

## **EMMA: I am Very Glad I Did Think of Her**

Traits of radicalism and transitionalism in Jane Austen get their due expression in *Emma*. It is a fact that all Jane Austen novels are domestic in theme with marriage at the centre .To examine the theme of transitionalism and radicalism in *Emma* we would start with the novelist's handling the 'marriage' in the novel .In an age when marriage was looked upon as something not a matter of rejection particularly for a marriageable woman, *Emma Woodhouse* is the only Austen heroine who openly rejects marriage. Reference can be drawn from the very Tenth Chapter in the novel. Herein the chapter it is found that Harriet is surprised that Miss Woodhouse does not wish to marry:

I do so wonder, Miss Woodhouse that you should not be married, or going to be Married! So charming as you are! Emma laughed and replied, my being charming, Harriet, is not quite enough to induce me to marry.

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 generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman of good fortune is always respectable.

Dear me! but what shall you do? How shall you employ yourself when you grow old (73-74).

Harriet represents the conventional view and Emma's decision not to marry goes against the norm. Harriet also is horrified at the idea of an old maid 'which is so dreadful'.

Finally, she asks a practical question 'how shall you employ yourself when you grow old?' Harriet's disbelief and astonishment are a testament to the unchallenged hegemony of the conventional view. Her naïve remark that it is 'odd to hear a woman talk so' also reveals that men enjoyed an intellectual freedom denied to woman. Accepted social attitudes also govern her use of 'old maid' as a pejorative or pitying description. Equally, 'What will you do with your life?' expresses the conviction that marriage,

childbearing and house - keeping are the purposes of a woman's life. Any other purpose for female existence is unimaginable. This view does finally present a clear challenge to Emma.

A modern reader is likely to applaud Emma. Her speech quoted earlier is an evidence of her quality of fresh thought, taking a detached view of social conventions. She torpedoed Harriet's illogic precisely: 'My being charming, Harriet, is not quite enough to induce me to marry' (73), at the same time exposing Harriet's assumption that women passively agree to marry and it is more so if they are 'charming'. Emma continues, reaching concise conclusions and formulating clear premises, 'If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it,' and 'I have none of the usual inducements to women to marry' (73). Emma is also found to put forward her argument that women marry for 'fortune', 'employment' or 'consequence', or to be 'beloved'- all of which she has. She has, therefore, no reason to marry. A modern reader finds this argument to be nothing but a projected view of Jane Austen herself giving an expression to her radical view. In *Emma* Jane Austen introduces us to a heroine who, even under an enormous, all-pervading social pressure re-affirms her own 'self' not to be found as usual

in an age the novelist was born and brought up. Emma's role in the novel presents herself to be a young woman attempting to deny the power of social imperatives.

Emma is more than the history of a young woman's inducement to marry; it is Austen's demolition of the idea of absolute social hierarchy. Recently, Austen critics have taken new interest in the politics of her fiction, and Marilyn Butler argues that her novels depict a stable, hierarchal world reflective of Austen's own Tory values. Butler's reading may hold for the early novels, conceived before England had felt the full brunt of Revolutionary turmoil, but it could not be less true of the works that appear at the end of the Napoleonic wars. There, Austen is at one with her European contemporaries in depicting a world revolutionized by the disappearance of social absolutes. *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* all deal with this theme but *Emma* is the only one to do so radically.

The coincidence of sexual and social desire in Austen is also worth mentioning. Marriage is the Austen-heroine's career. In *Emma*, objects of ambition, like those of love, are always socially determined; that is, they are designated to the subject by the desire of a third. Harriet

is proud to drink tea with Miss Woodhouse because Mrs. Goddard's girls envy her, just as she admires Robert Martin because her Highbury friends do. And, in a post-Napoleonic world like that of *Emma*, the final dictators of desire are not an elite, but the majority. An object becomes or remains socially desirable because ordinary people compete to have it. This world of democratic desire and universal rivalry is the world of *Emma*. Jane Austen makes Emma to play the role of arbiter in society and in love; she forgets that in post-Revolutionary society, one's imitators are one's potential competitors. As her rivalry with Harriet reveals Emma's love for Knightley, so the competition of Mrs. Elton exposes the reality of Emma's social ambition. 'Self-important, presuming...(with) a little beauty and a little accomplishment, but...little judgement' (281), Mrs. Elton is Emma's double and Austen's dissection of her heroine's personal and social pretensions provides some of the subtlest satire in her fiction.

Emma is forced to endure comparison with a rival she considers beneath her, and the more she tries to distinguish herself from her double the more she demonstrates their fundamental similarity. Austen traps her in the paradox of post-Revolutionary upper classes

eternally engaged in the effort to inscribe a difference between themselves and an emulative bourgeoisie. Mrs. Elton does more, however, than reduce Emma from model to rival. By liberalizing the regal metaphor behind Emma's pretensions-as at the Crown, or in her imitation of Marie Antoinette at the Donwell picnic. She reveals its ridiculous and illusory nature. Indeed, by taking up Emma's conservative social criteria and making them her own, Mrs. Elton invalidates a whole set of hierarchical notions that permit her to assert her superiority to the Tupmans as Emma asserts hers to the Eltons. Emma conceives of her society in terms of rigid inequalities. But the social hierarchy of England in 1816 is one of open classes, not closed castes. The course of the narrative contradicts these conservative misconceptions in the same way as it exposes Emma's errors of personal psychology.

To Emma's illusion of a stratified, stable rural English society, Austen counter poses the narrator's vision of a society stable only in change, in which social status is constantly altered by good fortune and bad, by marriage and by death, by hard work, and, above all, by the passage of time. This surely is a pointer to our point of interest in Jane Austen and it being the traits of transitionalism. The

world of Emma, then, is a revolutionized world in which traditional notions of rank and caste are challenged by new social forces that express themselves through universal rivalry. In fact, the more closely we analyse the social fabric of Emma, the more its illusion of Burkean stability disappears before a picture of a traditional society in rapid, almost chaotic, flux. The absences or incapacity of fathers, the recurrence of the epithet 'nobody' etc. all suggests that the patriarchal and hierarchical divisions of English country society are in the process of being subverted. Reactionaries like MR. Woodhouse repeatedly invoke time in favour of traditional prejudices but in Emma it paradoxically proves to favour the upstart. Mrs. Churchill, Emma's synecdoche for the power of rank, 'was nobody when he married her' (310). Frank Churchill, the master manipulator of Emma's erotic triangles, epitomizes, by his ambiguous class status and egotistical pursuit of self-interest, the career of the successful arriviste. The confidence in 'chance (and) circumstance' (438), he proclaims in his letter to Mrs. Weston is borne out in his Beylian gamble for love and wealth. If Emma's and Knightley's marriage restores an appearance of social stability at the narrative's close, the anticipated

marriage of Churchill and Jane is a symbol of the social order's radical contingency.

We need only contrast the marriages, which close Emma with those that conclude Pride and Prejudice to appreciate Jane Austen's in dealing with the subject. In both gentlemen marry gentlemen's daughters .The romantic quality of the early novel lies less in the disparity of its matches than in the manner in which it brings them about. Jane's union with Bingley and Elizabeth's with Darcy are presented as victories of individual emotion over the obstructive jealousy and snobbery of third parties. The regard of the lovers is conceived and maintained outside the sphere of social influence. In Emma love and society relate quite differently. Jane Austen's narrative art has the effectiveness of a great novel because its erotic and social triangles function together, simultaneously deconstructing the romantic concept of love and the Tory concept of society on which Austen's fiction is based. Austen is at her strongest, when she opposes Emma's elitist illusions with the ironic yet generous concept of equality in the pursuit of happiness, the democracy of desire. Emma Woodhouse, subverts the patriarchal structures in which they are inscribed, imaging Austen's own quiet subversion

of the repressive ideology her novels seem to endorse .In EMMA, the unsettling of the polarities finds its wittiest advocate in the heroine herself, who, in a characteristic move, complains that Mr. Knightley the novel's 'normative and exemplary figure', finds their respective judgments 'not near enough to give me a chance of being right, if we think differently' (99). Yet Emma's attempt to substitute difference for opposition is more than just a clever piece of sophistry. Emma is frequently 'wrong' as she is here, but perhaps she is 'right' to question the absoluteness with which Knightley does in fact view the distinction between them. Perhaps, moreover, her 'wrongness' is often closer to being 'right' - that is, to yielding knowledge of the fictions that sustain social existence--that Knightley and his scholarly advocates will admit. Patriarchal criticism of Emma, of course, takes Knightley's side, portraying the narrative as a conflict in which 'right' seeks to appropriate 'wrong' and to recast it (her) in its (his) own image .It is possible, however, to pursue an apparently perverse but more critically productive tactic: we can give Emma respect and construe the conflict dialectically, treating it less as an opposition and more as a difference.

We might try, then, to read the novel as a contest between Emma and Knightley, a contest between two equally compelling interpretations of the self--especially the female self and society. Knightley states his views succinctly when he objects to Emma's adoption of Harriet Smith as her protégée:

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 (39).

Despite the stark opposition that Knightley's terms suggest, the difference between the two implicit pedagogies cannot be simplified as the difference between a serious and a playful education or between a moral and an aesthetic one. For if Knightley's 'strength of mind' borders on the conformist virtue of 'adaptability', Emma's 'polish', while it signals a politics of superficiality, is by no means superficial.

In Emma, knightley is made to criticize Emma's educational principles because 'They only give a little polish' (82). Jane Austen here exposes Mr. Knightley just as a proprietor

whom, A. Walton considers the 'custodian of judgment' (A. Walton, 1965, 68). Again, in the following passage which describes the academic programme Emma has advised for Harriet, we may discern both authoritarian and subversive discourses:

Her view of improving her little friend's mind, by a great deal of useful reading and conversation had never yet led to more than a few first chapters and the intention of going on tomorrow. It was much easier to chat than to study (68).

Knightley has already mentioned Emma's long-standing propensity for drawing up lists of books to read, only to abandon her ambitious plans;

I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding (37).

However, offering an alternative to the patriarchal view of reading as a regimen for 'strengthening the mind' and forming character, Emma's misreading (of the charade, 71)

arises from a radically different understanding of character. From a close study of the novel *Emma* we find that Emma and Harriet are a composite character, so that Emma's assumption that the Charade was intended for Harriet seems oddly appropriate. Actually, as characters in a novel, Harriet and Emma, fall short of uniqueness and unity because substituting for each other, they 'mean' something other than themselves just as a rhetorical figure means something other than itself. Now, it seems to be something quite relevant to refer to the observation of Joseph Litvak in the following lines;

Austen is at her most subversive, then not in intimating the anti-social recesses of her heroine's interiority but in locating Emma in this potentially endless circuit of fiction, interpretation, and desire with its dynamic, and reciprocal relations between men and women. (Litvak, 105).

That Jane Austen is a radical in her handling the theme of *Emma* is once again firmly proved when we examine the fact that Jane Austen's narrative presents its major characters as growing or maturing or developing as separate or distinct or different individuals. It is also a fact that she also

imbibed in her traits of transitionalism, being a product of an age of transition. Jane Austen's major characters are maturing and separate entities and this very proposition has well been supported by Lawrence Stone in the following manner:

The notion that people begin as separate individuals who then march out and connect themselves with others, is one of the most dazzling bits of self-mystification in the history of the species (Lawrence Stone, 1977, 683).

In Austen's fictions, as has been pointed out earlier in this dissertation; marriage plays a crucial role in an individual's life. Marriage in Austen's fictions is portrayed as the ultimate or final union rather than as separation or passage-unlike in other cultures in which a woman's marriage can involve passage from her original or paternal family to the family of the husband sometimes years before the marriage or consummation itself can take place. In Austen this flight (through marriage) from family is consistent with the changing shape of the family in the eighteenth century, in the long-term shift towards the nuclear family. The family in its nuclear scale brings the

spouse in a very intimate term. Intimacy is the summum bonum of Austen's fiction, her highest value, the reward of her heroine's struggle and the goal of her narratives. In *Emma* of course, Austen works with a radical's outlook in dealing with the value of true intimacy in a marital status. Emma's former closeness with Mrs. Weston is set against her friendship with Harriet Smith. This friendship, or more properly, this patronage of Harriet is set in competition with Mrs. Elton's patronage of Jane Fairfax. Through these contrasts the reader is regularly shown that Emma prefers the insipid company and unequal friendship of Harriet Smith to the more valuable or more equal and thus more challenging friendship expected but spurned between herself and Jane Fairfax. Jane appears to be the only logical choice, but most of the time she does not reside in Highbury. As Mrs. Weston points out, Harriet is the only realistic possibility for a friend to Emma. She argues to Mr. Knightley;

How fortunate it was for Emma that there should be such girl in Highboy for her to associate with... you are so much used to live alone that you do not know the value of a companion (36).

In the long run, Emma is found to tell Harriet of Jane 'We are always forced to be acquainted whenever she comes to Highbury' (86). Emma's intimacy, however, is narrated quite clearly through different phases in the course of the novel---from Miss Taylor, the governess who stands in the place of a mother, through Harriet Smith, the female friend, to Mr. Knightley, the husband, just as in all of Austen's novels she must separate heroines from female friendship in preparation for marriage. In this context we should, of course, take into consideration the fact that Austen nowhere examines happy marriage within her novels proper, but her novels are constructed so as to lead up to the hope that such happiness is possible, lying just on the other side, as it were, of the last page of the novel. In this sense, Austen's are novels of courtship not of marriage; for they always end on the threshold of marriage, where intimate happiness is indicated in the future tense, as something about to be experienced but not experienced and verified quite yet. Marital happiness is dependent upon knowledge of the other, and full knowledge of the other is another word for intimacy.

Another very important and noteworthy aspect in Jane Austen is surely her attitude to the idea of literary pursuits in

the male and female authors. This very aspect is very rationally and faithfully dealt with in *Emma*. Like a true radical, Jane Austen has been very particular about it. She attaches gender to writing in order to create a disjunction between writing and speech. She also observes that the source of speech resides in the individual. She establishes this as the basis for the truth-value of writing. Jane Austen grants priority to the verbal practices of women, women who may never carry out programmes of reading literature, but who are nevertheless essential to maintaining polite relationship within the community. She has Emma who renounces the strategies of fiction-making. Austen condemns her heroine to think out social relationships over and over again in terms of imaginary narratives. It is by this process that Emma develops a language that will enable her not only to express but also to know her own feelings, and such knowledge is the precondition for avoiding the pitfalls entailed in misrepresenting the feelings of others. Thus the novel produces a reliable language of the self by the curiously backward process of allowing its heroine to repeat her misreading of sexual relations until she knows her feelings. Accordingly, Mr. Knightley recognizes two spirits in Emma, a vain spirit that prompts her fiction-making and

a serious spirit that understands the violations of truth as they occur, He explains: 'If one leads you wrong, I am sure the other tells you of it' (225).

The very manner that establishes relationship between gender and truth, distinguishes Austen from Richardson. There is the shifting of the ground-a pointer to Jane Austen's traits of transitionalism. Like Richardson, Austen represents the struggle between various modes of representation as a struggle between male and female. But it is to be noted that for Austen the female requires reform at least as much as, even more than the male .The novel opens with Emma being in charge of the house .She is left with too much leisure time at her disposal for match-making. Of her long-withheld approval of Harriet's engagement to Robert Martin Mr. Knightly remarks: 'You are materially changed since we talked on this subject before' (325). But upon Emma's admission, 'I hope so for at that time I was a fool,' he accedes to her former interpretation of Harriet's character: 'and I am changed also; for I am now very willing to grant you all Harriet's good qualities' (327). So far as the above speech by Mr. Knightly is concerned, it seems that the speech is a renunciation of the conventional language of love. He soon resumed: 'If I

loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am. you hear nothing but truth from me' (296). However faltering the terms, in which Knightley confesses his true feelings for Emma are, Austen proves yet more withholding when it is Emma's turn to reply .In this context the voice of the novelist completely supplants that of the lover:

She spoke then; on being so entreated-what did she say? Just what she ought, of course .A lady always does. She said enough to show there need not be despair-and to invite him to say more himself (297).

But one thing is to be considered that Jane Austen grants Mr. Knightley authority to read the human character, authority that is nearly equal to her own-on ground that he (Knightly) was one of the few people who could see 'faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them' (5). Once again, it is only the novelist who can turn Emma's self-sufficiency into a deficiency that instigates desire independent of a social origin .If early on Emma speaks of herself as a most complete individual, Austen writes this speech as the absence of Emma's awareness that she is missing something as a female .It is the same order

of deficiency that prompts Emma to insult Miss Bates and thereby inspire Knightley's harshest indictment: 'How could you be so unfeeling to Bates?' (258).

In a similar fashion Austen attributes the smallest lapse in social decorum to a failure within the individual, a flaw which the novelist as a radical, identifies as a defect of gender. It is more than a little interesting to note that in order to fill the model Mr. Knightley sketches out for her, Emma must not only learn that she desires, but must also suppress the aggravation she feels towards women she cannot absolutely control. That Emma is so transformed in the course of the novel suggests that the acquisition of this form of literacy is the same as the formation of a nineteenth century individual. One can observe the shift in Austen's emphasis away from natural virtue as the quality a woman exemplifies to a more complex understanding of subjectivity and the part example plays in shaping it. Emma's problem originates in her absent mother because her 'mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses', she was raised by a woman who 'had fallen little short of a mothering affection but who allowed Emma too well of herself' (1). Austen's novels castigate behaviour that has been prompted

by social motivation--Emma's low regard for Martin, Knightley's for Harriet, Elton's for Harriet, as well as Emma's for Miss Bates. Austen actually at places, uses the traditional signs of social status to show how they work havoc among the members of her community if they have the power to define individuals. But communication is confused and the community disrupted just as surely when status signs are ignored. In this way the novelist demonstrates that these signs do not operate effectively within traditional rhetorical categories or within the reigning grammar of social identity. For Austen, the new genre was a form of power in its own right, which could displace the material body of the subject and the value of those objects constituting the household. Indeed, Austen proposes a form of authority---a form of political authority that works through literacy rather than through traditional juridical means to maintain social relations. If by Austen's time, sexual relations are assumed to be the specialized knowledge of the female, and it is in the female writing that the terms of such relationships are figured out, then fiction fulfills its discursive function by exemplifying the conduct of relationships between men and women.

Once again, in our attempt to establish Jane Austen as a novelist of a period of transition, we can say that reading *Emma* we must not only equate language with power but also equate the language of power enjoyed by an elite minority of country gentle folk quite removed from the centre of power. This very aspect characterized the English country gentry at the turn of the century--the eighteenth merging into the nineteenth. In Jane Austen's *Emma* we also find a shift in the handling of her thematic structure. Unlike her five other novels in which shifts of location and plot dynamics are interconnected, *Emma* is entirely situated in Highbury, 16 miles off London. The sense of being closed in, is emphasized by Mr. Woodlouse's anxiety about droughts through open doors and the danger that is thought to threaten women walking unescorted beyond the shrubberies. Donwell Abbey is only twenty minutes' brisk walk away even for a delicate creature such as Jane Fairfax, but *Emma* insists, 'It is too far indeed to be walking quite alone. Let my father's servant go with you. Let me order the carriage' (274).

Gypsies accost Harriet and, even though they may not have meant any harm, a situation is created in which she needs a male to rescue her. Randalls, the residence of the Westons,

is only about a mile away from Emma's home, Hartfield, and Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley's estate perhaps twice this distance but we are told that Emma and her father have not visited Mr. Knightley for two years. Box Hill, barely six miles away, is a picnic spot that Emma has never seen before the disastrous outing there. To be settled and satisfied seems to be the ideal, because Frank Churchill's remark; 'I am sick of England, and would leave tomorrow if I could' is considered by Emma to be the reaction of a spoilt young man who has had too much 'prosperity and indulgence!' (276).

The war between Britain and France over two decades may have resulted in an emphasis on values and here is also found an emphasis that Mr. Knightley shares with Emma in his condemnation of Frank Churchill's ways as more French than British. Emma's sense of exultation at the country background is an unconscious projection of her desire being mediated through the author's appreciation of the shift of culture from gentry level to agrarian one. This appreciation is nurtured and refined through taste and hard work. We know that Mr. Knightley is a conscientious landlord whose closeness to his bailiff, William Larkin, is something of a joke in his social circle. His friendship

with his tenant farmer Robert Martin also shows an appreciation of the value of honest labour that Emma in her idleness would never understand. Still, it is possible to see why radical critics such as David Aers and Rosen Sales see Jane Austen in *Emma* as a radical in handling the world of the rich land owning gentry to the total exclusion of the majority of the population:

She waves a magic wand and the mass of the population vanishes into thin air, leaving only the fruits of their labour for the likes of Mr. Knightley to appropriate. You can walk around large and populous Highbury or walk around Mr. Knightley's estate and never see a labourer. The system of production is so natural that we are persuaded that it needs no worker (D.Aers, 1981, 128-29).

*Emma* strikes one as predominantly a text in which the existing order and social boundaries are considered critically. Harriet and Robert Martin's marriage is a convenient reconfirmation of class identity and the two outsiders Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill are coupled and eliminated from the enclosed static world of Highbury so that normalcy can return. It may again be recalled that Mr.

Woodhouse and Emma feel uneasy about Frank Churchill who opens too many doors and whose disregard of class gets the author's approval to some extent. The father-daughter observation in this regard is a reliable indicator of the author's view. The question of class never comes to the surface so sharply in Jane Austen's other novels as it does in *Emma*. In fact; there is the least ambiguity about Jane Austen's position on class. She has a total disregard for the hierarchical structure of the society of her time. In every confrontation between the aristocracy and the middle class, she unerringly aligns herself with the latter.

While examining Jane Austen's attitude to life and society of her time from a radical's perspective, we should equally touch upon the fact that in *Emma* the preservation of class hierarchy becomes an important issue. Marriages, instead of being means of social and spatial mobility become devices for rigid reconfirmation of class and space enclosures. Harriet's marriage with Mr. Knightley's tenant farmer means that 'the intimacy between her and Emma must sink.' However much Mr. Knightley might value Robert Martin at work, he recognizes that socially they must not interact; 'His rank in society I would alter if I could, which is saying a great deal, I assure you, Emma' (358).

This is because social boundaries are seen as inviolable, almost divinely ordained. The issue of authorial irony becomes most thorny in the last pages of the novel, where according to many interpretations; Emma's moral education reaches its completion. The long--awaited resolution of the mystery surrounding Harriet's birth is resolved when 'she proved to be the illegitimate daughter tradesman' (365), shaming Emma's attempt to connect her with the 'gentlemen' in her social circle: 'The stain of illegitimacy unbleached by nobility or wealth would have been stain indeed' (308). The words 'blood', 'stain', and 'taint' are used more than once in the novel, emphasizing the concern that was felt for preserving the purity of the blood of the English gentry. Earlier, when Emma is in raptures over Donwell Abbey, she reflects on the 'untainted blood' of the Knightleys as one of their supreme achievements and at the end she is thankful that she has failed in her efforts to find a gentleman husband for a mere tradesman's daughter: 'Such was the blood of gentility, which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for!' (365).

The recurring language of purity and pollution testifies to Emma's anxiety to preserve social boundaries. The middle

class move upwards through marriage, but the code within which Jane Austen operated did not permit descent below a certain social and economic level. The narrative of *Emma* closes in upon itself, offering a contrast to her next novel *Persuasion*, marking out a sort of transitional approach, where the movement is outward. The two great houses Hartfield and Donwell Abbey, merge at the end of *Emma*, merely repeating a union between the two families that has occurred once already. Consequently there is no expansion of the family or social circle. In *Persuasion* the heroine marries outside her social class. She not only glories in being 'a sailor's wife' but also happily becomes part of gradually expanding fraternity of sea-faring people who do without the stability of a fixed home. Considering the importance of the houses in Jane Austen's earlier novels, the relinquishment of a fixed home in *Persuasion* seems a major departure. *Emma* is, indeed, after close examination of the two remarkable traits of radicalism and transitionalism in Jane Austen, the greatest stumbling block to the theory that her novels show her views on social and moral questions, gradually developing into those of *Persuasion* where 'they are least class-bound' as observed by Mukherjee in her *Re-reading Jane Austen* (69).

This chapter as is opened up with the theme of marriage, so also it is ending with our handling the same thing having a little different implication altogether. Marriage in *Emma* is thought of entirely in terms of actual and particular relationships. Jane Austen, though a radical in her times, is fascinated by the complexities of personal relationships. *Emma* is as convincing as our own lives and has the same kind of concreteness. The subject of *Emma* is marriage but not marriage in the abstract. It is through the consciousness of the heroine Emma, that the situations in the novel are revealed. She is no heroine in the conventional sense. She is not merely spoilt or selfish. She is presented as proud and her very pride leads her to inflict suffering that might ruin happiness. She has an attitude to marriage typical of the ruling class. She sees human relationships in terms of class snobbery and property of qualifications. Her chief concern about Mr. Knightley is that his estate should be preserved for little Henry. It is only through her intimate experiences that she comes to a more critical and more fully human view. Jane Fairfax, again, is significant character in the novel. We know nothing of her except what we gather in the course of the novel. She is a young woman of singular refinement and 'true elegance' (elegance of mind involves a genuine

sensibility to human values). It is true that Jane Fairfax is as good as she is clever and as clever as she is beautiful. But it is also true that Jane Fairfax is an unprovided woman with no prospects in life beyond those of earning her living as governess at Mrs. Smallridge's and passing her hard earned holidays with Miss Bates.

A good deal of moral passion of Emma does undoubtedly arise from Jane Austen's understanding of and feeling about the problems of women in her society. She is a radical at her looking at the problems troubling the woman folk. It is this realistic, unromantic and indeed subversive concern with the position of women that gives the tang and force to her consideration of marriage. The most intimately illuminating theme in the novel is, time and again, the theme of marriage. There is no doubt about it. It is essential to Jane Austen's plan that the matrimonial experiences should be in no way muffled or sentimentalized. She examines with a scrupulous yet passionate and critical precision the actual problems of the world. That this world is narrow cannot be denied. How far Jane Austen is radical in dealing with so narrow her world is an important issue for consideration. Its smallness, however, does not matter at all. There is no means of measuring importance by size.

What is valuable in a work of art are the depth and truth of the experience it communicates. The silliest of all criticism, Arnold Kettle observes in his *An Introduction to the English novel* - 1 is: 'The one, which blames her for not writing about the battle of Waterloo and the French Revolution ... the limitation and the narrowness of the Hartfield world are the limitations of class society' (Arnold Kettle, 1996, 93).

The values and standards of the Hartfield world, of course, are based on the fact that like a true radical Jane Austen feels that as if it was a right for a minority of the community to live at the expense of the majority. No amount of sophistry can get away with this fact that to discuss the moral concern of Jane Austen without facing it would be hypocrisy. It is perfectly true that within the assumptions of aristocratic society, the values recommended in *EMMA* are sensitive enough. Here again, we would turn to Arnold Kettle who holds: 'Snobbery, smugness, condescension, lack of consideration, unkindness of any description, are held up to our disdain' (Arnold Kettle, 1996, 94).

Some positive forces operative in Jane Austen are beautifully illustrated in this particular novel. Among

these forces is her highly critical concern over the fate of women in her society, a concern that involves a reconsideration of its basic values. This is fairly exemplified by the following description of Emma's visit with Harriet to a sick cottager-

They were now approaching the cottage, and all idle topics were suspended. Emma was very compassionate...it was sickness and poverty together which she came to visit ... I feel now as I could think of noting but these four creatures all the rest of the day and yet who can say how soon it may vanish from my mind? 'Very true'; said Harriet, 'poor creature! One can think of noting else (68).

A radical as she is, Jane Austen imbibes in her certain forces, the like we have made mention of in the present discussion. If aristocracy is implicitly defended, it is at least on rational grounds. Emma upholds the actual, concrete problems of human existence in an actual, concrete society. It is, again, Jane Austen's sensitive vitality, her genuine concern for human feelings in a concrete situation as Emma presents, that captures our imagination. It is this concern that gives her such delicate and precise

insight into the problems of personal relationships. Thus the novelist lets us know the way men and women in a particular given situation work out their problems of living in a transitional society that existed in the end of the eighteenth and the of beginning of the nineteenth centuries.