivated and cultured background. The conservative society is destructive to women of such orientations and their future or prospects are almost definite and not attractive at all (Aers, David & Cook et al. 129). If by any chance Jane does not find someone willing to marry her, then she has to submit and become a governess. Although she is praised for having admirable traits, Jane finds herself at the mercy of women such as Emma and Mrs. Elton because according to them the value of a woman is deeply entranced on the value of her income. This is typically the society's viewpoint of women's marketability. To these women, Jane comes from a lesser class of the societal ladder in spite of the fact that she is more knowledgeable and exhibits more admirable attributes of accomplishment than them.

Austen portrays Jane as a passive woman something that Emma considers cold but she inwardly has an admiration for the social advantages that Emma can access. Although her heroine attributes cannot be compared to those of Emma, she represents the second heroine that

Austen wishes to use in highlighting her radical opinions. Much of what we know about her is derived from the narrator and Emma's quotes. Jane has to market and allow her to be taken up by the governess role. Her marriage to Frank represents a tendency that Austen has when it comes to her heroine characters. Through this, we can comprehend the depicted rivalry and contrast between women who could afford their freedoms and others who simply had to settle for the choices they had.

To a larger extent, the author ridicules marriage by organizing marriages that result in unhappiness or divorce as for the case of Maria. Similarly, this is what becomes of Frank and Jane's marriage. It is extremely flawed as the men of this era are attracted to women of large income an attribute that Jane lacks. She is the very appropriate character to highlight the realities of such women whose husbands are still interested in flirting with the other class of women. The truth remains that women like Jane only settle for marriage just to avoid the only to avoid the only other alternative of being a governess. The nature in which she is secretly engaged by her husband is proving the undervaluing and lack of worth for women of her caliber. In the end, we can tell that Austen is not pleased with Jane's choice especially in regard to Frank but this is the basic choices that society gives women of her standard.

All through the text, Austen coherently underlines her heroines and creatively mocks the social norms by giving these women the freedom to have and utilize authority. To fully understand the depth to which Austen was radical, then you must read with reference to the historical era in which she wrote her texts. Her criticism and mockery of the conventional norms to which women existed is underlined in her well-detailed works of the text Emma. Her choice of heroines varies but is the type of characterization that prompted the contemporary readers to question the societal norms that made women heavily burdened and controlled. The very guts

and confidence to write about such issues and use satire to mock the conservatives is an act of radicalism as a female author.

In the conservative era, any form of social criticism that was derived from a women's place and directed to challenge the societal stand was definitely termed as radical. It is not to no surprise that her characters such as Emma and Jane have been regarded as radical. Moreover, Austen does not present any of her characters as the perfect or ideal woman as per the Georgian standards. For instance, Emma is described as an outspoken woman that follows her heart in what she chooses to do. But she has her own flaws in the sense that she cannot make a sound judgment as illustrated in her matchmaking attempts. Her choice to marry Mr. Knightley and have him move to her house shows a wider violation of the social conventions. Austen glorifies her heroines and ends up giving Emma more authority that society would have given her.

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