



## **JANE AUSTEN'S NOVEL "EMMA": MARXIST APPROACH**

Sunshine G. Asunto  
[shinegarayasunto@gmail.com](mailto:shinegarayasunto@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Emma was written in 1814-1815, and while Jane Austen was writing it, it was suggested to her by a member of the Prince Regents' household that she dedicates it to His Royal Highness. Austen took the suggestion as it was intended as a command and Emma was thus dedicated, but the dedication itself is rather slyly worded. Austen's Emma is a fan favorite. With her focus on society, money, and relationships. The main objective of this study is to determine how economy and social class portrayed within the literary work is and its reflection to reality. The study used a descriptive research method to assess how the main objective is achieved throughout the study. The study concluded that the class structures are the most obvious and most important differences between characters in Emma. The rich control social situations, the social climbers attempt to seem rich and important, and the poor are at the mercy of the rich. The study also revealed that marriage is an agent of change and for women in Austen's time, marriage was one of the only ways of changing their lifestyle. It's no wonder that so much of the novel is devoted to imagining different potential matches. Marriage here isn't just about love however, questions of love are complicated by money, family, land and social status, all of which come into play whenever Emma attempts to arrange marriages including her own. Austen's novel emphasizes the social aspects of marriage in order to expose the economic and class dynamics of romantic love.

**Key Words:** *Economy; Reflection; Social Situations; Marriage; Class Dynamics*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775 at Steventon, Hampshire, England and died on July 18, 1817 at Winchester, Hampshire. Austen was an English writer who first gave the novel its distinctly modern character through her treatment of ordinary people in everyday life. She published four novels during her lifetime: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and*



*Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815). She vividly depicted English middle-class life during the early 19th century. And her novels defined the era's novel of manners. *Emma* deals with a young woman's maturation into adulthood and the trouble she gets herself into along the way.

*Emma* was written in 1814-1815, and while Jane Austen was writing it, it was suggested to her by a member of the Prince Regents' household that she dedicates it to His Royal Highness. Austen took the suggestion as it was intended as a command and *Emma* was thus dedicated, but the dedication itself is rather slyly worded. *Emma* is one of Austen's best novels, with some critics holding it in higher regard than *Pride and Prejudice*. In *Emma Woodhouse*, Austen has created one of her most memorable heroines, a willful, headstrong, yet fundamentally well-intentioned young woman whose intelligence and energy need the tempering of experience before she can be judged truly mature. *Emma* is structured around a number of marriages recently consummated or anticipated, and, in each case, the match solidifies the participant's social status. In Austen's time, social status was determined by a combination of family background, reputation, and wealth, marriage was one of the main ways in which one could raise one's social status. This method of social advancement was especially crucial to women, who were denied the possibility of improving their status through hard work or personal achievement.

The study focused on Austen's novel entitled "Emma" which emphasis is on the novel's main theme on how is economy and social class portrayed in this kind of literary work and its reflection to reality. Through Austen's novel, the reader is invited into the everyday yet extraordinary lives of the inhabitants of Highbury, England. Yet, the novel suggests, marrying too far above oneself leads to strife. This study focused on the flow of the story interpreting the plot of the novel with the used of Marxist approach. The flow of the story starts when Mr. Weston's first marriage to Miss Churchill had ostensibly been a good move for him, because she came from a wealthy and well-connected family (Mr. Weston is a tradesman), but the inequality of the relationship caused hardship to both. He marries Mrs. Weston just prior to the novel's opening, and this second marriage is happier because their social statuses are more equal Mrs. Weston is a governess, and thus very fortunate to be rescued from her need to work by her marriage. Emma's attempt to match Harriet with Mr. Elton is also shunned by the other characters as inappropriate. Since Harriet's parentage is unknown, Emma believes that Harriet may have noble blood and encourages her to reject what turns out to be a more appropriate match with Robert Martin. By the time it is revealed that Harriet is the daughter of a tradesman, Emma admits that Mr. Martin is more suitable for her friend. The relationship between marriage and social status creates hardship for other characters. Frank Churchill must keep his engagement to the orphan Jane Fairfax secret because his wealthy aunt would disapprove. Jane, in the absence of a good match, is forced to consider taking the position of a governess. The unmarried Miss Bates is threatened with increasing poverty without a husband to take care of her and her mother. Finally, the match between Emma and Mr. Knightley is considered a good one not only because they are well matched in temperament but also because they are well matched in social class.



The study is limited only on the scenes and happenings in the story that portrays and shows the main theme in which economy and social class exist in the story and the scenes back then that reflects reality. The existing theme in the novel is that, the class structures are the most obvious and most important differences between characters in Emma, wherein the rich control social situations, the social climbers attempt to seem rich and important, and the poor are at the mercy of the rich. The other themes that run throughout this novel are: marriage, society and class, transformation, gender, respect and reputation, love, wealth, morality and ethics.

Austen's novel case has portrayals of the human drama or action running its course on several loosely interwoven levels, thus imparting a universal quality to her work and very much viewed with his high degree of social relation and class, which all responded and has a big similarity to a similar situation in a real society in parts of Europe society nowadays.

The researcher's basis in the study were the changes that European society undergone through different periods of time. In this study, the researcher identified how economy and social class portrayed within the literary work and its reflection to reality.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive research method was used for the study. This study is descriptive in nature since it aimed to determine how "Emma" portrays the economy and social class and its reflection to reality and society nowadays.

The study was conducted through researching facts and significant documents that satisfied the objective of the study. After the research was done, the information was collected, interpreted and analyzed. The researcher used a Marxist approach in analyzing the content of "Emma".

For the enrichment of the study, the researcher consulted online articles, books, journals and other reference materials from the library and internet.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The result substantiates that as one of the characters says on the novel, marriage is an agent of change. For women in Austen's time, marriage was one of the only ways of changing your lifestyle. It's no wonder that so much of the novel is devoted to imagining different potential matches. Marriage here isn't just about love however, the questions of love are complicated by



money, family, land and social status, all of which come into play whenever Emma attempts to arrange marriages including her own. Austen emphasizes the social aspects of marriage in order to expose the economic and class dynamics of romantic love.

The result shows that economy and social class was portrayed within the literary work and its reflection to reality by giving the highlight of the main themes in the novel:

"When the times that Emma thinks that Robert Martin is such a horrible candidate for a husband and asking if this is a realistic assessment."

"When the novel start with Mr. and Mrs. Weston already got married and asking if how it might change our view of Mrs. Weston if she were Miss Taylor at the beginning."

Although Emma and Mr. Knightley's marriage is obviously the central romance of the novel, there are many other matches.

Class structures are the most obvious and most important differences between characters in Emma. The rich control social situations, the social climbers attempt to seem rich and important, and the poor are at the mercy of the rich. Although Austen's novel turns on Emma's attempts to raise her friend out of social oblivion, the narrator mocks any and all attempts to change the social hierarchy. Manners mean everything, and those who weren't born with good breeding just can't measure up to those who are.

Austen ends the novel with Mrs. Elton's opinion of Emma and Mr. Knightley's wedding because she always emphasizes various character's responses to events in the plot. And within the plot of this novel, good manners determine social standing and other factors influence social status. Circling around all of these, Emma builds up various definitions of respectability and its evil cousin, pretension. Pretension may be the more interesting of the two, but it's always deflated as the sort of social climbing it is. A good family reputation takes time (perhaps centuries) to build. Everybody knows who everybody else is and where they fall in the social hierarchy.

Throughout the novel, love is well, complicated. You can't marry for love unless you have money. And if you have money, then why worry about getting married? But dating is out of the question so how do you know if you're in love? Romantic love, in other words, is a big bucket of worms. Secret engagements, imagined crushes and crushed hopes are all too common in Emma. Love is the unspoken half of all questions of marriage, but learning to recognize love as a value of its own is pretty difficult. Love for families, however, is surprisingly uncomplicated (and



surprisingly common). Aged (and irritating) fathers, demanding aunts and silly sisters all get more affection than they deserve.

Wealth is also the existing theme of this novel. For women back then, wealth equals independence from men and demeaning jobs. For men, wealth means a life of leisure. The allure of money leads men to marry irritating and socially insignificant women or to ignore ones they truly love. The (imagined) promise of future money causes Emma to propose impractical and imaginary loves for her friend. As love becomes increasingly important, it has to be balanced against the possibility of financial incompatibility. There aren't any fairytale endings in Austen. If people are happy, it's because they're well-fed and well-housed and that takes money.

"The situation that Mrs. and Miss Bates aren't rich, but they are respectable. And people here in this novel have to be equally rich to be happy in marriage."

Morals and manners might seem to be contradictory concepts, but in Emma they are one and the same. Describing someone who acts like a gentleman (or gentlewoman) is another way of describing someone who acts according to accepted social norms of behavior. Compassion and kindness, true indications of gentility, aren't always valued as good manners by everyone in the novel but only crass people never realize how important such forms of sympathy really are. Satirizing bad manners becomes as much of a concern as validating good manners: characters (and readers) learn from the mistakes of those who just can't seem to get it all right.

Emma is structured around a number of marriages recently consummated or anticipated, and, in each case, the match solidifies the participant's social status. In Austen's time, social status was determined by a combination of family background, reputation, and wealth, marriage was one of the main ways in which one could raise one's social status. This method of social advancement was especially crucial to women, who were denied the possibility of improving their status through hard work or personal achievement. Yet, the novel suggests, marrying too far above oneself leads to strife. Mr. Weston's first marriage to Miss Churchill had ostensibly been a good move for him, because she came from a wealthy and well-connected family (Mr. Weston is a tradesman), but the inequality of the relationship caused hardship to both. He marries Mrs. Weston just prior to the novel's opening, and this second marriage is happier because their social statuses are more equal Mrs. Weston is a governess, and thus very fortunate to be rescued from her need to work by her marriage. Emma's attempt to match Harriet with Mr. Elton is also shunned by the other characters as inappropriate. Since Harriet's parentage is unknown, Emma believes that Harriet may have noble blood and



encourages her to reject what turns out to be a more appropriate match with Robert Martin. By the time it is revealed that Harriet is the daughter of a tradesman, Emma admits that Mr. Martin is more suitable for her friend. The relationship between marriage and social status creates hardship for other characters. Frank Churchill must keep his engagement to the orphan Jane Fairfax secret because his wealthy aunt would disapprove. Jane, in the absence of a good match, is forced to consider taking the position of a governess. The unmarried Miss Bates is threatened with increasing poverty without a husband to take care of her and her mother. Finally, the match between Emma and Mr. Knightley is considered a good one not only because they are well matched in temperament but also because they are well matched in social class.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and discussion of the study, the researcher concluded that the novel "Emma" has a great impact degree of social relation, economy and class which all responded and has a big similarity to a similar situation in a real society in parts of Europe society nowadays. The European Union also made a big part in the changes happened back then until now. And all of those existing themes in the novel served as the representation of the real world. It does not happen only in the part of England and the whole Europe but it also reflects the reality we are facing nowadays.

#### 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to express her deepest gratitude to the following people who had been instrument on the success and completion of this research work:

First and foremost to the **Almighty God** to whom the researcher had prayed when difficulties arise;

To her parents and siblings;

To her subject professor, **Dr. Randy T. Nobleza**, for sharing his time and knowledge in the field of literature research; for his profitable and valuable advices that never fails to lift our spirits when we are feeling down because of the challenges during our research work;



Of course, **friends and AB English IV classmates**, who supported her all throughout and give her witty advices, moral support and cheers;

To all people who have become part in the success of this research work, her deepest and greatest heartfelt gratitude for all the support and assistance.

## 6. REFERENCES

Stiff, G. (2001). **The Republic of Pemberley**. Retrieved from:

<http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/janelife.html>

Briggs, C. (2003). **Biography of Jane Austen**. Retrieved from:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jane-Austen>

Cowdrey, K. (2002). **Introduction to European Union**. Oxford: Amber Lane Press.

Cocks, P. (2004). **Towards a Marxist Theory of European Integration**. *International Organization*. Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter, 1980), pp. 1-40). University of Wisconsin Press. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706615>

Szreter, S. (2000). **Marxism and the Labour Movement**. Retrieved from:

<http://home.clear.net.nz/pages/cpa/>

Richards, P. (1998). **19th Century England: Society, Social Classes, & Culture**. International Organization. *Creative Commons Common Deed*.