

## Marriage as a theme in Emma

'Emma' is one of the finest novels written by Jane Austen. She started writing this novel in January 1814 and finished it in March 1815. On commencing the composition of this novel, Jane Austen said: "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." How she has proved to be wrong in this assessment. Most readers have liked the heroine Emma, despite all her faults, shortcomings and errors of judgement.

Jane Austen has often been accused of celebrating nothing better in her novels than a hunt for husbands. Emma truly hunts husbands, but she hunts them for other women, and nearly destroys her own happiness in the process. It would be very close to the truth to say that the novel Emma is about marriage. Whether the emphasis is upon marriage-greed, or upon marriage-snobbery, or upon the marriage of true minds, or upon marriage as an ordeal, the fact remains that marriage constitutes a leading theme in the novel.

In the very opening chapter we find Emma setting herself up as a matchmaker. She claims that it was she who brought about the matrimonial alliance between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston. Further the next fifteen or sixteen chapters of the novel are devoted to an account of Emma's earnest efforts to bring

about a match between Mr. Elton and the girl Harriet whom she has taken under her protection. Emma is quite hopeful with regard to her plan about making a match between Mr. Elton and Harriet. When, therefore, Harriet receives a written proposal of marriage from Robert Martin, Emma manipulates a refusal by Harriet, to the great disappointment of Mr. Knightley who had fully approved of Robert Martin's intention. Later we find that Mr. Elton is not in love with Harriet but Emma then this match-making project of Mr. Elton and Harriet ends in disaster. Emma also listens the news that Mr. Elton has got engaged to a certain Miss Augusta Hawkins and that the marriage will take place soon.

The novel 'Emma' presents its main character as a match maker. She tries her best to search a suitable partner for Harriet but she fails. She first plans to match Harriet with Mr. Elton but she fails. Then she plans a match between Frank and Harriet which also goes in to disaster. Mr. Knightley had also denied her intention to marry Jane. Emma always try to make a match between others but she herself has no intention to marry. She says, "If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it". But the novel ends with some suitable matches like Emma - Mr. Knightley, Harriet to marry Robert Martin, Frank to marry Jane -

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Thus, marriage is a prominent theme in the novel "Emma". It begins with one marriage that of Miss Taylor, ends with three more and considers two others by the way. The subject is marriage but not marriage in the abstract. There is nothing of the moral fable here, indeed it is impossible to conceive of the subject except in its concrete expression, which is the plot. If it is not quite adequate to say that Emma is about marriage, it is also not adequate to say it is about the heroine.

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