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The Idea of the Natural: Moral Reformation and Agricultural Development in Jane Austen's *Emma*



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Abstract

Jane Austen's novel *Emma* (1817) makes a clear but complicated distinction between the attitudes of men and women towards nature and their association with women. Critics like Barbara Britton Wenner and Denise Cosgrove point out that while men would see in both a force to be controlled, women would see themselves as part of the landscape, that among the landed gentry women were "frequently viewed as property themselves, and as such were often literally part of the [landscape]." Austen's novel presents "enclosure" of land for agricultural development, and the moral reformation of women for domestic harmony as the ethical responsibility of gentlemen towards their society by drawing upon prevailing notions of physical affinity between land and women. This paper will critically look at the use of such parallels between nature and women in *Emma* where Mr. Knightley takes up the role of such a reformer or guardian who preserves the "natural" hierarchy even while he tries to improve the social and financial status of women as well as the agricultural produce of land.

Keywords: *Emma*, Women, Nature, Landscape, Reformation, and Improvement.

Jane Austen's novel *Emma* (1817) makes a clear but complicated distinction between the attitudes of men and women towards nature and their association with women when Mr. Knightley, the gentleman patriarch of Donwell Abbey, confronts Mrs. Elton or Augusta Hawkins, the woman from the urban city of Bath, to explain his idea "of the simple and the natural" (232). Towards the middle of the novel when Emma, Harriet, Mrs. Elton and others visit Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley's estate, on a strawberry picking party, Mrs Elton proposes dinner outside the house in the garden: "a table spread in the shade.... Everything as natural and simple as possible" (232). Mr. Knightley, however, crudely rejects Mrs. Elton's proposition:

My, idea of the simple and the natural will be to have the table spread in the dining-room. The nature and the simplicity of gentlemen and ladies, with their servants and furniture, I think is best observed by meals within doors. When you are tired of eating strawberries in the garden, there shall be cold meat in the house (232).

Generally we would understand the outside world to be natural and the house as a cultural marker. But paradoxically, Mr. Knightley, by bringing the natural within doors, associates the domestic sphere (the culturally marked space for women) with nature and genders it as essentially feminine. The gentleman seems to impose *his* cultural idea of the natural as the domestic sphere. The garden on the other hand lies outside the house; and as the cultivated space can also be seen as the male territory. What is left unsaid is about the uncultivated land, which, as this paper proposes to study, the text identifies with the untamed gipsy women and/or the artless Harriet Smith. The uncultured woman, who lacks the etiquettes and manners of the gentlewoman as if shares the same space as the untamed wilderness that has to be tamed,

cultivated and gardenized in order for it to become the male dominion—enclosed and domesticated.

Whereas, Mrs. Elton as an outsider in the Highbury society can be considered to be a more "modern" woman with a "tourist's gaze." In the same chapter Emma aligns herself with "the natural landscape of Donwell Abbey and feels honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant..." (234). In taking pride in her association with Donwell Abbey, Emma not only acknowledges her association with Mr. Knightley as a member of the gentry, but also ironically acknowledges her subordinate in social hierarchy where Mr. Knightley enjoys a higher status as a landlord gentleman and the patriarch of Highbury. The difference in the nature of the two women, however, is noteworthy. While the former transgresses Mr. Knightley's laws of what is natural and is reprimanded by him, the latter conforms to his view of the natural and is rewarded for her complacency by being married to him. What is significant is the difference in attitudes of men and women towards women's association with nature as Barbara Britton Wenner's notes. Wenner cites Denise Cosgroves definition of landscape to show that while men would see in both, nature and women, a force to be controlled, women would see themselves as part of the landscape:

The gaze upon the landscape means something quite different for a woman author or heroine than it does for a man. When an eighteenth-century male with a background in the gentry gazes on the landscape, he frames it in a way that objectifies it and indicates its potential for control. When a woman gazes, she is imagining where she fits inside the landscape and how she can position herself to be helped by it (4).

It seems that in 1817, when the book was first published, Austen was trapped in the ambit of the phenomena which saw linguistic as well as physical affinity between land and women. Since nature was associated with the feminine, both were regarded as necessary to serve man's material needs of financial and social stability, and improvement. Any deviation from social manners or cultural norms was seen to be a transgression. Such transgressions urged the gentlemen to take on the role of moral reformers. By proposing to have dinner outside, Mrs. Elton transgresses the law of the Highbury society and its natural social order.

Mr. Knightley takes up the role of a reformer or guardian who preserves the social hierarchy of eighteenth century England. At the same time as a responsible member of the landed gentry he also tries to improve the social and financial status of the womenfolk of his society. His plans for the uplifting of status of women, however, did not include employment opportunities or greater financial freedom for them. The plans of gentlemen like Mr. Knightley to improve the position of women were similar to the plans for the improvement of land through enclosures. Both were equally restrictive and paternalistic in their oppressive policies. If the wilderness were enclosed in order to employ new methods of farming on the land, women accordingly were domesticated and groomed to suit the requirements of their prospective husbands. Jane Austen, herself, although critical of self-serving characters like John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), six years later in *Emma* shows that the quality of the land, notwithstanding aesthetic beauty, depended on its yield. And women, whether Elinor of *Sense and Sensibility* or Emma in the eponymous novel continued to retain their affective ties with the land. Just as the quality of the land depended on its yield, similarly, if the prospect of upward social mobility of women depended on their birth, it was also

determined by their social etiquettes. In this respect, the novel uses Mr. Knightley in alliance with Emma, as an instrument to improve land and women by exploiting existing notions of parallels between women and nature. This paper looks critically at this use of parallels between nature and women in the novel *Emma* (1817) and examines Austen's use, as a member of the gentry, of the gentlemen's claims to ethical responsibility towards the lower classes and the rural landscape in her fiction. The paper argues that the two functions of gentlewo/men, moral reformation of women and the improvement of land for agricultural purposes were not very different from each other, and rather went hand in hand, that the novel's suggestions for the transformation and "improvement" of women and landscape for the greater good of the nation, in fact only served the interest of the landed class—in this case of Mr. Knightley and Emma.

Parliamentary debates in England since 15th century had justified programmes for enclosure of rural landscape, under the pretext of national interest. By the eighteenth century this interest had taken the shape of ethical responsibility among gentlemen towards the less privileged rural folk. Kevin A. Morrison in her 2008 essay "The Mother Tongue of Our Imagination" mentions, "Until 1832, the nation was conceived largely in terms of an aggregate of landed property; political power resided solely in the landed gentry" (83). There can be little doubt that the enclosure programs catered only to the selfish interests of a feudal, patriarchal social order. Unlike the gentlemen, however, women were never direct beneficiaries of such programs. Like the land that was enclosed, they were viewed as property themselves, perpetually in need of reformation and improvement. In spite of little prospect of ever owning the enclosed land, ironically women too participated in such programs of improvement, and submitted to culturally laid down binaries by internalising the

norms of a masculine legislation and culture. Even if some women like Jane Austen were aware of social deprivations that women suffered, their status as gentry gave them a sense of authority over men and women of less privileged classes. Albeit unconsciously, gentlewomen supported and participated in a system that curtailed their own freedom as well as that of the wilderness with which they were often identified. Celia Easton cites *Northanger Abbey* as an example of Austen's interest, as the daughter of a clergyman, in land enclosure (82). Raymond Williams on the other hand, points out that land enclosure and agricultural improvement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "was no revolution, but the consolidation, the improvement, the expansion of an existing social class." The gentlemen by themselves were non-productive consumers contributing nothing to the nation. Williams quotes Prof. Habakkuk:

English landowners as a whole were a class of consumers, and the greater part of their borrowings were contracted for non-productive purposes, to provide dowries, to fund short-term debts contracted as a result of extravagant living, to build mansions, the borrowings for enclosures, for example, were usually a small part of total indebtedness. (116)

Women like Austen, were apparently blind to the non-productive nature of gentlemen. Austen's novels assume that women could contribute to the productivity of the nation only through marriage within appropriate class and social standing. In *Emma*, which is a novel primarily about marriage, with nature and agriculture occupying very little space, women are seen as potential contributors to the nation's development only through their association with men and marriage, and by extension land.

The two estates, Donwell Abbey and Hartfield, that feature in *Emma* serve as medium for illustration of the two different subjects of reformation—land and women, for the greater good of Highbury, "a microcosm of England" (Krampp 148). Depicting clear opposition between the two estates while at the same time drawing parallels between the two subjects of reformation, the novel presents Donwell Abbey as an example of ideal landscape, and Hartfield as an estate that fosters flawed characters, namely Emma and Harriet. The near perfection of Donwell Abbey, which is inhabited significantly only by its patriarch, Mr. Knightley, gets contrasted with the flawed nature of the inhabitants of Hartfield, mostly women. While Mr. Knightley has improved Donwell Abbey and the productivity of its adjunct, Abbey Mill Farm by encouraging modern methods of agriculture and farming, Emma, although herself flawed in the eyes of Mr. Knightley, aims at improving Harriet Smith, who is of national importance for the novelist, Krampp argues, "as a potential biological and cultural reproducer of England's race" (148). The gendered nature of the two estates points to the binaries that get drawn between the imperfect women of Hartfield and the perfect gentlemen of Donwell. Even Robert Martin, the tenant farmer of Abbey Mill Farm is perfect.

In the beginning of the novel Knightley's attention was ostensibly directed towards improving Emma. Emma's entire focus on the other hand, was on the education, reformation and improvement of Harriet. In the famous lines from the novel, she would "notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her to good society; she would form her opinions and her manners" (13-14). Just as Hartfield in its entirety can be taken to embody the feminine flaws that need to be corrected, Harriet embodies all such culturally given flaws of women: of imagination, emotionality, irra-

tionality and sentimentality. Harriet's name which shares a phonic correspondence with Hartfield, makes her the appropriate field on which Emma, the flawed perfectionist with "a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (1) would experiment her skills.

The novel describes Harriet as "the natural daughter of somebody" (13). The quality of being natural, with its connotations of illegitimacy and lack of civilized manners was not something to be admired. Being natural in the society of Austen was associated, like Emma's opinion of the Martins, with being "coarse and unpolished" (13). Like the Martins who needed to be brought into "good society" (13) Harriet too was required to be improved from her natural state. Emma had at first admired Harriet's typical Anglo-Saxon features, "short, plump and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness" (13) and her "natural graces" (13). Nevertheless, for Emma "natural graces" alone did not make a perfect woman, nor did uncultivated land like the heath occupied by the gypsies. "Natural graces" had to be aided by social codes of behaviour and manners of the gentlewoman in the same manner as the panoramic natural beauty of Donwell Abbey "with all the old neglect of prospect... which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up" (234) is made perfect by its "ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream... and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues" (234) and, of course, Abbey Mill Farm. The novel apparently proposes that modern culture and its scientific advances must complement tradition, not replace it. Gardening had aesthetized the landscape of Donwell Abbey while still retaining its old prospect. On the other hand, implementation of modern means of farming had improved Abbey Mill Farm.

Emma, although often defiant of Mr. Knightley, similarly, complements him and the old tradition

to which he belongs. She also shares with Austen a sense of nostalgia for the cultural past and the idyllic English landscape when she muses about Donwell: "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive" (236). The word "culture" as used in this statement, is defined by Jonathan Bate to refer to "a mode of agriculture, and the word's origins go back to cultivation, to crops, to the land" (48). He further points out that in "Austen's time, culture was still something very much associated with the land" (48). By the nineteenth century, however, the term "came to be associated with the life of the mind rather than the life of labour" (43). In the two characters of George Knightley and Emma we see a confrontation of the two definitions of culture and the two centuries that Austen's life spans. The difference in age between Mr. Knightley and Emma is also significant. One can safely assume Mr. Knightley to belong to the agrarian culture of the eighteenth century. Accordingly, Emma, who is much younger, and an eponymous character, can be seen as part the early nineteenth century, when the book was first published. The description of their houses is also a telling evidence of the two different ages to which they belong. Emma's house at Hartfield, was more "modern and well-built" (176) compared to the house at Donwell, which "was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular..." (234). Emma's fault, if it can be said to be so, lies in her wish to groom Harriet, a character who is not only full of flaws but is also foolish, to make her suitable as a wife for a gentleman. As a gentle-woman who wishes for Harriet to marry above her station, Emma "both transgress[es] and transform[s] space" (Wenner 4). In these two characters, Austen targets her criticism of the nineteenth century as foolishly ambitious. We might also note that Harriet is exactly as young as the nineteenth

century when the novel was first published. As a foolishly ambitious representative of the early nineteenth century, Harriet does not fit into the feudal structure of eighteenth century. On the contrary, Mr. Knightley, as representative of the eighteenth century nobility, requires Harriet to be the trained wife to a farmer, namely, Robert Martin. He believes that Robert Martin would benefit from a docile wife, who on his part would assure her "security, stability, and improvement" (317). Mr. Knightley, then, as representative of the class of gentry might be seen as championing the agrarian tradition of England—a tradition that was feudal by nature. Michael Kramp sees George Knightley as a "pastoral leader" who, in the words of Michel Foucault, "assume[s] responsibility for the destiny of the whole flock and of each and every sheep" (quoted in Kramp 153-154). By Knightley's standards the illegitimacy of Harriet's birth does not permit her to aspire for a higher position. The best option to respectability that the society could offer Harriet was the position of a farmer's wife. Although Emma chooses to believe otherwise, she is caught between her allegiance to the feudal culture of the previous century on one hand, and with her own fascination with the modern nineteenth-century "life of the mind" (of which her picture gallery and interest in books, however puerile, are proof) on the other. She no doubt admires Harriet's natural charms. But as the heir to her father's estate, and typical of her class, she also almost claims ownership of her protégée, as her possession with a fitting place among her gallery of portraits and nature-paintings:

What an exquisite possession a good picture of her would be! I would give any money for it.... But really, I could almost venture, if Harriet would sit to me. It would be such a delight to have her picture!....this room rich in specimens of ... landscapes and flowers... (26-27).

As a specimen of the landscape Harriet's naturalness is further emphasized by her association with the gypsies who are camped on the outskirts of Highbury. As already mentioned, Michael Kramp draws out similarities and contrasts between Harriet and the gypsies at the same time as he identifies Harriet with the English nation because of her Anglo-Saxon features:

She is introduced as "the natural daughter of somebody," Harriet appears as the anonymous and arche-typal Anglo-Saxon female, complete with the traditional physical qualities of the ostensibly ancient race of England. This initial sketch of the parlor boarder enables Austen to create a more stark opposition between the dark-skinned gypsies and the White Harriet, but it also exposes an important similarity between the young White woman and the gypsies. Both are "natural" (151).

Her parentage not known, until almost the end, [N]atural, vilified, and illegitimate like the gypsies, Harriet occupies an in-between space, belonging neither to the society of Highbury nor Hartfield. Whereas in works like *The Mill on the Floss* or *The Scholar Gypsy* "the fantasy of stigmatised, rather than elevated birth frees the heroine," and marks a way of "escaping from the exigencies of conventional femininity" as Deborah Nord argues (14), Jane Austen's Harriet Smith is all the more implicated in the cultural demands of the feudal order because of the social stigma of her birth. Trapped spatially in the heath among the gypsies when they "attack" her (217), "her first attempt to mount the bank brought on such a return of it as made her absolutely powerless—and in this state, and exceedingly terrified, she had been obliged to remain" (217) she is rescued by Frank Churchill, another gentleman, and attended by Emma. Her desperate attempts to escape from her situation

subjects Harriet to schemes of reformation. While Emma becomes her mentor and helps her to recover from the shock of her experience with the gypsies, Mr. Knightley, as caretaker of the entire society of Highbury and its neighbourhood is notified "of there being such a set of people in the neighbourhood" (218). Mr. Knightley being such a prompt "justicer," "[t]he gypsies did not wait for the operations of justice: they took themselves off in a hurry" (219).

Keeping in view the tradition and practice of the times we can hardly doubt that Mr. Knightley would gradually enclose the hedges occupied by gypsies for farming and improvement. The economically unproductive status of the unenclosed land and the gypsies (who in this case are only women and children) serve as potential threat to the security of the village/state/nation and bring the two into affinity with each other, subject them to the reformist impulse to which White refers in her essay. Although White assigns no such impulse to the author of the novel she does mention "Austen's interest in evangelicalism and evangelicals" which

probably also led her to the many tracts and magazine articles of the early nineteenth century that proposed reform for the gypsies. As Mayall notes, "much of the published writing on Gypsies [...] thus grew out of the contemporary [...] evangelical zeal to first understand and then reform the group of itinerants who flaunted their heathenism on the domestic shores." In general evangelicals saw the gypsies as a "race desperately in need of being rescued from their way-ward, amoral and irreligious lives and being assimilated into respectable and settled society" (312).

The land that lies between Highbury and Hartfield, and the in-betweenness of Harriet's social position

project an intimate relationship between the two. The land, with its possibility of being enclosed after the gypsies have departed, and Harriet with her willingness to be rescued and reformed, have potential, as the text suggests, for improvement. Mr. Knightley and Emma together become instruments for reforming and legitimising both, the land and Harriet through enclosure and marriage, respectively. Like the land which came under possession of the gentry, Harriet too would serve the financial interest of the gentleman through her association with the farmer and the rent that accrued through him.

Not just the gentleman, but the farmer also nurtured the responsibility of reforming women and land. Robert Martin's interest in such schemes of improvement is revealed in the "the Agricultural Reports" that he reads "to himself," and the anthologies of moral and instructive passages that he reads out to the women in his house. Like George Knightley, the gentleman farmer, who in the words of Robert James Merrett, "'sow [ed] wisdom and goodness' in rural folk to bring forth 'increase' in them" (712), Martin too "sometimes of an evening... read something aloud out of the *Elegant Extracts*" (17). Robert Martin was master not only over the Abbey Mill Farm "with all its appendages of prosperity and beauty, its rich pastures, spreading flocks, orchards in blossom," his territory also extended to his home and family, all members of which were only women. The domestic happiness of Robert Martin depended on the ethical values he sowed in the women and the pride that these women took in their possession of "eight cows, two of them Alderneys, and one a little Welch cow, a very pretty Welch cow indeed" (236). In opposition to the large farm he rented and improved there was the restricted sphere of his womenfolk whose modest happiness was limited to "their having a very fine summer-house in their garden" (16). As his wife Harriet would, no doubt

become part of Robert Martin's property. Martin's ownership of Harriet is established through the moral instructions he has earlier read out to her as a guest in his house, and Knightley's training: "giving [her] information as to modes of agriculture, & c." (236). In the "gipsy party" referred to in the beginning of this essay, while all others are engaged in viewing and admiring the beauty of the landscape, Harriet and George Knightley are the only ones "more engaged in talking than in looking around" (236). They have, in fact, no need even to "look around" in their respective positions as owner and subject of the cultivated landscape.

The ideal nature of the Martin-Harriet relationship is further emphasized by identifying Robert Martin with Arthur Young, a well-known farmer and agricultural writer in eighteenth-century England. In the forty-six volumes of his periodicals *Annals of Agriculture*, founded in 1784, Young had suggested new and modern techniques of improved production from land. Merrett, in his essay "The Gentleman Farmer" confirms that "[w]hen Austen presents Robert Martin as an avid reader of the 'Agricultural Reports' she implies that Knightley has guided his tenant to read [Arthur] Young" (721). Young had started his experiments with new techniques of farming with his mother's estate. But he had not been successful because of the lack of capital. Raymond Williams notes that "[m]ore than any other man," Young "made the case for the second great period of enclosures, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." (66). Young's mother had hailed from a Jewish family from Holland, and he himself had at one time been apprenticed as a merchant. It is significant that besides agricultural improvement Young had also "emphasised the connections of the agricultural interest with the other new social forces of the time: with mercantile capital... with early industrial techniques... with the physical sciences... and with political power and

organisation..." (Williams 66). Robert Martin's association with Harriet, the daughter of a trader (hence, representative of the economic mercantile class) and George Knightley, therefore, by Young's proposal becomes suggestive of the ideal situation for the improvement of agriculture. Together, Martin and Harriet, symbolize the dual characteristics of ideal farming land and money as suggested by Young. Raymond Williams, however, points out the complication involved in an alliance between land and capital that Young, the reformer had failed to notice: "[t]he improvement of land required considerable capital, and therefore the leadership of the landowners," which "not only increased the predominance of the landed interest; it created by enclosure and engrossing to make large and profitable units, a greater number of the landless..." (66). Williams' study demonstrates that the espousal of improvement plans only buttresses a feudal structure built on agrarian economy, serving the financial interest of the landed class.

The novel, however, warns of a threat to the agrarian economy by the rising tourism industry. Tourism as an urban industry which was beginning to flourish in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century was gradually encroaching upon the rural and moral landscape. Mrs. Elton's proposal of the strawberry picking at Donwell Abbey as a sort of "gipsy party" establishes her as a typical tourist: "I shall wear a large bonnet, and bring one of my little baskets hanging on my arm. Here,—probably this basket with pink ribbon. Nothing can be more simple, you see.... There is to be no form or parade—a sort of gipsy party" (232). Her view of landscape is essentially different from other members of Highbury. When she looks at nature her sole purpose is to seek sensual pleasure. The other inhabitants of the region, on the other hand, are in no such conscious pursuit as is evident in the following dialogue between Mrs. Elton and Emma:

When people come into a beautiful country of this sort, you know, Miss Woodhouse, one naturally wishes them to see as much as possible; and Mr. Suckling is extremely fond of exploring. We explored to King's Weston twice last summer, in that way, most delightfully, just after having their barouche-landau. You have many parties of that kind here, I suppose, Miss Woodhouse, every summer?

No; not immediately here. We are rather out of distance of the very striking beauties which attract the sort of parties you speak of; and we are a very quiet set of people, I believe; more disposed to stay at home than engage in schemes of pleasure (178).

Whereas, Harriet's symbolic association with the gypsies is representative of her natural status, Mrs. Elton's maiden name Hawkins is suggestive of the preying qualities of tourists. Even the language used by Mrs. Elton to describe the strawberry-picking is the commercial language of marketing. In the early nineteenth century strawberry, a wild fruit, was gaining in popularity as a garden fruit among the rich. Although it was seen as aesthetically arresting, much of it was generally produced for commercial purposes. Austen's use of language to refer to the discussion among the picnickers is telling of Mrs. Elton's tourist attitude and commercialization of land:

...Mrs. Elton, in all her apparatus of happiness, her large bonnet and her basket, was very ready to lead the way in gathering, accepting, or talking—strawberries, and only strawberries, could now be thought or spoken of. The best fruit in England—everybody's favourite—always wholesome—These the finest bed and finest sorts.—Delightful to gather for one's self—the only way of really enjoying them.—Morning decidedly the best time—

never tired—every sort good—hautboy infinitely superior—no comparison—the others hardly eatable—hautboys very scarce—Chili preferred—white wood finest flavour of all—price of strawberries in London—abundance about Bristol—Maple Grove—cultivation—beds when to be renewed—gardeners thinking exactly different... (234-35).

The novel can, therefore, be seen as championing the cause of land enclosures for improving and increasing agricultural produce through the moral intervention of responsible gentry. The gentleman's purpose was on the face of it, not money-making but a sense of moral responsibility towards the citizens. The idea is conveyed through what is perceived as Emma's flaw, her attempts to justify Harriet's claims to the position of gentry, and Mr. Knightley's approval of raising Harriet to the status of a farmer's wife. The obvious suggestion is that in the world of Highbury one may seek only modestly to improve one's situation without aiming too high for personal advancement. In this regard, Mr. Knightley is shown to be exemplary. He is not extravagant and makes no show of his wealth. He has not modernised his house, nor does he own a carriage. He prefers to walk or rent a carriage when he finds it essential for helping a friend like Miss Bates. He does not look at the landscape as accruing financial profit and his projects of agricultural improvement do not entail personal benefit, as the text would make us believe but the benefit of the whole of Highbury. However, the fact remains that financial profits did accrue from such improvements and political and financial implications of such transformations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century cannot be ignored. Therefore, when Mr. Knightley looks at Harriet and sees in her the potential for an ideal wife of a farmer we cannot consider him entirely innocent of personal interests.

Even Emma's initial interest in Harriet, which was acknowledged by her as "the greatest amusement" (6) may appear as the gaze of the tourist seeking only personal pleasure. Her view of Harriet is limited, as evinced by her flawed portrait of Harriet. Instead of making an accurate representation, Emma's portrait manipulated and emphasised what she herself wanted to believe about Harriet. The portrait glossed over the imperfections of Harriet's features and endowed her with an unnatural beauty that she lacked. Emma's view of Harriet is partial like that of the tourists of her times who used the Claude glass, "a mirror which a viewer could useto see the landscape as though it were a small painting" (Wenner 2). Her limited perspective makes her ignorant of the reforming and moralising efforts of Mr. Knightley as oppressive and deterrent to her own freedom. Emma is apparently aware of the privileges that she enjoys as an heir to her father's property, and fears that she will lose them if married. But the novel (and correspondingly, the novelist) nevertheless, allows her to acknowledge Mr. Knightley's goodness, surrender her liberty to him in marriage, thereby, establishing the feudal order.

As members of the class of landowners, there is not much difference between Emma and Mr. Knightley whose transforming influence on agriculture also extended to people around their estates. Whereas in the case of Mrs. Elton we notice that nature is commercialized for personal sensual pleasure, in Mr. Knightley and Emma we notice the social and financial benefits accruing because of their transforming influence. Both, the tourist, as well as the gentleman exploits the landscape, apparently in the interest of their society, and consequently, the nation. But whereas, Mrs. Elton's superficiality is all too visible, and so appears "vulgar" (181), Mr Knightley and Emma's claim to selfless charitable activity only masks, and shamelessly promotes the interest of the landed

class. Emma's sophisticated difference from Mrs. Elton is noted in the ironical tone of the narrator: "Emma had never been to Box Hill; she wished to see what everybody found so well worth seeing." But Emma's "seeing" would be "done in a quiet, unpretending, elegant way, infinitely superior to the bustle and preparations, the regular eating and drinking, and picnic parade of the Eltons and the Sucklings" (230). The difference between Mrs. Elton and Emma's view of the landscape is hardly convincing. However Emma might belong to the upper class, and thus be one among the class of exploiters, she is also a woman. As such, her affinity with the land cannot be ignored. Her attraction towards, and intimacy with Harriet only confirms her association with the landscape of Highbury. Further, Marrett's arguments regarding Emma's "snobbery" alerts us to affinities... that root her in the agricultural community more deeply than she admits. She looks down on Martin's riding around the countryside... to get Harriet walnuts, but, in drawing Harriet towards Mr. Elton's house, Emma is content to get intimately acquainted with all the hedges, gates, pools, and pollards of this part of Highbury (Marrett 733).

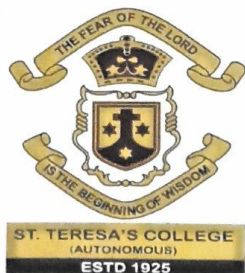
Implicated in her association with the two opposite poles of Mrs. Elton and Harriet, and also at the same time to Mr. Knightley, Emma is rooted to the landscape of Highbury as the only woman character who is a cultural insider. All other women in the novel are outsiders to Highbury. While Mrs. Elton and Harriet get incorporated into the environment of Highbury, Jane is the only woman who, even while an insider remains an outsider. She is the only woman in the novel who appears to be perfect. But she too is not independent of the constraining ideals of Highbury. Mr. Knightley at a point remarks: "not even Jane Fairfax is perfect" (187). As a woman who has not been subjected to the reformation ideals of Mr. Knightley, and resisted Emma's patronisation, Jane continues to remain an outsider. Women of Highbury, on the

other hand, are at different levels of im/perfection with potential for improvement through the guiding influence of its men. The narrative strategy of the novel does not even spare its heroine. It rather persuades us to believe that Emma is simultaneously a natural member of the landed gentry as the mistress of Hartfield, as well as a subject of reformation as a woman.

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