

Theme of love and marriage in Emma

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Jane Austen is the most influential novelist of early 19th century. She made innovations in plot construction, structural organization and thematic pattern. She used novel as a platform to voice the mood and temperament of common man whose interest was largely ignored. The concept of regional novel acquired a concrete shape in her novels. She was so much involved in the depiction of the problems of people belonging to a particular region that she didn't take pains to look into the major problems facing the country. Her novels deal with such varied subjects as the social hierarchies of the time, marriage or the pastimes of the well-off families. A woman of the English gentry belonging to a reasonably well-off family, well connected and remarkably well-educated living in a very small village of rural England in the late 18th and early 19th century finds expression in her successive novels like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* where woman finds an edge over their male counterparts. Charges were levelled against her for ignoring some essential aspects of the Georgian era in her novels such as, the American Revolutionary war and the loss of the thirteen colonies, the French Revolution, The beginning of the industrial Revolution and the birth of the British Empire. She argued that the people she was depicting through her novels were so much involved in their personal problems like getting their daughters married which were more alarming and of greater magnitude that other problems were pushed to the background. She deliberately avoided major problems facing the country to show

solidarity with their wishes and desires. She also comes closer to Hardy who confined himself to the depiction of life in the Wessex region with a difference that while Hardy painted grim picture of society, Austen portrayed the warmth and vitality which she noticed in society. F.R. Leavis gave a glowing tribute to her by including her in the great tradition of English novelists in his book *Great Tradition*.

Emma presents a superficial picture of the lives of the inhabitants of the town of Highbury. Charlotte Bronte has rightly said that Jane Austen presents "the surface of the lives of general English people curiously well". The emotions that do exist in Emma are quite clearly portrayed very differently from those that exist in the novels of Bronte sisters but are not of necessarily less intensity. They are more heavily masked and more delicately expressed. Emma is young rich woman who runs her father's home. She spends much of her time gossiping and playing matchmaker for her friend Harriet. She lives much in her own imagination that is the world as she sees it and has a hard time facing reality sometimes. She does not display strong passion for anyone or anything save her own opinion. She dearly loves her father and her friends and is very faithful to them.

Throughout the novel everyone seems proper and in place. Mr. and Mrs. Weston are also happily married. Frank and Jane too are secretly engaged and this came out without any outburst from anyone in Highbury. There are some characters like Miss Bates and the Elton's who suffer from major flaws but they too are not allowed to do anything uncontrolled. Society is structured and everyone is expected to know his or her place. A lot of silly, superficial things apart like Harriet saving a piece of Mr. Elton's pencil and the stir caused by Jane's piano harmony and balance is properly maintained. The people of Highbury in their small world happily gossip, visit and meddle in each other's life. No one wants to stir up the pot. At the end of the novel even Emma who it is hoped would do something different married Knightley and accepts her role in society much to her father's happiness.