

**Views on Children, Childhood and Education  
in Jane Austen's *Emma***

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## Introduction

One of Jane Austen's many strengths is the description of the emotional, psychological and social development of her characters. In *Emma*, we are introduced to a set of characters who have been shaped by their individual backgrounds and upbringings. We are provided with glimpses of their childhood experiences and at the same time Austen paints a picture of who they have become. What values have been imprinted in them and what strategies are they using to handle their lives?

The group of young people that the novel centers around are on the verge of adulthood. They are trying to find their individual identities, realize their dreams and discover their places in society. It is revealed to us, how their chosen courses of action and machinations result in a number of consequences. Their experiences and living conditions vary greatly and seem to determine their characters. Emma Woodhouse has developed an unrealistic worldview. Jane Fairfax has acquired a strategy of trying to improve her talents while hiding her emotions. Harriet Smith is extremely insecure and eager to fit in and Frank Churchill, finally, conceals his true feelings under false pretences and a charming personality. Could this be a direct result of their different childhoods?

This essay will concentrate on how different living conditions during youth influence the way in which the characters see the world, form their opinions and interact with each other. I will look at how the characters have been brought up and educated. What kind of values have their different experiences provided them with and how have these shaped their reasoning and chosen courses of action? The investigation will hopefully prove that the conditions that they face during their formative years determine how they later, as young adults, see the world.

In order to put the novel into a historical context this essay will show how children, childhood and education were considered during the eighteenth century as well as the early nineteenth century. What kind of theories and ideas prevailed at the time, regarding the correct way of bringing up children and educating them? The part introducing the theoretical background for the study will focus on two of the most influential philosophers of the time when it came to education, namely Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke. Their ideas will be presented and I will examine if and how their teachings are present in *Emma*.

## Children, Childhood and Education

As Borsay points out, the views on children, childhood and education are forever changing. Every period has its own cultural norms that reflect society at the time and which in turn influence the attitudes to for example children and education (53). In order to understand the points that Austen makes about the influence of childhood and education in *Emma* it is therefore helpful to have a basic knowledge of the views of the time. Fletcher writes that before Locke entered the stage in the late seventeenth century, the popular view on children was that they “lacked self-control and self-discipline” (3). Because of this the child should be kept under strict control and trained to behave with the help of physical punishment (3).

With Locke, who stressed education and experience as ways of improving the child, there was an upsurge in the interest in education (Borsay 60). The emphasis on that character could be learned, suited the needs of a rising middle class who used education as a means to social ascent (Houswitschka 82-83). This new way of looking at things is apparent in *Emma* where Austen criticizes the manner in which some of the characters have been brought up. Even so, it is not the characters themselves who are to blame for their shortcomings, but the way in which they have been educated.

Selwyn writes that there occurred a shift in the way that children were perceived in the eighteenth century. Upper- and middle-class children went from having been kept primarily in the nursery, out of the way, to being allowed to participate more in family life. Moreover they became little persons in the eyes of their parents and other adults, and as such they were allowed to express their ideas and feelings (95). In the novel the young children are treated with a lot of consideration and warmth. However, some of the adults take this lenient attitude too far and by showing the results of spoiling children the book points to the dangers of the wrong kind of education.

A typical English upbringing differentiated between the sexes (Fletcher 4-5). In Austen’s time boys of the upper classes were educated to have a career. The most frequent professional options were managing the family estate or joining either the military or the church (Kelly 253-254). The boys were taught “classical languages, science, theology and mathematics” whereas girls of these social classes were brought up and educated to marry, preferably advantageously (Kelly 254-258). For this reason girls were kept out of the traditional male domain of a career outside the home and were instead educated to be “accomplished”. This term alluded to skills that could be used to entertain her future husband and guests, such as drawing, painting, modern languages, embroidery, conversation and letter-

writing (Kelly 257). In Austen's time there was an ongoing debate of the limited education offered to girls. Mary Wollstonecraft, among others, questioned the sense of keeping women and thereby the entire country back, leaving every important decision to the man, who had the advantage of an intellectual education (Kelly 258).

Whereas the upbringing and education of boys had as a purpose to prepare them for a career and an active role in society, girls were schooled to be successful mothers. Therefore, it was paramount that a girl was taught good manners and moral values since she would then pass this on to her children (Fletcher 34-35). Raising children was thought of as a joint responsibility of the husband and wife, but they had different roles to play (Fletcher 64). The mothers took care of the guidance and training of the young children and she continued this regiment with the daughters as they grew older. Fathers were expected to step in and take over the education of older boys, either by being directly involved or by engaging suitable teachers for their sons (Shoemaker 124-125). In *Emma* we are presented with characters who either embrace these traditional gender roles or who try to disregard them.

### **John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau: Two Central Philosophers**

There was a great interest in education and how to best bring up children in the seventeenth- and eighteenth- century and a lot was written on the subject. Especially the upper classes had a hunger for instructional manuals and advice on children and education (Fletcher 40-44). The two most influential writers when it came to bringing up children in the eighteenth century were John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau.

John Locke who was a physician based his theory of the ideal education on observations of real children. According to his doctrine, developed 1690 in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, man was a blank slate, a "tabula rasa" at birth. Our experiences would then fill the white page with content and in doing so determining the kind of person we would become. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* written in 1693 he describes the ideal education of a gentleman (86). Even though Locke talks about the best education for a gentleman, he states that with only some minor alterations his educational recipe would also suit the educational needs of a young lady (86).

To Locke, education was all-important. In §32, for instance, he stresses that education is what decides what a man will become. The difference in competence between men ultimately comes down to the difference of their education (103). The key to developing the mind in the

right direction was, according to Locke, to tame desire with reason (107). Instead of simply giving in to our needs and instincts, we should learn to use reason and let rational thinking decide the proper way to act in any given situation (107, 167). The characters in *Emma* show varying levels of education including Harriet who has had insufficient schooling, Frank and Emma who essentially follow their desires and Jane who can be said to have mastered the art of subjugating her feelings and using reason when making decisions.

A good education was about preparing the child for the duties and responsibilities he would face as an adult gentleman. Therefore, the education should be adjusted to the individual talents as well as the needs of the student (163). However, every gentleman's education should contain four elements: "*Virtue, Wisdom, Breeding and Learning*" (194). In other words, a gentleman must first and foremost be taught good morals and then also how to make good decisions, how to behave and lastly the academic subjects themselves. A teacher or parent should not stand idly by and let the child learn what he wants and solve problems on his own. Instead he/she should play a very active role guiding, helping, steering the student in the right direction and pointing out good and bad examples and how to recognize them (221, 154). Depending on the education that a character in *Emma* has received he or she has had some, none or a lot of guidance and as a result is now well prepared or ill prepared to face the challenges of life.

The main goal of a good education was according to Locke to instill good habits in children by repetition and example (122, 143). This should be done by motivation and encouragement, not by force (115, 116). Locke wanted parents and teachers to reason with children, not simply lay down rules (142, 183). This would make them more prone to understand the consequences of a behaviour and to do the right thing in the future (110). Several of the characters in *Emma* have trouble foreseeing the results of their actions, something which is a result of the education that they have had. According to Locke a "sound mind in a sound body" was paramount (1). An untrained body would be just as bad as an understimulated mind. Children should not be overprotected but be made hardy (102). In the novel this ideal of making children hardy and healthy is noticeable in for example how Isabella's children are brought up.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) admired Locke and with his thoughts as a base, Rousseau created his own theory of education. He presented his model in *Emile or On Education* which is about a fictional boy who is educated according to Rousseau's maxims.

The main goal for Rousseau was to shield the child from the corruption of society (Book 1, 39-40). His ideal is the "solitary natural man", who should be allowed to grow up as naturally

as possible. Rousseau wanted the child to learn from experience. His own mistakes and triumphs were to lead him rather than a universal moral code implemented by a teacher or parent. The desires and needs of the child should be in the foreground and all education should be problem-based. First when a child has a need to know something he will have the proper incentive to find a solution (Book 3, 167-169). The teacher should not be an authority figure: "Command him nothing, whatever in the world it might be, absolutely nothing. Do not even allow him to imagine that you might pretend to have any authority over him (Book 2, 91). Whereas this might seem as a good idea in theory in *Emma* Austen seems to caution against an education inspired by Rousseau. The characters that have had the freedom and lack of guidance that he advocated have all shortcomings as adults.

Like Locke, Rousseau also recommended a regiment for making the child hardy, but he took it one step further. While Locke discouraged using medicine for trivial complaints or for prophylaxis, Rousseau did not want to consult a doctor until the child was on the brink of death (Book 1, 55). Rousseau also argued for an education where books were very sparsely used. The only book he recommended for Emile was *Robinson Crusoe*, which in his mind is a wonderful example of a natural education. Robinson Crusoe had nobody to teach him, and he had to learn what worked by trial and error (Book 3, 184-185).

In contrast to John Locke, Rousseau states that men and women have very different roles to play and should therefore be educated differently, (Book 5, 363). Women should please men and their education should ideally concentrate on the skills necessary to care for their husband, home and children (Book 5, 365). Men should be in charge of more intellectual endeavours, such as the study of science (Book 5, 386-387).

To sum up, Locke's focus on reason and moral education is pitted against Rousseau's emphasis on the feelings and desires of the child. Locke argues that a comprehensive curriculum and books are vital, whereas Rousseau advocated a natural upbringing far from society. Rousseau scorns Locke's model of a masterful teacher guiding and actively educating the student. Instead he argued for a passive teacher who only motivated the pupil. It is then up to the pupil to learn what he needs in order to solve the problem he is facing at the moment. While Locke liked to think that his education could be applied to either sex. Rousseau proposed a gender-specific education that was different for boys and girls. In *Emma* the influence of these theories can be seen in the varying childhoods and types of education that are presented and that induce the characters to act in a certain way.

## Harriet Smith

Harriet is in many ways the opposite of Jane, as she is an example of someone who has had the kind of scanty education which was still the norm for many girl. The seventeen-year-old has grown up at Mrs Goddard's boarding school for girls in Highbury, which is described as "a real, honest, old-fashioned Boarding-school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price and where girls might [...] scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies" (17-18). As Fletcher recounts, boarding schools for girls were introduced in England in the early seventeenth century, but parents from the higher social classes generally preferred to have their daughters educated at home, so boarding schools were mostly used by families of the middle classes (244-247). At Mrs Goddard's school, the girls have plenty of physical exercise and fresh air, which was something that Locke as well as Rousseau recommended, and the kind of education that will prepare them for their future role as wives and mothers, which was what tradition saw as suitable for girls. They are not taught more advanced subjects, such as foreign languages or science, and Harriet seems to be both ignorant and naïve when Emma first meets her.

Emma thus decides to make Harriet her project and resolves to become her guide in the world:

*She* would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers. (19)

Since Harriet has had such an incomplete education, she has not been given the tools that she needs in order to handle life. In Mr Knightley's words, "[S]he knows nothing herself, and looks upon Emma as knowing every thing" (30). To a great extent she is still a blank slate, Locke's *tabula rasa*, and as such very impressionable. Therefore, Emma can influence her and mould her into whatever shape she likes. With the relationship between Harriet and Emma and its consequences, Austen shows the danger of an upbringing and education that is not complete, as Harriet under Emma's influence is at risk of losing the opportunity of marrying Mr Martin and is alienated from her social class.



For Locke as well as Rousseau, the choice of tutor was critically important. In Harriet's case, there is nobody there who could choose a suitable teacher for her. Instead Mrs Goddard introduces her to Emma, who does not possess the necessary qualifications that both philosophers demanded a good tutor should have. Locke thought that a tutor had to be experienced and well-educated, while Rousseau felt that a teacher must put the student's needs before his own. Emma fulfills none of these criteria.

Once more, Mr Knightley represents the voice of reason as he warns of the danger that Emma's influence represents for Harriet: "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" (30). Naturally, Harriet feels appreciated and flattered by the attention, since she herself is inferior to Emma as well in social status as in fortune and parentage. She looks up to Emma, wants to learn from her and is quite willing to be guided by her. In Harriet's mind, Emma possesses the knowledge and experience of the world that she herself lacks.

All her life, Harriet has been used to take instructions and she has adapted her behaviour to this reality. By complying with other people's wishes to such an extent, she has not had the opportunity to practice how to make her own decisions and trust her own feelings. Harriet is unsure and does not dare to rely on her own undeveloped judgement of what is right and wrong. She would much rather be told what to do and then she can adjust to the choices made by other people. When Mr Martin sends Harriet a letter of proposal the first thing that Harriet does is therefore to consult Emma (39). Harriet's attitude to the offer then goes from an initial feeling of delight to a complete change of heart, as she ultimately agrees with Emma's view that she is much too good for a mere farmer and should set her sights higher (40-42).

Harriet's behaviour shows that she has not had enough instruction to be able to make decisions for herself, as Locke would have advised. At the same time, she is too insecure to trust her own feelings, which was what Rousseau recommended. It is evident that Harriet is eager to adapt and to substitute her own opinion for Emma's and to act in a way that Emma will find appropriate. From once considering herself lucky to have been invited to the Martins, she now feels superior to them. Her turnabout highlights her naivety and want of experience as well as her lack of proper instruction. She does not seem to comprehend what criteria are important for a man of Emma's class when it comes to choosing a wife, and does not understand that she will never enjoy the wide range of options that are open to Emma. Emma's friendship has in a way dazzled her.

Harriet does not have the ability to see the world as it really is. Because no one has explained what awaits her when she leaves the school, she will have to accumulate experience, make mistakes and then hopefully correct them. As a contrast to Emma's view of Harriet as a good catch for a gentleman, Austen puts forwards how Mr Knightley sees her chances. He finds it bordering on cruelty to change Harriet's perception of which class she belongs to. According to Mr Knightley, she is an ordinary girl, of ordinary intelligence, charm, education and wit. The only unordinary thing about her is her prettiness and that is simply not enough (49). Mr Knightley has a realistic view of Harriet's position on the social scale, whereas Emma chooses to interpret Harriet's background to suit her own purposes of marrying her off to a gentleman.

Harriet tries to mimic Emma down to the smallest detail. Not only does she defer the important decisions to Emma, she follows Emma's lead even in small, non-important things. Her habit of being thoroughly indecisive is apparent in every part of her life, as for example in the scene where she is shopping at Ford's: "Harriet, tempted by every thing, and swayed by half a word, was always very long at a purchase; and while she was still hanging over muslins and changing her mind, Emma went to the door for amusement" (176). Once Harriet has decided what to buy there is still considerable indecision whether the items should be sent together or separately and to which address. The matter is only settled when Emma takes charge and makes the decisions instead of Harriet. Harriet then happily goes along with what Emma has decided (176-178).

At the end of the novel, Harriet has pulled away from Emma, and Emma is avoiding Harriet because she feels guilty. This helps Harriet to start to trust her own feelings and rely on her own judgement more than she has done in the past, and as a result she ends up marrying Mr Martin (356). Harriet had real feelings for Mr Martin all along, she just lacked the self-confidence to trust her own judgement. The text conveys a concern for Harriet's future; she could easily be led astray or taken advantage of, because of her inexperience and faulty education. In pairing Harriet with Mr Martin, Austen makes sure that she will have somebody rational that can guide her in the future and in that way her insufficient education can be remedied.

## Jane Fairfax

Jane is a character who seems to have been brought up according to the ideas and recommendations of Locke. In his philosophy he stressed the importance of a structured education in the hands of a competent tutor. Jane became an orphan at the age of three and it was left to her grandmother and aunt to care for her (122). Later on, however, Colonel Campbell arranged to raise Jane together with his own daughter of the same age. As Fletcher states it was not uncommon to place girls with relatives if the parents thought that this would give them a better education, and as a result an advantage when it came to marrying well (259-261). Jane has always been loved and cherished by the Campbells and has been given the best possible education (123). Austen describes them as “right-minded and well-informed” and these characteristics are precisely what render them highly suitable to influence and guide a young mind in the right direction (123). In addition to these first-class role-models, Jane has had several highly educated teachers capable of assessing her talents, instructing her and guiding her on the road towards excellence (123).

As Gary Kelly writes, women at the time were placed in one of three slots based on the education they had received. If a woman was “notable” she had only had a basic education of how to run a household, but she lacked accomplishments. An “accomplished” woman was considered the ideal. She had been brought up to fit in to the society of the upper classes (257-258). The only thing that was omitted from a good female education for the upper classes was learning, which was a field reserved for boys (Fletcher 222). If a woman ventured into this male domain, she was considered to have had too much education and be “learned”. This was regarded as something of an abomination (Kelly 257-258). Jane has had exactly the right amount of education according to the views at the time. She is accomplished without being learned and because of this, she can easily assume a role in society, in her case as a governess. In this respect her education is in line with Locke’s teachings. He was of the belief that the main aim of all education was to create good and responsible citizens.

Jane’s father was not a rich man, so Jane’s education has out of necessity been aimed at preparing her for the role of governess (123). As Kelly among others states, it was one of a very limited number of vocational options open to young women of the upper and middle classes who had to work (256-257). Being a governess was not a comfortable or easy position to have. Even though the governess was paid, she was not an ordinary servant, but at the same time she was not part of the family (Fletcher 223). While other characters in the novel feel

sorry for Jane because she will have to work as a governess, and continually refer to this as something of a tragedy, Jane herself calmly accepts that it is her duty to earn a living. Again this is in line with Locke's ideals that all decisions should be guided by a sense of duty.

Austen describes Jane as very beautiful, talented and graceful (124). She outshines Colonel Campbell's own daughter (153), so there is every reason for her to develop a high self-esteem. However, the reality of having been brought up among strangers, continuously feeling indebted and grateful for the opportunities that the Campbells have provided her with, has left its mark. Instead of feeling superior, she is forever trying to prove herself worthy and to improve herself. Locke's firm belief that the primary goal of all education was to instill a hunger for knowledge and improvement in the student, is something that has obviously become a part of Jane's personality (§195, 249).

Even though other people constantly praise her accomplishments and admire her skills, for example playing the piano (152), Jane is still motivated to continue improving her skills and developing her talents. In everything that she does, Jane strives for excellence and this is very much in accordance with Locke's ideas of a good education (§94, 156). For instance when it comes to playing the piano, she has the technical dexterity as well as musicality (175). Mrs Elton's judgement sums up how people consider Jane: "—A sweet, interesting creature. So mild and lady-like—and with such talents!—I assure you I think she has very extraordinary talents. I do not scruple to say that she plays extremely well" (213).

Jane's comprehensive education has also left her with a good moral compass. She makes a real effort to behave in a dignified manner, on the one hand not betraying the secret of her engagement (261), on the other hand not misleading people. Jane does not agree with Frank's strategy of handling their secret engagement by tricking everybody to think that he is interested in Emma (333). She has had the kind of moral education and guidance recommended by Locke, and can therefore assess the situation and its possible implications.

When Jane finds herself in a situation where emotions run high, she consistently opts for using reason rather than emotion as a basis for her choices and decisions. She does what she feels is morally right when she breaks off the engagement and returns all Frank's letters, even though it makes her physically ill (334). Jane's behaviour is consistent with how Locke put it: "[T]he Principle of all Vertue and Excellency lies in a power of denying our selves the satisfaction of our own Desires, where Reason does not authorize them" (§38, 107). Jane also shows an admirable self-control with her rather trying relatives, the Bates, a feat that for example Emma, a character brought up in accordance with Rousseaus's principles, is

incapable of. Emma hurts Miss Bates' feelings while Jane on the other hand shows the patience, respect for other people and self-control that Locke advocated.

Locke's ideas have, as shown above, permeated Jane's upbringing which is characterized by structure, first-rate teachers and a desire to achieve excellence in every discipline. She has been taught how the world works and her education has prepared her for adult life with all its demands and challenges. As a young woman, Jane is thus dependable, well-educated, independent and capable of judging reality correctly. She has been equipped with well-grounded moral principles which she follows even though she has to suppress her feelings. While the text describes other characters, for example Emma, in an ironic way, showing the reader their flaws and shortcomings, the narrative voice refrains from using irony when it comes to Jane who is depicted as a kind of ideal. This view is echoed by other characters, including Emma who does not really like Jane, but who admires and respects her.

Jane's only possible flaw is that she seems to internalize her feelings rather than showing them openly. Emma finds her cold and guarded, hiding her emotions under a coat of impeccable manners (127). She keeps her personal opinions on people and things private and is reluctant to share them publicly (151, 154). Mr Knightley thinks her too reserved to make a suitable wife for him, despite her many accomplishments (217):

‘Jane Fairfax has feeling’, said Mr Knightley—‘I do not accuse her of want of feeling. Her sensibilities, I suspect, are strong—and her temper excellent in its power of forbearance, patience, self-control; but it wants openness. She is reserved, more reserved, I think, than she used to be—And I love an open temper.’ (218)

At times, Jane's composure momentarily cracks which lets the other characters glimpse what she is truly feeling. One such occasion is when she is sitting at the piano that has been delivered from an anonymous benefactor and Emma catches a glimpse of the happiness under the calm exterior (183).

In order to try and balance the strengths and weaknesses of their respective upbringings and childhoods the characters in *Emma* are paired up in couples towards the end of the novel. Jane is matched with Frank even though at a glance Emma would seem to make a more compatible partner for Frank since they are very much alike, but from a Lockian point of view, it could only lead to disaster. They both lack a sound judgement because of the insufficient education and guidance that they received during their respective childhoods. For this reason Frank is paired with Jane, who has had what Locke considered a complete

education and can therefore serve as a guide for Frank, acting as a counterbalance for his flaws, at the same time as his lively temperament can make Jane less reserved.

## **Frank Churchill**

Frank exemplifies the result of an upbringing and education in adherence to Rousseau's principles. He has been given freedom rather than guidance and relies on his feelings to guide him instead the moral and reason advocated by Locke. Frank's mother who came from a wealthy family, the Churchills, married his father, the considerably poorer Mr Weston, against the wishes of her family. Because of the undesirable match, her family dissociated itself from the couple, but when Frank's mother died three years later, her brother and his wife volunteered to take Frank in and raise him. In this respect Frank's childhood resembles Jane's. However, the Campbells adopted Frank when he came of age and made him their heir since they had no children (13-14), a circumstance that has given Frank much more confidence and security than Jane got from merely living with the Campbells. Frank grew up primarily in Yorkshire with his aunt and uncle and only saw his father once a year in London, but never visited him in Highbury (166, 14), so his father has not played a very important role in his development. His uncle has also failed to guide Frank during his childhood, though, something that Locke insisted a father or other male role model should do.

According to Fletcher, the popular view at the time was that when a boy reached the age of six or seven, it was the father's responsibility to take over the upbringing (149). In order for the boy to grow up and become a good man, he had to have a good male role model was the idea at the time. If the mother remained the main influence for a boy it was seen as detrimental to his development (Fletcher 150). He would run the risk of having good manners and social skills, but not enough of what were considered to be the male characteristics such as strength of character, reasoning skills and a sense of duty. This is exactly what has happened to Frank. He has had the manipulative behaviour of his aunt as the role model of how to behave (94). Mrs Churchill uses her bad health unscrupulously to scare people into obeying her wishes. For example, it is her influence that stops Frank from visiting his father in Highbury and she can manipulate Frank into returning home whenever she feels like it (95, 195). Frank copies this behaviour and uses manipulation as a strategy to get what he wants, for example he tricks Emma into believing that he is interested in her, in order to hide his engagement to Jane. Although detrimental to people around him, his behaviour is in line with

Rousseau's ideas that the child should learn from his own experience, not from lessons taught by an instructor (Rousseau 62). Frank simply employs the strategy that he has seen works well.

Frank's unwillingness to come to Highbury highlights what might happen if a child has had no correct moral guidance growing up. Mr Knightley points out that if Frank thought it his moral duty to visit his father, he would make it a priority and find a way in spite of his aunt (112-113): "I can allow for the fears of the child, but not of the man. As he became rational, he ought to have roused himself and shaken off all that was unworthy in their authority" (114). Here Mr Knightley represents the influence of Locke. He voices that at twenty-three Frank should have had a moral education, making him reason rather than looking for the easy way out and putting duty before his own comfort and pleasure (113-114). But Frank acts according to Rousseau's ideals when he first and foremost looks out for himself and his own happiness before considering other people's feelings (Rousseau 213).

We are told very little about the kind of education that Frank has had and the conclusion we can draw from this is that education has not had the same priority in Frank's life as it has in Jane's. This goes against Locke's principles, but is consistent with how Rousseau saw it. He thought that personal freedom and fulfillment were far more essential goals for education than excellence (Rousseau 162). Furthermore, the purpose of education according to Rousseau was to prepare the child for the role of human being, not to ready him for a particular occupation: "Living is the job I want to teach him" (41-42). In Rousseau's eyes the ever-changing nature of society made it useless to educate a child for a specific position and Frank seems to have nothing to do but amuse himself (Rousseau 42).

Fletcher describes that the upper classes in England resisted Rousseau's teachings. They could not see that his type of education was adequate to their needs. For them, preparing the child for his/her future role in society was fundamental: "Rousseau had attempted to abolish the notion that children should be taught or trained, whereas the English gentry and middle class believed it to be their duty, through instruction, to perpetuate social and gender order and to create moral adults" (8). For Rousseau it was an important maxim that children should have their own way and that they should be given what they want when they want it. Frank's behaviour clearly illustrates that he is used to getting his own way and he only considers himself and his own feelings when he makes a decision. Being truthful seems not to be a priority for him. He simply tells people what will benefit his purpose at the time. Frank's nonchalant treatment of the truth and his disregard for how his lies could impact other people are a direct result of his inadequate upbringing and education.

Frank has the skills of a gentlemen, for example he can express himself beautifully and carry himself well in company, but he has not the moral understanding or the habit to put what is right before what is pleasurable. He has all the attributes of a gentleman, but not the corresponding character (241). As Kelly writes, to preserve the estates of the gentry it was of vital importance to instill good moral values, a sense of duty and a habit of overruling desires with the help of education (255). Frank has not had this kind of education and is therefore ill-prepared for managing his future inheritance. Men from the upper classes did not work if they had a fortune or other income which could support them (Shoemaker 115), so it is natural that Frank does not seem to have a career, but at the same time he is not being prepared for his future role as heir. He is essentially Rousseau's natural man, ruled by passions and desires, not reason or common sense.

Frank exerts himself to appear friendly, easy-going and with nothing to hide, while he is guarding the secret of the engagement with Jane (155). The engagement must be kept a secret in order to safeguard Frank's inheritance, but in doing so he is very purposefully misleading everybody around him. They all take his special attention towards Emma to mean that he is pursuing her romantically (166, 278). Frank was the one who persuaded Jane to keep their engagement secret, even though she had misgivings about this (330). In the end, however, Frank acknowledges that Jane was right all along: "But she was always right. If I had followed her judgement, and subdued my spirits to the level of what she deemed proper, I should have escaped the greatest unhappiness I have ever known" (333).

Frank is portrayed as vain and selfish, and Austen thus implicitly criticises Rousseau's views on upbringing and education, by contrasting Frank's behaviour with the comments made by the reason-oriented Mr Knightley. She leaves it to the reader to make up his/her mind about the consequences of an education in the spirit of Rousseau. When Frank is matched with Jane, at the end of the novel though, he will have a future guide who can correct the faults that he has developed due to his imperfect upbringing.

## **Emma and Isabella**

Just like Frank Churchill, Emma and Isabella have been brought up with the freedom advocated by Rousseau. They have not had sufficient guidance to enable them to make good decisions and interpret the world properly. Mr Woodhouse, being very proud of his daughters, has the parenting strategy of spoiling and overprotecting them. He does not correct or



discipline them, but limits his parenting to encouragement and praise (5-6). This course of action is exactly how Rousseau advised parents to school their children. According to him, the child should be given freedom to be “master of his own will” (120, 161). Miss Taylor, who is supposed to be a stand-in mother, has cultivated more of a friendship than a parent-child relationship with the girls. The two Woodhouse girls have consequently not had the structured education recommended by Locke, but have been allowed to decide for themselves what to learn, how much and when. The reality of Emma’s upbringing has been: “Emma doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor’s judgement, but directed chiefly by her own” (5).

While Jane, who has been raised following Lockian concepts, strives tirelessly to improve her skills and applies herself diligently to her studies, Emma, who has had the freedom idealized by Rousseau, does not follow any particular regimen but jumps from one subject to the next without achieving excellence in any (35). Mr Knightley, as the voice of reason, is quite disappointed in Emma for not taking her studies more seriously and always abandoning a project of learning that required even a little effort: “But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to understanding” (29).

For Emma and Isabella losing their mother has also contributed to the excessive freedom in their upbringing. While mothers were in charge of young children of both sexes, for girls she remained important also later on as a guide and a source of wisdom and instruction (Fletcher 48,128). Emma and Isabella have not had their mother there to teach and to guide them and neither their father nor Miss Taylor has been able to fill this role adequately.

Because Emma is the most intelligent person in the family, she has had nobody who has been able to challenge her mind or who she could look up to as her superior, either in understanding, competence or wit. Emma has therefore developed a high self-esteem and a tendency to consider her judgement unrivalled, leaving her to believe it unnecessary to ask other people for advice: “The real evils indeed of Emma’s situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments” (5).

The only counterbalance to the permissive upbringing with only positive reinforcement that Emma has had has been Mr Knightley: “Mr Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them” (9).

Emma's upbringing drives her to look for companions that will not outshine her. In Emma's view Harriet is the perfect candidate as she is inferior to her socially, as well as when it comes to knowledge and talents. Mr Knightley, however, sees the danger of a friendship between such unequal parties: "I think her the very worst sort of companion that Emma could possibly have. She knows nothing herself, and looks upon Emma as knowing every thing. [...] How can Emma imagine she has any thing to learn herself, while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority?" (30).

Due to her upbringing and education Emma is incapable of foreseeing what consequences her actions will have for herself and those around her. Without understanding the harm that she is inflicting, Emma discourages Harriet from accepting Mr Martin's proposal (41). In her mind she is doing her friend a favour, saving her from becoming a farmer's wife. Mr Knightley, representing the voice of reason, and as such the spokesperson for Locke, scolds Emma for her rash and ill-considered advice (49): "You have been no friend to Harriet Smith, Emma" (49). Emma who is unused to taking advice from other people and then following it, has not even the insight to be sorry for the harm that she has caused (51-53). As always she thinks her own judgement vastly superior to Mr Knightley's.

Interestingly enough Emma has not had the upbringing that Rousseau proposed for a girl. Quite opposite to the ideal freedom of a boy's education, Rousseau recommended that a girl's education should be more controlled and that they should get accustomed to obeying others (Rousseau 369-370). He argued that this was for the future good of the girl, since she would never enjoy the freedom reserved for men, but would always have to yield to a man's judgement and decisions (Rousseau 370). A possible reason for giving Emma a boy's education, might be that she has much more freedom and opportunity to choose than a typical girl during that time (67).

Emma is trapped in her misconceptions and prejudices. Even when Mr Knightley points out to her that Mr Elton seems more interested in her than in Harriet, she refuses to look at Mr Elton in an unbiased way. She simply brushes it aside thinking Mr Knightley wrong (85-87). Even when Mr Elton's behaviour is more consistent with Mr Knightley's theory than her own, she dismisses it as absurd. (96). Throughout the novel, Mr Knightley constantly tries to guide Emma's behaviour by pointing out her mistakes to her. Mr Knightley's reproach of her behaviour makes her question her own actions and makes her want to change. At the end of the book Emma has gained insight and experience thanks to Mr Knightley's interference, and she is capable of recognizing that she has led Harriet astray: "Deceived myself, I did very miserably deceive you—and it will be a painful reflection to me for ever. Do not imagine me

in danger of forgetting it.” (202). If she had only trusted Mr Knightley’s judgement not her own, she could have avoided many mistakes: “I have not forgotten that you once tried to give me caution.—I wish I had attended to it—but—[...] I seem to have been doomed to blindness” (321).

Emma’s education following the principles of Rousseau has left her without the restraints of morals to curb her behaviour. In contrast to Jane with her Lockian education, Emma puts herself and her own comfort first, disregarding how she may hurt other people’s feelings in the process. For example when she injures Miss Bates’ feelings just because she finds her irritating Mr Knightley corrects her. Only after Mr Knightley has drawn attention to her behaviour does Emma understand that she has hurt Miss Bates (284). Because she has had too much freedom and learned too few rules, it is impossible for her to even realize that she has made a mistake until Mr Knightley spells it out for her. Ultimately, however, Emma readily acknowledges that she owes her newfound insight to Mr Knightley’s interfering and correcting her behaviour. In the end Austen chooses to pair Emma with Mr Knightley, a choice which will assure that she will always have his good advice to combat the ill effects of her childhood.

Like Emma, Isabella has had the guidance of a better educated man, in her case in the form of her husband John. It is evident that Isabella depends a great deal on her husband, looking to him for advice and guidance. John uses reason to make his decisions just as Locke recommended. Isabella fills the role that Locke thought a mother should encompass, the caring and nurturing mother. She will do anything for her children, including walking home to get to them if the roads are impassable (98-99). John Knightley’s behaviour acts as a counterbalance to Isabellas’ over-protectiveness and tendency to pamper her children. Locke’s influence is evident in how the children are brought up. They are encouraged to be active, they are corrected when they misbehave and John Knightley has taken over the responsibility for the older boys (64, 235).

## **Conclusion**

As Selwyn writes in *Jane Austen and Children*, Austen was critical of parents who spoil their children or failed to provide them with the necessary education. According to Austen the children themselves were not to blame. The statement goes with what this essay has shown,

namely that the different characters in *Emma* highlight how your upbringing and education can be either an advantage or a disadvantage later in life.

Harriet has not had enough education to prepare her for the reality of life after school. Her background makes her shy away from making decisions and too inclined to trust other people not her own feelings. Jane's Lockian upbringing has left her accomplished with good moral values and the ability to make correct decisions. As a contrast to Jane, Frank has had no proper guidance during his childhood and adolescence. Instead he has been spoilt by his manipulative aunt. The education that Frank has had corresponds with Rousseau's ideas that a child should learn from his own experience and mistakes. As a direct result of his upbringing, Frank is immature and does not understand how to treat other people. Emma and Isabella have also been spoilt and because of their unstructured education, they are incapable of discerning right from wrong, understanding the consequences of their own actions and interpreting the world correctly. At the same time they do not realize when they need advice and when they get it they tend to disregard it.

Whereas Harriet who has had an incomplete education as well as Frank, Isabella and Emma who have enjoyed the free upbringing recommended by Rousseau are ironically portrayed, Jane who is educated according to Locke's model, is presented as a kind of ideal. In order to balance the flaws that the characters have due to their deficient upbringings and educations, at the end of the novel they are paired with partners who have more complete educations. Harriet will have Mr Martin to rely on, Frank will benefit from Jane's superior judgement, Isabella has her husband to depend on and Emma will enjoy the guidance of Mr Knightley.

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