



LUND UNIVERSITY
Humanities and Theology

What Every Man Delights In?

How three major female characters of Jane Austen's *Emma*
adhere to an early 19th-century female ideal

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ENGX54
Degree essay in English Literature
Autumn semester 2015
Centre for Languages and Literature
Lund University
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Abstract

Jane Austen's novel *Emma* (1815) is set in the quiet English countryside and focuses on the young woman Emma Woodhouse, the daughter of an elderly country gentleman. For 200 years this book has been widely read, and its protagonist has evoked strong feelings. Most readers either love, or hate her, but she is rarely met with indifference. Next to Emma there are two other young women in the novel: Jane Fairfax and Harriet Smith. In this essay these three female characters are examined, and compared to the female ideal promoted by the moralists James Fordyce, John Gregory, and to some extent Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Though all of the three young women in many ways adhere perfectly to the Regency-ideal, not one of them can be considered to perfectly represent it. On the contrary, they all behave in ways which are contrary to the conduct promoted by Rousseau, Fordyce and Gregory. What is more, a connection can be found between the characteristics which follow the ideal, and the conduct that opposes it. The novel highlights the contradictoriness of many aspects of the ideal female.

Keywords: Emma, Jane Austen, Fordyce, Gregory, Rousseau, 18th-century conduct-manuals, Regency ideal, Ideal woman, Feminism, Feminist

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Historical Background	3
Jane Fairfax	8
Harriet Smith	16
Emma Woodhouse	24
Conclusion	33
Works Cited	35

Introduction

“such a girl as Harriet is exactly what every man delights in – what at once bewitches his senses and satisfies his judgement” (42)

This is Emma’s answer when Mr Knightley criticises the character of her friend Harriet Smith, in the first part of Jane Austen’s novel *Emma*. But would Harriet have been considered “what every man delights in” when the book was published in 1815? Would Harriet, Emma or indeed the very accomplished Jane Fairfax have been considered the ideal of femininity? In the 18th century, England saw an increase in the number of guide books on the subjects of etiquette and manners, directed at young women (Quinlan 139). The increase in this kind of literature most likely originated from a general increase in the discussion of women’s right to education and their place in society during the second half of the century. Just as Maurice Quinlan writes, the increase of books on the subject of etiquette was most likely a natural reaction to the increasing market for this type of literature during the late 18th and early 19th century (139).

It was during this tumultuous time, as a result of industrialization gaining momentum, that the middle-class grew into a force to be reckoned with in the English political landscape. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall write that the new middle-class of prosperous merchants, manufacturers, and professionals of this period wished to set themselves apart from the aristocracy, which most of them were very critical of. The middle-class strove to achieve this by converting “their increasing economic weight into a moral and cultural authority” (30). This conversion was central in the attempt to overthrow the aristocratic supremacy. Men and women of the new middle-class tended to occupy separate spheres to a greater degree in comparison to the men and women of the aristocracy. Middle-class men were out in society earning money, while the women were home alone, excluded from paid employment. This incited a “heavily gendered view of the world [to be] utilized to soften, if not disavow, the disruption of a growing class system” (30). Male identity became more and more connected to the concept of occupation and useful employment, and increasingly dependent upon the contrast of women and femininity as something passive and ornamental, restricted to the family and home (30).

It was in the milieu of upper- and middle-class families, that the books on female conduct and etiquette became increasingly popular. By the early 19th century these

books could be found in most moderately wealthy homes. Two of the most popular and largely circulated were: James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), and John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) (Kramnick 37). Fordyce's sermons are even mentioned in Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, conceived 1796 and published 1813 (276). Both Fordyce and Gregory were most likely influenced by Rousseau, whose notorious book *Émile*, came to have a great influence on the education of children.

Fordyce's Sermons, together with Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, will form the foundation of the 19th-century ideal upon which the analysis of this essay will rely. The reason these works have been chosen is that though they were written in the 18th century, they were both widely read at the time when Austen wrote *Emma*. The fact that the author was familiar enough with Fordyce to mention his sermons in one of her novels makes him even more relevant. Gregory's text is presented as a series of letters written by a father of declining health to his daughters, who lost their mother when they were in their infancy (Gregory preface). As *Emma*, the daughter of a man of declining health, was an infant when she lost her mother, an interesting connection can be seen to *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*. In addition, Rousseau's views on women's education will be used to some extent, the reason for this being that *Émile* was widely read and fairly influential at the end of the 18th century (Jimack xxiv-xxv).

Just as there are a number of different ideals coexisting in society today, there were naturally a number of influential ideals in 18-19th-century England. In this essay, "the Regency ideal" refers to the ideal promoted by Fordyce, Gregory, and Rousseau. This was an ideal conceived by men, but aimed at women. The different aspects of the ideal will be dealt with in detail in the background section. However, generally speaking, this ideal promoted very traditional gender roles. Women are encouraged to be beautiful, graceful, meek, quiet, accomplished, and devoted to their parents and husbands (Rousseau 322; Gregory 12, 33; Fordyce 102-103) The ideal woman as presented by the three moralists fits well into the context of the late 18th-century middle-classes, where woman's primary function was to be a contrast to the active, vigorous man.

This essay will study the three leading ladies of Austen's fourth novel, and examine how they relate to, and to what degree they can be said to live up to or deviate from the Regency ideal. Austen has been described as a proto-feminist writer, and most of her books have been claimed to advocate women's rights in some way (Morrison 337; Kirkham xi). Based on this knowledge, and a close reading of the book, it is possible to argue that

Emma is a critique of the moralists' female ideal. In the novel, Austen presents caricatures of the model woman in order to expose the essentially unobtainable nature of the ideal.

The following chapter will supply a brief background, presenting the ideal woman as represented by Rousseau, Fordyce, and Gregory. There will also be a short background to the idea of Austen as a proto-feminist, and feminism in general at the turn of the 19th century. After this follows the main body of the essay, which is divided into three sections. Each section presents a character and examines how she fits the ideal, and on what points she deviates from it. To some extent there will also be a reflection on each character in relation to earlier critics and feminist writings.

Historical Background

Many of the 19th-century conceptions of how to raise sons and daughters, were based on the views on education which had transpired during the Enlightenment. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Émile* which, though it was widely criticized when it was first published in 1762, became exceedingly popular. *Émile* is a work of five books, about a hundred pages each, and out of these books four are dedicated to the boy Émile, while only the last one considers the education of the girl Sophie. This is a sign of the times as the education of males was valued infinitely higher than that of females. Considering the structure of society at the time, this is hardly surprising. Women were not considered fit to work, and their rights to own property was limited. Rules of entailment¹ favored men, and women were thus largely dependent on their male relatives or guardians (Davidoff & Hall 210, 276, 315).

Perusing Rousseau's views on women, and what women should be like, it becomes obvious that his views were very similar to those of the moralists who were to publish later in the century. Rousseau claims that women are, and indeed should be, weak, passive and modest. He states that their duty is to please men, and that "[their] strength is in [their] charms" (322). Gregory and Fordyce both present similar ideas of what the innate character of women is like. Women are presented as naturally soft and emotional (Gregory 12), prone to vanity, and very impressionable (Gregory 14-16). As if this was not enough, Rousseau stated that a woman's honor depends just as much, if not more, on people's views of her than on her actual character. He states that "no woman who permits herself to be considered vile is really virtuous" (392). This is a view which to some extent permeated into both Fordyce's and Gregory's writings (Fordyce 8-9, 22-23, 53; Gregory 40-41, 67-68).

¹ Law regulating the inheritance of estates (for example preventing them from being passed down to anyone but a male heir).

Despite the prevailing view that women are in most points weaker than men, all three authors agree that men really are dependent on women (Rousseau 1993 387). Thus a great responsibility is placed on women – that of being the caretaker of man and home. To fill this role properly, a number of skills and characteristics are necessary. Women are advised to perfect these skills, and improve their characteristics by following the advice presented in the books.

All three writers, but especially Fordyce, criticize public places in general concluding that these are “[a]ll ... romance and distraction, the extravagance of vanity, and the rage of conquest” (Fordyce 14). The main argument is that all this distracts young women from their duties i.e. what is domestic and useful. Fordyce only allows for women spending time in public places as a necessary evil, since they need to be presented to suitors (45-46). When it comes to flirtation and coquetry, there is a clear division between Rousseau and the two others. Fordyce and Gregory view every form of flirtation from a woman as highly improper and immoral (Gregory 48; Fordyce 44, 50). Rousseau on the other hand, states that “coquetry, kept within bounds, becomes modest and true” (348). However, exactly what these bounds are is unclear, something that makes Rousseau’s acceptance of coquetry opaque. The three men are also in some disagreement on the subject of how active a part women should take in conversation in general. Rousseau writes that men should not trust the words of women as they are naturally prone to flattery and deceit (393-394). And he advises women not to speak ill of those who are absent, especially not of other women (Rousseau 1993 432). Gregory is of the view that young women can take a sufficient part in conversation without uttering a word, if they just modify their countenance in a suitable manner (33). He believes that this may indeed be a very natural thing, as women’s innate modesty predisposes them “to be rather silent in company” (33). How women should behave when they do speak is somewhat difficult to make out. They should have an “easy dignity” about them, but it must not be too easy or open (34). To this, Fordyce adds that young women are, and should be particularly fond of light and joyful conversation. However, they must never be too vivacious, as this could seriously impair their self-command and render them prone to folly (87-88). He discourages any close intercourse between young unmarried women of the same age. Instead, young women should endeavor to spend as much time as possible with their elders, from whose company he claims that they will profit immensely (83, 88-90).

As to the proper education of girls and young women, Rousseau sets the tone by proclaiming that if mothers bring up and educate their daughters however they themselves see fit, it will most likely turn out badly for the children as well as themselves (Rousseau 1993

391). He concludes that it is not men's fault that they are attracted to and dazzled by pretty looks and manners. And if girls are educated like boys they will lose their power over men, and then "men will be the masters indeed" (Rousseau 1993 391). Still, Rousseau argues that women should have some education. But the sole purpose of this education should be to make them more agreeable helpmates to their husbands, and more adequate mothers to their children (Rousseau 1993 392). The other two writers have a somewhat wider view on the education of young women, though ultimately it boils down to more or less the same thing: It is desirable that women acquire some breadth of accomplishments, and broaden their minds to some extent. However it is very unattractive for a young woman to either be or appear to be learned, and first and foremost she should focus on what makes her agreeable to men, and what renders her a more appropriate wife and mother (Fordyce 102-103; Gregory 36-37). These views were later echoed, to varying degree, by the great many female writers who published book on manners and etiquette in the early 19th-century (Quinlan 143).

Religion is one of the few points where Gregory and Fordyce differ considerably from Rousseau. This is not very surprising, as Rousseau was above all a philosopher, while Fordyce was a clergyman and Gregory a physician. The two later argue that piety is admirable, and indeed necessary, in a young woman's disposition. Rousseau on the other hand, believes that girls who are brought up to always pray and be solemn will invariably try to make up for the worldly pleasures they have missed once they are married (Rousseau 1993 403). It seems as though Rousseau failed to gain the public opinion with these views. According to Gregory as well as Fordyce, young women will do well to devote a large portion of their time to religious worship (Gregory 12-13, 17-18; Fordyce vol. II 28). On the subject of religious education, both Fordyce and Gregory mention, or allude to, novels as books which could severely damage a young woman's mind (Fordyce 14, 82; Gregory 15-16).

Regarding women's appearance, Rousseau stresses that girls and women should dress in a simple style, allowing their natural beauty to speak for itself (Rousseau 1993 402). Fordyce follows him closely, stating that: "I would exhort and even enjoin Christian women, always to dress with decency and moderation; never to go beyond their circumstances, nor aspire above their station" and that they should "[n]ot ... value themselves on their dress, or despise others more meanly habited" (3). These views were reflected again and again, by the many Evangelical educators who wrote at the turn of the century (Quinlan 144).

To conclude, in Rousseau's own words "[w]hat is most wanted in a woman is gentleness" (Rousseau 333). Besides gentleness, the most important characteristics of the young model woman was that she be docile, cheerful, and fond of things such as music and

dancing (Rousseau 1993 403). Among all vices and bad habits, Rousseau seems to consider bitterness as one of the worst, while wit is considered to be the most disgusting by Fordyce as well as Gregory (Rousseau 333; Fordyce 95-99; Gregory 35).

The 19th-century family was generally a reflection of society, being decidedly patriarchal. This dominance of men was manifested both through naming practices, and rules of inheritance (Davidoff and Hall 31). Women's roles were those of daughter and mother, belonging first to their fathers, and then to their husbands. Women were seen as valuable and important to the family, and procuring a good marriage for a daughter could be just as important as succeeding in a favorable business transaction. But women generally had very little power over their own lives and, as is made clear by the section above, they were generally seen as essentially different from men (Davidoff and Hall 31-32).

Though early 19th-century England was thoroughly saturated in these ideas, there were still those who opposed many of the views on women presented above. Among the people who voiced their objections, Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the most notable, and early, promoting women's rights already in the late 18th-century. Wollstonecraft has been called "the first major feminist" (Kramnick 7), and though feminist was not a word used in the 17- or 1800's it is a fitting word to describe her major work *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Apart from her writings, Wollstonecraft is a prime example of a strong, proto-feminist role model.

When her family broke apart, Mary Wollstonecraft financially supported her father as well as her younger brother, working her way through a great many different professions, as a lady's companion, a teacher, a governess, a journalist and writer. The fact that she was a financially independent woman is something which set her apart from the vast majority of women in the 18th and 19th-century. Only a very small portion of middle-class women ever took up paid employment. And though almost all women of the working-class had to work at some point in their lives, only a fraction of them ever made enough money to support themselves, let alone anyone else (Rose 76). Something of a connection can be found between Wollstonecraft and Austen in this instance. Though Austen was never able to make enough money to live independently by her pen, she too was part of the tiny minority of unmarried middle-class women who pursued a professional career (Poovey 209).

Vindication of the Rights of Women (hereafter referred to as *Vindication*) starts out forcefully, with the claim that men, generally speaking, employ the reason they have been given merely to justify prejudices (Wollstonecraft 92). Looking at the views and opinions expressed by the men above, her assumption does not appear wholly unjust. Wollstonecraft

expresses some strong criticism aimed directly at Rousseau and Gregory, as well as other male moralists (Wollstonecraft 93-98, 100, 103, 113). She completely resents Rousseau's idea of 'returning to nature', stating that what mankind needs is to move forward towards a more perfect civilization, not to retreat into barbarism (94-96). When it comes to the men's views on women, Wollstonecraft meets and overrules their arguments on several points. She pointedly remarks that women are expected to be virtuous, but that they "are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue" (100). On the argument that "women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace" (100) she forcefully retorts that such proclamations can only be made with the intent of depriving women of their souls, and insinuate that they are designed for "docile blind obedience" (100). Indeed, a fair share of what Wollstonecraft writes in *Vindication* is still seen in the 21st-century debate on gender. Among other things, she makes an analogy between man's suppression of woman and the upper-classes' suppression of the working-classes (141). She makes allowance for the view that women may be naturally weaker than men, but she also opens up for the idea that women might indeed only be "degraded by a concurrence of circumstances" (141).

Though Wollstonecraft had to endure a fair share of censure and criticism due to her writings, they still reached quite a wide audience. However, for quite some time, the life of the author was considered so scandalous that women in general might avoid all association with the *Vindication* as well as its author (Miriam Kramnick, introduction to Wollstonecraft 17-18, 63). Even the few women who did write on the subject of women's rights during the subsequent years took pains not to be associated with Wollstonecraft (Miriam Kramnick, introduction to Wollstonecraft 64). With this in mind it becomes very hard to tell whether or not Jane Austen ever read any part of *Vindication*. However, a possible link can be found between Austen and Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft is said to have been acquainted with the father of one of Austen's father's resident pupils (Berglund 82). Whether or not this is true, it is most probable that Austen had at least heard of the *Vindication* as well as of its author.

Austen has been portrayed in vastly different ways through the years. Readers and critics have seen her as everything from a conscious feminist to a propagandist for the upper classes, and a right down "nasty old maid" (Johnson xiii-xiv). As Mary Poovey writes in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1985), it is important to remember that Austen's conditions were very different from those of other female writers such as Wollstonecraft or Mary Shelley (172). While the two latter spent most part of their writing careers abroad, able to view and criticize English propriety from afar, Jane Austen spent her entire life in the

English countryside, in a society saturated with middle-class values and ideas of propriety (Poovey 172). As with all deceased authors, it is hard, if not impossible to know exactly what Austen was like and what her eventual motives might have been when writing her novels. However, her sister Cassandra left some of Austen's letters to posterity, and these combined with her novels do point to a degree of social and political understanding (Poovey 209).

This essay will be based on the presumption that Austen had some critical opinions upon the works of Fordyce and his ilk. Furthermore, she might even have had some notions of the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, and possibly even some other proto-feminist writers. A great number of 19th-century critics praised Austen for not criticizing women's place in society, claiming that she even promoted the present order. In later years however, numerous scholars have argued (rather convincingly) that Austen was critical of women's situation, and that she used irony and humor to criticize the society she lived in (Johnson xv-xvi, xxiii).

Jane Fairfax

At first glance, Jane Fairfax would seem to fit perfectly into the role of the ideal Regency woman. Jane is young, beautiful, graceful, and thoroughly accomplished (108-110, 134). When it comes to looks and appearance, she is described as: "remarkably elegant" (110), of a pretty height, and having a "particularly graceful" (110) figure. Emma comments on Jane's beautiful face, dark eyelashes and eyebrows, deep grey eyes, and clear and delicate complexion (110). Jane's complexion is rather debated in the book. She is said to be rather sickly, and has very pale, porcelain skin. Emma finds Jane's complexion becoming, however, further on in the book Frank Churchill describes Jane's skin as "almost always [giving] the appearance of ill health" (110, 132). Though Emma strongly advocates and defends Jane's pale complexion, it is debatable whether or not it would have been considered proper by the moralists. According to the ideal promoted by Fordyce and Gregory, young women should be careful of their health and take regular exercise (Fordyce 33-34; Gregory 56-58). Health should be reflected in the young woman's looks through "luster of ... eyes and ... freshness of ... form" (Fordyce 33) as well as "a bloom to [her] complexion" (Gregory 57). Thus, with all her grace and beauty, Jane Fairfax would most likely have been considered too delicate and sickly in her physical appearance.

In their sections on looks and style, both Fordyce and Gregory focus largely on women's general style of dress and toilette, rather than physical beauty. Though it is in no

way the main focus of Gregory's text, he does emphasize every woman's responsibility to look her best at all times (64). Not very much is said of Jane Fairfax's manner of dress and hairstyle. She is generally described as graceful, elegant, and good looking, and this could be interpreted as describing both her physique and manner of dress (110,146). Only once is Jane's style critiqued. This happens at the Cole's dinner, when Frank Churchill remarks that she has "done her hair in so odd a way" (148). However, this is probably not because Jane does wear her hair in an unusual style, but purely a way of distracting Emma from his staring at Jane. As Jane is described as elegant, it is likely that her style is more or less impeccable, and that it would fall within the bounds of propriety promoted by the moralists (Fordyce 25-30; Gregory 64). Furthermore, Miss Fairfax's attitude towards her own appearance is close to the attitude promoted by the moralists. Jane always appears very modest (111, 147, 159, 162), and she does not talk of her own looks or invite flattery. These are qualities which rank rather highly with Fordyce as well as Gregory (Fordyce 25, 43; Gregory 31-33).

When it comes to accomplishments and manners, we learn that Jane is thoroughly accomplished, "much beloved" (70, 108), humble and keen on being agreeable to her elders and betters (159, 201-202). It is even suggested that the reason Emma dislikes Jane is Jane's superior accomplishments (58). This is especially apparent when the two are invited to play the piano at the Cole's dinner party (151-155). All of these things speak in favor of Jane being the very embodiment of the ideal young woman (Fordyce 88, 90; Gregory 21, 23, 31-32). Jane gives the impression of taking great care to keep to decorum and not speak out of turn (161, 201). Unlike Emma, we never hear Jane gossip, and even when she is most horribly beset by Mrs. Elton it is clear that Jane is doing her utmost to appear grateful, show respect and be polite (200-203). In relation to *Fordyce's Sermons*, Jane's conduct in these instances is as impeccable as her dress and her piano playing (83). On the subject of conversation, it is somewhat difficult to make out if Jane could be considered a prime example. There are relatively few conversations with Jane in the book. But when she is present, Miss Fairfax gives a rather careful, quiet, and reserved impression (111, 133, 135, 193, 311). Gregory and Fordyce are in agreement that the ideal young woman should bring light, happiness, and comfort to every conversation (Gregory 37-38; Fordyce 92-93). However they also believe that reserve can be a virtue, and that women can "take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable" (Gregory 33, 41-42, 45-46). This should mean that, Jane's polite and well bred manners, and her modest silence in company would be considered in line with the ideal. However, the lack of ease and accessibility in her disposition which Mr. Knightley points out, as well as her at times melancholy temper, makes Jane appear somewhat less ideal (193).

It is impossible to overlook the fact that Jane's situation is highly unfavorable. She is decidedly worse off than Emma, and it might even be argued that she is in a more awkward social position than Harriet (108-109). There are a number of complications to be found in Jane's situation. She has been brought up to be even more accomplished than her future work as governess would require her to be (108). On top of this, Jane has been raised more or less as a daughter by Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, and this must have made her used to a standard of living she is bound to lose forever unless she marries (109). What is more, though she has been away for two years when the book starts, Jane has otherwise visited Highbury regularly, and seems to be spending the greater part of her visits at home with her aunt and grandmother. This could be seen as something highly positive, even recommendable, by the moralists, as they claim that staying at home is highly advisable for young women. According to them, conversing with your elders is an excellent pastime; Fordyce even claims that

“[t]he conversation of people older than yourselves [...] will produce more recollection: and be assured, my sisters, those are the truest pleasures which are tasted by a mind composed and serious [...] the experience and maturity of more years will enlarge your understandings, at the same time that they will repress your vanity and presumptions” (89-90)

There is however a problem, this opinion is built on the preconception that the elders are of a superior judgment (Fordyce 88-90). In the case of Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax it becomes very clear, on several occasions, that Miss Bates suffers from a considerable lack of judgment (157-158, 160, 232). To begin with there is the glaring problem of her love of gossip. There is also the issue of her talking even when she has nothing to say. And finally, she seems to have a tendency to speak of things which should not be spoken of (105, 158, 164). These characteristics are all to some degree deprecated by the moralists (Gregory 41-43, 55; Fordyce 46, 59-60; Rousseau 339).

All in all, Jane does seem to keep rather poor company when she visits Highbury. Her closest acquaintances throughout the novel seem to be the Campbells, the Bateses, Mrs. Elton, and Frank Churchill. Out of these, the Campbells look to be the most agreeable from the point of view of the moralist. However, as (except for a short description) the Campbells are not present in the book, it is hard to derive much more from that relation than that the family has a high opinion of Miss Fairfax, and that those feelings are returned. When it comes to the Bateses, Mrs. Bates does not present any obvious unfavorable traits, and she is old enough to have some excuse for any queer manners (Fordyce 90). Miss Bates however is not quite old enough to have the excuse of age for her follies. No doubt, Fordyce, would worry about her influence on Jane (Fordyce 82, 86-87). Gregory would most likely

find Jane's attachment to her aunt admirable. But it is unlikely that he would consider Miss Bates an ideal companion (Gregory 73-75). When it comes to Mrs. Elton, she seems to aspire to be the very opposite of the ideal. She married her husband after only a very short acquaintance, forming the attachment during a visit to Bath (114, 120-121). This is a site where neither Fordyce nor Gregory would deem it suitable to form a romantic attachment (Fordyce 45-46; Gregory 123). On top of this, Mrs. Elton dresses vulgarly, brags continually, is constantly fishing for compliments, pries, gossips, and speaks out of turn (181, 182, 185, 203). Jane's secret engagement to Frank Churchill would of course be considered improper in itself. But even disregarding the nature of their acquaintance, he would be considered an unsuitable companion. Looking at how Frank is presented in the novel, Fordyce as well as Gregory would name him an untrustworthy and profane person, quite unsuitable for the company of Miss Fairfax (267-268; Gregory 40, 94-98; Fordyce 51). In short, not one of these people can be considered a fit companion for the ideal Regency woman.

Perusing Jane's character in general through the filter of the ideal, she appears to have two major character-flaws. Firstly, just as both Emma and Mr. Knightley point out, Jane is too reserved. According to Rousseau as well as Fordyce, young women should be fairly open, and of a pleasant and happy countenance (Rousseau 333, 337; Fordyce 85, 87, 89). Being a bit reserved would not in itself be considered unbecoming, and Jane's tendency to blush is just what it should be (234; Gregory 31-33). But still, Miss Fairfax is much too reserved in company to be considered truly amiable (111; Gregory 33-35). There is of course her unfortunate situation with Frank Churchill to take into consideration (266, 282). In Jane's conversation with Emma, after the engagement is made known, it is strongly implied that Jane would have been much less reserved and more agreeable had she not been so constantly afraid (311). This might appear to be a redeeming factor. But even disregarding the impropriety of Jane's secret, the moralists would most likely not consider it a valid excuse. Gregory encourages every woman to "bear your sorrows in silence, unknown and unpitied. You must often put on a face of serenity and cheerfulness, when your [heart is] torn with anguish, or sinking with despair" (13).

Jane's second major flaw can be considered as rather graver. Though it is not spelled out the same way as her reserve, it is still possible to discern a feeling of bitterness in Jane Fairfax. This is most noticeable in her conversation on the subject of taking service as a governess (201-202). Jane's resentment at going into service might be very much understood by a contemporary reader, as well as by the 19th century female reader. However, it would not have been agreeable to any of the three moralists. Rousseau considered bitterness in women

unhealthy and harmful (333). And Gregory as well as Fordyce writes very much in the Lutheran tradition of being happy with your lot in life, and doing the best with what has been given you. Though most middle-class women would have regarded going into servitude as degrading, Jane's obvious resentment would not have been seen as an admirable trait (201-203) (Wollstonecraft introduction by Miriam Kramnick 34, Gregory 13-14). Had she been an ideal woman, Jane should have "put on a face of serenity and cheerfulness" (13). She ought to have sought and found solace in religion, and put her heart into her duties to the family and church (13-18, 23-24).

Jane has one more characteristic which places her out of range of the ideal. The ideal young woman should be completely ignorant of all things immoral (Gregory 67-68, 94). Had Jane been perfectly innocent in this way, she would not have stormed off, nor looked hurt at Emma's and Frank's hints about Mr. Dixon (161, 234). The ideal woman would never have assumed her friends to imply her having an improper relation with a married man. Even if she for some reason would have understood, she should either have pretended not to understand, or she should have been so worried about her reputation that she would have done anything to redeem herself (Fordyce 22-23, 50; Gregory 67-68). A woman's reputation was regarded as extremely valuable as well as extremely frail. Indeed, according to Rousseau, the mere implication of a woman being anything but spotless might be ruinous, whether the accusations be true or not (325). The moralists also seem to be in agreement that any scandalous rumors which might emerge were the woman's own responsibility (Rousseau 324-325; Fordyce 5, 23; Gregory 112-113).

On the subject of Jane's reputation, there is of course the overshadowing dilemma of her relationship with Frank Churchill. On this subject there are indeed several things which would be held against Jane. To start with, she has entered an engagement on her own accord, without consulting or even informing any of her elders and guardians (266-270). This would have been seen as highly reproachable (Heather 79-80). By entering into this engagement, she has taken a risk which might have damaged her reputation beyond repair, had it not lead to marriage. There is of course also the aspect that Jane and Frank met in a public place, and that they got engaged after a fairly short acquaintance (251, 295). Weymouth would be considered a "watering place", a fashionable resort, much like Bath. In this way, Jane's and Frank's engagement is reminiscent of the Eltons'. These are things which would be thought to speak very much against the union (Gregory 87-88, 123, 136; Fordyce 8, 14, 48, 54). Mr. Knightley says that Frank Churchill "ought not to have formed the engagement" (300), and Fordyce and Gregory would seem likely to have agreed with him.

What is more, the moralists might have added that Miss Fairfax ought not to have accepted the proposal. Indeed, if she was to live up to the ideal she most certainly could not (Gregory 35, 42, 49). According to Gregory it is the power and duty of the woman to break off an improper flirtation. A woman ought to be able to dispel any charm she has put on a man, and “reduce the angel to a very ordinary girl” (47-48). To this, one might add Rousseau’s views that marriage must be entered with caution, and that the pair should be matched to suit each other in every way (Rousseau 1993 441-443).

Both Fordyce and Gregory speak very strongly against men who make advances to young women in public places, and who do not behave according to certain rules. Gregory claims that “no man, but a brute or a fool, will insult a woman with conversation which he sees gives her pain” (40), and Fordyce puts forward this question to men in general: “Can ye [...] do any thing [sic] to strip them [women] of their native robe of virtue? Curst be the impious hand that would dare to violate the unblemished form of Chastity! Thou wretch! Thou ruffian” (51). This stripping of the robe of virtue could simply be interpreted as making physical advances to a girl, thus robbing her of her virgin purity. However, considering Gregory’s as well as Fordyce’s wider definitions of female virtue, a man might be said to strip a woman of virtue without even touching her (Fordyce 48; Gregory 40). An example of this kind of injury to a woman’s virtue would be to talk to her of improper feelings, thus sullying the purity of her mind. With this wider definition of chastity, the quote above would be very much applicable to Frank Churchill. He would be thought to be at fault at least twice, as he contributes to endangering the reputations of both Jane and Emma (234, 248-251, 267).

There is one section of *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* which seems particularly applicable to Jane Fairfax. Gregory writes:

The natural vivacity, and perhaps the natural vanity of your sex, is very apt to lead you into a dissipated state of life, that deceives you, under the appearance of innocent pleasure; but which in reality wastes your spirits, impairs your health, weakens all the superior faculties of your minds, and often sullies your reputations (14)

At Weymouth, Jane has fallen in love with Frank Churchill, and most likely accepted his proposal from equal parts of pleasure and the hope of stability (133, 266-268). The secret engagement thus entered into, has resulted in her living a wretched half lie. As Jane puts it herself: “I am fatigued; but it is not the sort of fatigue – quick walking will refresh me. Miss Woodhouse, we all know at times what it is to be wearied in spirits. Mine, I confess, are exhausted.” (244). The secret has surely wasted her spirits and, after Box Hill, Jane becomes physically ill as a result of the deceit and secrecy she is a part of, and now also having all she

hoped for seemingly falling apart whilst being unable to talk to anyone about it to alleviate her heart (254-256). Once the secret is out, Jane readily confesses that she is ashamed of her “very great misconduct” (310). She even condemns the period of the engagement, allowing that she “had always a part to act. It was a life of deceit!” (311). In the novel, everything turns out for the best for Jane. The great obstacle of her union with Frank Churchill, Mrs. Churchill, dies, and Mr. Churchill seems very willing to welcome both Jane and Frank into his home (261, 311). However, as any of the moralists might have pointed out, this turn of events seems to be pure chance. Miss Fairfax has made a gamble with her prospects, and might almost as well have ended up with a spoiled reputation. Had this happened all her prospects could have been crushed, she might even have been considered unfit to work as a governess.

In *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (1983), Margaret Kirkham points out an important implication of Jane Fairfax’s views on the governess trade. From a feminist perspective it is possible to see Jane Fairfax’s disdain of entering service as something more than mere animosity towards her lot in life; Jane’s speech, in which she compares governess agencies with slave traders (Austen 201-202), can be seen as an outspoken feminist statement. What Jane does is to compare the situation of unconnected women with that of slaves. The connection is emphasized by the presence of Mrs. Elton, and the fact that she is the one endeavoring to get Jane to enter service. Mrs. Elton is the daughter of a Bristol merchant, and Bristol was a key city in the English slave trade (Kirkham 132). Jane’s observations on the governess trade can be seen as one of the clearest proto-feminist statements in the book. Austen balances, and makes Jane’s situation more complex, by contrasting her with the character of Emma’s former governess Mrs. Weston. Mrs. Weston seems to be one of the few women in *Emma* who come really close to the ideal promoted by Gregory and Fordyce. She appears to be both modest and virtuous, and must be fairly accomplished to have acquired a position with the Woodhouses. What is more, Mrs. Weston is eager to please, has a happy disposition, and takes care not to speak ill of anybody (9, 128,270). From a feminist perspective, it could however be said that Mrs. Weston has close to no freedom. Had Mr. Weston not proposed to her, she would most likely have had to spend the rest of her life at Hartfield, amusing Emma and caring for the decaying Mr. Woodhouse. A similar future would in all probability have awaited Jane, had she gone into service. She would have had to spend her life in other people’s houses, with impending risk of ending up a poor old maid, just

like her aunt. Though Gregory would argue that Miss Fairfax should put her faith in God, Austen seems to make a rather strong case in Jane's favor in this aspect (Gregory 13-14).²

Claudia L. Johnson takes the argument about entering the governess trade even further in her book *Jane Austen; Women Politics and the Novel* (1988). Johnson points out that though Miss Fairfax calls that the governess trade "the sale – not quite of human flesh – but of human intellect" (202), it might very well end in the transaction of both (Johnson 137). Pointing to the arguments of Mary Ann Radcliffe in *The Female Advocate* (1799), Johnson writes that a woman taking on any kind of profession might very well have been expected to offer up her body to her employer at some point (137). Whether or not Jane Fairfax is aware of this risk is unclear. However, her way of speaking about employment opens up for the interpretation that she is aware of every risk (201-202). The fact that Jane has grown up in places like London and Weymouth could further the argument that she might have more knowledge of the real world than most of the other women in the novel (108-111).

On the subject of the disclosure of the secret engagement, Kirkham points out that Austen has consciously distanced Jane Fairfax from the narration during the revelation of the secret engagement. She argues that Austen has done this to open up for a harsher censure of Frank Churchill, while Jane Fairfax is relieved from the lion's share of the blame (Kirkham 141). The view of Churchill as a scoundrel might be one of the very few points on which a feminist reading would agree with the views of Fordyce and Gregory. However, while the moralists would censure Frank for going behind the backs of his family and risking Jane's reputation, feminists would accuse him of lacking respect as well as regard for his future wife (Kirkham 142).

Jane has been described as "the model female" (Waldron 113) by some scholars. However, considering the writings of Fordyce and Gregory, this view seems questionable. Though Jane could be considered almost perfectly ideal in some aspects, her character as a whole does not live up to the standards of Fordyce's and Gregory's ideal Regency woman. Jane is beautiful and elegant, but she is also sickly and frail. She is quiet and modest, but she

² Just like Jane compares the governess trade with the slave trade, Mary Wollstonecraft compares the educational system advocated by Dr Gregory with a system of slavery. She bases this argument on Gregory's actively withholding reason from the education of women, which Wollstonecraft believes will surely lead to suffering (117). Whether Austen ever read Wollstonecraft or not, Miss Fairfax's comparisons does bring Wollstonecraft's reasoning's in *Vindication* to mind.

is also secretive. She has respect for her elders and betters, but she enters into a secret engagement and refuses to put her faith in God and resign herself to life as a governess.

Harriet Smith

Harriet is the girl whom Emma describes as “what every man delights in” (42) to Mr. Knightley. He does not agree with her at first, but in the end he avows that Miss Smith “has some first-rate qualities” (222). Harriet is a very young and very inexperienced girl, whom Emma seems to select for a companion based on her pretty looks and happy disposition (13). She is described as “short, plump and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness” (13). Just how good-looking Harriet is generally considered by the other characters is somewhat hard to make out. She seem to be considered inferior to both Jane Fairfax and Emma, however, there appears to be a general agreement that she is indeed very pretty (13, 37). Even though she is not as beautiful, elegant, or graceful as Jane, Harriet possesses many of the physical attributes which are valued highest by Fordyce and Gregory (Gregory 57; Fordyce 28, 33). Also, just like Jane, Harriet does not appear to be vain about her looks. In fact, she is described as being entirely free from conceit (15). This would render her rather close to the ideal when it comes to appearances and vanity (Fordyce 89-90; Gregory 14).

As to Harriet’s accomplishments, it is made apparent that she has rather poor taste and no real comprehension in matters of art etc. This is made especially clear in her praise of Emma’s piano playing, and lack of appreciation of Jane’s superior talent (154). It is also alluded to in Emma’s and Harriet’s visit to the store, when Harriet seems to have very little understanding when it comes to muslins and ribbons (157). Neither Fordyce, nor Gregory puts any great emphasis on matters of taste in general. However, Gregory states that women need “good sense and good taste” (60) to run a household, and he and Fordyce both wish women to be agreeable and well dressed (Fordyce 26, 28, 36, 40; Gregory 64-65). Fordyce states that women should acquire “all beautiful and useful accomplishments suited to their rank and condition” (3). Very little is said about Harriet having any real accomplishments. However, Mr. Knightley states that she “is not a sensible girl, nor a girl of any information. She has been taught nothing useful, and is too young and too simple to have acquired any thing [sic] herself” (40). This implies that Harriet has very few accomplishments indeed. As she is not invited to play the piano with Jane and Emma at the Cole’s dinner party, Harriet does not seem to have any considerable musical skills. And as her skill with pencil or

watercolor is never mentioned in connection with Emma's painting, though they are always together, it seems improbable that Harriet has any great skill in that area either. Her lack of accomplishments would render Harriet less agreeable in the eyes of the moralists (Fordyce 3, 102; Gregory 55-56). Fordyce might find her youth and the fact that she has spent her life in a boarding school to be mitigating factors (13), and there is of course also the aspect that Harriet, unlike Jane and Emma, is not a gentleman's daughter. This might make the moralists expect less of her accomplishments, as she would not be expected to marry a man of refined tastes, or ever have to entertain the guests at a grand dinner party. However, a senseless girl without accomplishments could probably never be considered ideal by either of the moralists, regardless of her social station (Fordyce 3, 97, 102-103; Gregory 55-56).

At one point in the novel, Emma actually points out that Harriet is lacking in dignity as well as grace (146). This would indeed be considered a great fault. Fordyce as well as Gregory exhort women to be both dignified and graceful (Fordyce 28; Gregory 49-50). A woman without these qualities would be out of reach of the ideal. However, there is the question whether Emma includes the same qualities in the terms grace and dignity as Fordyce and Gregory do. Fordyce enumerates a number of "graces of the mind" which he finds more important than physical beauty. These are: modesty, meekness, prudence, piety, and "all beautiful and useful accomplishments" (3). Though Harriet could very well be said to be modest, meek and fairly prudent, we do not know much about her piety, and as mentioned she does not seem to be accomplished. Somewhat surprisingly however, Harriet's lack of accomplishments and grace might be slightly offset by her equal lack of intellect. Harriet's simplemindedness is perhaps most clearly manifested when she tries and fails to solve Mr. Elton's charade (48). She appears rather silly, but this complete incompetence in solving charades and riddles could be attributed to her completely lacking any understanding of wit, which would in itself be seen as a sign of virtue and un-spoilt pureness (Fordyce 95-97). Though Mr. Knightley states that "[m]en of sense [...] do not want silly wives" (42), and Gregory states that women need "good sense" (60), Gregory simultaneously wishes all women to possess "the most perfect simplicity of heart and manners" (50), and he actually warns them of appearing too intelligent (36). Harriet's lack of dignity might thus place her far from the ideal. But her lack of wit and her simplicity could put her in a somewhat more favorable position.

On the subject of conversation, Fordyce wishes women, especially young women, to be able to lighten and enliven conversations (92, 99). From the comments on Harriet made by Emma as well as Mr. Knightley, she appears to be quite the ideal young

woman in this aspect (13, 15, 222). Furthermore, neither Fordyce nor Gregory believes that women should speak too much in company. They consider it more important that women make “the company pleased with themselves” (Gregory 38) and to accomplish this women are not really required to voice any opinions of their own (Fordyce 100; Gregory 33-38). As Harriet gives a rather quiet, unpretending impression, she does seem to be quite the ideal woman when it comes to conversation. Furthermore, Fordyce advises women never to appear confident or to try to invite admiration, at the same time as he instructs them to be of “a temper open to friendship, as well as to Love” (28, 85). With her artless manner and cheerful disposition, Harriet appears to fulfill both these criterion (149).

When it comes to Harriet’s disposition, Emma reflects that there is nothing “remarkably clever in Miss Smith’s conversation, but she [is] altogether very engaging – not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk – and yet so far from pushing, shewing [sic] so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful” (13). Further on it is stated that “Harriet certainly was not clever, but she had a sweet, docile, grateful disposition; was totally free from conceit; and only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to” (15). These comments adhere nicely to Rousseau’s views that women are, and should be, docile (331). Emma also comments on Harriet’s artless manners and “light, cheerful, unsentimental disposition” (146) Mr. Knightley states that he thinks Harriet is “a pretty little creature” and that he is “inclined to think very well of her disposition” (37). He also reflects that “her character depends on those she is with; but in good hands she will turn out a valuable woman” (37). After he has come to know her better, he acknowledges that she is “unpretending, single-minded [and] artless” (222). He also recognizes that Harriet is a much better sort of woman than Mrs. Elton (222). On this last point Fordyce as well as Gregory would surely agree, as Harriet appears to lack all traces of the pride, vanity and vulgarity which would make Augusta Elton so deficient in the eyes of the moralists. In many ways indeed Harriet’s disposition would appear to be quite ideal. She clearly seems to have the “simplicity of heart and manners” which Gregory cherishes (Gregory 50). However, Gregory wants women “to possess that acute discernment which may secure you against being deceived” (112-113), and these views shine through in the tone of Rousseau’s and Fordyce’s texts as well. On this last point Harriet is again far from the ideal, as she gives a very trusting, even gullible impression, especially in her relation to Emma.

Harriet’s wish to be guided seems to be one of her great attractions to Emma (13-15). Emma appears to take advantage of this, and Harriet soon starts to depend on the advice of her older friend. This is something that becomes exceedingly clear when Harriet

receives Robert Martin's proposal (33-34). Harriet's dependence on the judgment of others is also made painfully clear when she can not even order ribbon in a store without relying on Emma to tell her what to do (157). Gregory states that "in matters of taste, that depend on your own feelings, consult no one friend [...] consult your own hearts" (130). He continues to say that if a gentleman makes advances to a lady, she might ask those who know him well about such things as his sense, morals, fortune etc. But she should not ask for any further advice (131). It becomes clear that though Emma might be criticized for willfully misleading her young friend, Harriet's way of depending on Emma would render Harriet herself liable to a fair amount of criticism from the moralists. Fordyce warns against what might happen to young women who are exposed to bad influence at public places, and discourages women of relying on questionable acquaintances. He warns that if "they are indulged once, a second time, a third time [...] By little and little their natural fearfulness begins to abate" (47). Gregory claims that "A happy choice [sic] of friends [is] of the utmost consequence to [young women]" (73). Fordyce is in agreement with him, stating that women should choose companions who will not corrupt their good manners, but influence them in a positive way (87). Fordyce is overall very hesitant about the propriety of young, unmarried women spending much time together, but believes that they had better spend time with their elders (89-90). Here Harriet would seem to be at fault. Instead of spending her days in the society of the mature Mrs. Goddard, Harriet chooses to spend most of her time under the influence of Miss Woodhouse. Fordyce would most likely put even more blame on the young Harriet, making any bad influence from Emma Harriet's own responsibility (87).

Though Harriet is described as "totally free from conceit" (15), she soon starts to act in a way that must be considered as rather conceited. Under Emma's influence, Harriet becomes convinced first that Mr. Elton is planning to propose to her, and later that Mr. Knightley might (50, 273). Fordyce preaches that few things are so damaging to a young woman as flattery (4). He believes it is important for women to have "a just esteem of" (5) themselves, but nothing more. It is made clear in the novel that Miss Smith never would have raised her sights to Mr. Elton, had she not been encouraged by Emma. With these things in mind, it seems safe to assume that the moralists would have considered Harriet better off before she became acquainted with Emma. Fordyce states that he finds it truly mortifying "to hear a girl seriously boast of her imaginary conquest [it is] weak in her; to fancy that every man who flatters her [...] is a lover" (58). In Harriet's defense, it has to be said that she never boasts of any conquests. She seems to confide only in Emma, and she appears rather careful even when speaking to her friend. Above all, neither when she believes that Mr. Elton will

propose, nor when she suspects Mr. Knightley of being in love with her does Harriet ever act presumptuously in the gentlemen's presence. This could be seen as some redemption for her corruptibility. Her reactions and anxiety on realizing that the gentlemen are not courting her seem to be quite what Fordyce predicts. The moralist states that "[a]ll essential transgression of order, [...] shall certainly be punished by inward disquietude" (52). And Harriet does suffer from inward disquietude both after the situation with Mr. Elton, and after her misunderstanding of Mr. Knightley (226-227, 304-305).

As mentioned earlier, Emma claims that Harriet is the kind of girl any man would wish to marry (42). At the end of the book even Knightley almost seems to agree with her, stating that he is convinced of Harriet "being an artless, amiable girl, with very good notions, very seriously good principles ... placing her happiness in the affections and utility of domestic life" (321). Knightley's description of Miss Smith correlates nicely with Fordyce's description of the ideal wife. Fordyce claims that most men will "try if they can find women well-bred and soberminded [sic ...] of a cheerful temper with sedate manners; women, of whom they may hope that they will love home, be attached to their husbands, attentive to their families, reasonable in their wishes [and] moderate in their expenses" (56). Further on Fordyce quotes St. Paul, advising women to become "discreet, chaste, keepers at home" (60). Here, Harriet seems to be very close to the ideal. She does seem to possess most of the qualities which Fordyce and Gregory claim that men look for in a wife (Fordyce 56, 98; Gregory 31, 33, 36).

Harriet is also shown to have an affectionate heart. It takes some time for her to get over her infatuation with Mr. Elton, and her initial inability to get over him takes on a slightly manic streak, when she is shown to have kept his old pencil-stump as a treasure (122, 227). Only when told that she is causing Emma pain, does Harriet become somewhat more subdued in her grief (178-179). Fordyce states that women's eyes never "shine with a more delightful effluence, than when suffused with all the trembling softness of [...] solicitude for friendship in danger" (94). This would render Harriet's reaction to Emma's reproach most becoming. Miss Smith does not get over Mr. Elton until he and his wife are downright uncivil to her at the ball (219, 222, 227-228). Though Harriet at first heeds Emma's advice, and refuses Mr. Martin, it is clear that he and his family continue to be dear to her, culminating in her finally accepting his second proposal (119, 318, 326). Both Harriet's infatuation with Elton, and her love of Mr. Martin are in line with Gregory's description of female love as a reaction (90, 93). He declares that "love is not to begin on your part, but is entirely to be the consequence of our attachment to you" (90). Harriet's way of falling in love with any man

who is said to want her adheres nicely to this ideal. Her interest in Mr. Knightley can be seen as an exception. However, Harriet does not show much interest in him until after he has asked her to dance at the ball and been increasingly attentive to her (228-230, 273-275).

Harriet is shocked when Emma declares that she has no wish to marry, and though at one point Harriet declares that she herself will never marry, the overall impression is that she is eager to find a husband sooner or later (57, 228). The overall tone in Fordyce's and Gregory's texts gives the impression that they would consider this a natural, even a desirable attitude. However, Gregory actually states that he knows "nothing that renders a woman more despicable, than her thinking it essential to happiness to be married" (114). Later on he exhorts that if marriage would turn out to be "absolutely essential" (126) to a woman's happiness, she should keep her wish to marry an inviolable secret (126-127). With this in mind Harriet would appear less ideal, as she is both intent to marry, and continually discusses the subject with Emma.

Out of the three women, Harriet is the most helpless one. She appears more or less completely dependent on other people both personally and economically. She depends on Mrs. Goddard, Emma, her unknown father, and on a husband when it comes to everything from economic support to making the simplest decisions. Economically speaking, Emma has her independence, and Jane has the education and ability to become a governess. But without the financial support of her anonymous father, Harriet would have nothing. Harriet's personal helplessness is emphasized in the section where she runs into the "gipsies" [sic] (223). She behaves like a veritable damsel in distress, screaming, fainting, and having to be saved by a valiant young man (223-224). Whether or not Harriet's situation as an illegitimate daughter would be seen as a redeeming factor by Rousseau, Fordyce, or Gregory is unclear. Fordyce does speak rather reproachfully of parents and guardians who do not take their responsibility (Fordyce 6-7). Thus, some of the blame for Harriet's imperfections may be put on her absent parents and, perhaps especially, on Mrs. Goddard. Fordyce argues that the best breeding is attained by "living among the best bred people, by cultivating a fond goodness of the heart, and possessing the advantage of a well educated mind" (58). Harriet does seem to have "a fond goodness of heart", but she has been deprived of the advantages of "a well educated mind" as well as the society of "the best bred people".

Harriet has been brought up at a girls' school, the sort of place which Fordyce has very little sympathy for. He complains that in those places girls are only taught "to dress, to dance [and] to speak bad French" (13). Furthermore, Fordyce worries that the schools corrupt the girls' morals (13). He does however allow for a few rare exceptions which "do the

Mistresses real hono[r]” (13). Judging from the description of Mrs. Goddard’s school in *Emma*, Fordyce might well have considered it one of the exceptions. It is described as

a School – not a seminary, or an establishment or any thing which professed, in long sentences of refined nonsense, to combine liberal acquirements with elegant morality upon new principles and new systems – and where young ladies for enormous pay might be screwed out of health and into vanity – but a real, honest, old-fashioned Boarding-school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price [...]Mrs. Goddard’s school was in high repute – and very deservedly [...] she had an ample house and garden, gave the children plenty of wholesome food, let them run about a great deal in the summer, and in winter dressed their chilblains (12)

This has no resemblance to the “fashionable system of Female Education” (13) which Fordyce disdains. Interestingly, hints of irony and a possible critique of the views on education presented by the moralists, can be found in the description of the school, especially when put in relation to Harriet. The mentioning of “long sentences of refined nonsense” and “elegant morality” does bring both Fordyce’s and Gregory’s writings to mind. Furthermore, it is said that girls are sent to Mrs. Goddard’s school “to be out of the way and scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies” (12). This does ring of the views shared by Fordyce and Gregory; that women should not read too much or consider anything which might require them to strain their minds (Gregory 15-16, 62-63; Fordyce 82, 97-99, 102-103). Considering Harriet as the result of Mrs. Goddard’s education, she is in many ways a caricature of the female ideal promoted by the moralists. She is pretty, clean, modest, innocent, affectionate, and has an overpowering trust in her elders and betters. However, much as a result of these virtues, she is also silly, ignorant, indecisive, and gullible.

When speaking of Miss Smith’s virtues at the end of the novel, Mr. Knightley attributes many of them to the influence of Emma (321). But it is during her stay with Emma’s sister Isabella that Harriet finally encourages and accepts Robert Martin (318-319). Not much is said about Isabella in the book. She is mainly portrayed as the doting wife and mother, devoting all her time and energy to the care of her husband and children. Mrs. John Knightley seems to be just the kind of woman Fordyce and Gregory would consider the ideal wife. She and her husband are also the sort of people whom Fordyce and Gregory would recommend as confidants to a young woman like Harriet (Fordyce 83, 88-89; Gregory 74-75, 84-85). Therefore, it is interesting that the narrator actually criticizes Isabella for being too submissive in relation to her husband’s moods. It is even stated that “with such a worshipping wife, it was hardly possible that any natural defects in [Mr. John Knightley’s temper] should not be increased” (62). This comment clearly criticizes the attitude Fordyce and Gregory, as

well as Rousseau, promote women to adopt towards their husbands (Rousseau 328; Fordyce 10, vol.2 112-113, 118-119; Gregory 12-13). Regardless of the narrator's views on Mrs. Knightley, Harriet, with her youth and impressionability appears to have all the potential of being transformed into a younger version of Isabella.

Harriet's situation as an illegitimate child is also relevant in relation to her ability to achieve the moralists' ideal. Both Margaret Kirkham and Claudia Johnson point to the matter of Harriet's illegitimacy as an important issue in the novel (Kirkham 134-135; Johnson 135). Through Harriet, Austen addresses the situation of illegitimate children, and by means of Emma she brings forth the absurdity of children paying for the mistakes made by their parents (40). As Johnson points out, the mere mentioning of Harriet's situation in the novel was political (135). No matter how close to the ideal Harriet could have been, she would always have had to carry the shame and burden of being borne out of wedlock, something which would always have excluded her from certain society and social possibilities. Furthermore, the fact that Harriet must be aware of her parental situation would have rendered her somewhat corrupt in the eyes of Fordyce and Gregory from the very beginning, even disregarding any other faults. Harriet must be well aware of the consequences of a sin which the moralists would prefer her to have no notion of (Gregory 67-68, 94).

In articles and books on *Emma*, Harriet is rarely discussed as a character in her own right, but rather as Emma's live doll. This is perhaps not surprising, as Harriet almost never appears to act based on her own judgment, which makes her rather like a mirror of the people who surround her. Still Harriet does have a mind and a will of her own, and her fear of expressing these is part of what makes her character interesting. In the article "Womanhood in Jane Austen's Novels", Sylvia Myers writes that Austen's heroines are attempting "to preserve their sense of personal worth just as they are becoming aware of the need to fulfill their somatic destinies" (5). In *Emma*, this view could be expanded to include Jane and Harriet as well as Emma. Harriet is young, impressionable, and trying to find her way in a world where everyone claims to know what is best for her. She possesses many of the innate qualities which Fordyce and Gregory praise, and unlike Jane, Harriet appears to be careful enough not to make a gamble of her prospects. She can at times let herself be misguided, but she never puts her reputation at risk the way Jane does. This puts her surprisingly close to the ideal in spite of her faults.

It is interesting that the way Harriet is presented in the novel makes the narrator seem rather indisposed to favor the ideal she in some ways represents. Harriet's character could almost be seen as a direct comment on Fordyce's statement that "[y]outh and beauty,

set off with sweetness and virtue, capacity and discretion – what have not they accomplished?” (9). Harriet has youth as well as beauty and great sweetness, she appears to be virtuous, is tolerably discreet, and has all the capacity she could possibly gain at a school like Mrs. Goddard’s. Despite this, Harriet is ignorant, gullible, and at the end of the novel she has not accomplished anything that she might not have had in chapter 7 had she only accepted Robert Martin’s first proposal (32).

Emma Woodhouse

On the very first page of the novel, Emma is established as being “handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition” (1). On the trip to Box Hill, Mr. Weston appears to voice the prevailing view of Emma with his riddle “What two letters of the alphabet are there, that express perfection? [...] M. and A. Em – ma.” (250). The view that Miss Emma Woodhouse is ideal in every way is thus put forward strongly at the beginning of the novel, and the fact that many of the other characters see her in this way is upheld throughout the novel. The only person who ever seems to find any real fault in Emma is Mr. Knightley (5).

However, when it comes to appearances, there seems to be universal consensus in Highbury that Emma is ideal in every way. She is at various times described as “handsome” (1), “lovely” (11), “pretty”, “beautiful”(24) and well dressed (142). In a scene between Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston at the start of the novel, Emma’s looks are thoroughly discussed:

‘I shall not attempt to deny Emma’s being very pretty.’ ‘Pretty! say beautiful rather. Can you imagine any thing nearer perfect beauty than Emma altogether – face and figure?’ ‘I [...] confess that I have seldom seen a face or figure more pleasing than hers. [...]’ ‘Such an eye! the true hazel eye – and so brilliant! regular features, open countenance, with a complexion! oh! what a bloom of full health, and such a pretty height and size; such a firm and upright figure. There is health, not merely in her bloom, but in her air, her head, her glance. One hears sometimes of a child being ‘the picture of health’; now Emma always gives me the idea of being the complete picture of grown-up health. She is loveliness itself... (24)

Based on this account, Emma must be the personification of the Regency beauty ideal. She is described as perfect in every way. Mr. Knightley adds further praise to Emma’s looks by pointing out that she is completely without conceit when it comes to her appearance (24-25). “Considering how very handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied with it” (24) he says, and Emma’s behavior throughout the novel bears out this statement. Even though she is described as perfectly beautiful and handsome, we never hear her comment on her own looks,

or contemplate her own apparel. In this aspect, Emma is adhering perfectly well to the ideal advocated by Fordyce and Gregory. Though the reader is never told much about Emma's style of dress, Mrs. Elton does complain that there was "[v]ery little white satin [and] very few lace veils" (328) at Emma's wedding. This hints to a measure of modesty and sobriety, two qualities which Fordyce as well as Gregory fervently promote in their texts (Fordyce 20, 23, 25, 28, 30, 34, 36, 97; Gregory 64-65).

One thing that is interesting about the description of Emma is the emphasis put on her looking so very healthy. Both Fordyce and Gregory speak of women's responsibility to keep themselves healthy (Fordyce 33-34; Gregory 56-57). However, neither of them puts as much emphasis on this as Mrs. Weston does, and they both make very clear that although women should be healthy, they must not be too strong and they must not boast about their health or speak of their interest in exercise (Fordyce 53; Gregory 57-59). Mrs. Weston appears to be describing not only a pretty, but a strong and vigorous young woman. In other words, although on the one hand Emma adheres very well to the ideal of good health advocated by Fordyce and Gregory, on the other hand there is a risk that they might find her too active and strong, that her health and strength would appear unfeminine. This would indeed, in spite of all her attractions, render Emma thoroughly unappealing to Fordyce and Gregory. Fordyce claims that a "masculine woman must be naturally an unamiable [sic] creature [...] any young woman of better rank that throws off all the lovely softness of her nature, and emulates the daring intrepid temper of a man – how terrible!" (53). The aspect of health puts Emma very much apart from Miss Fairfax with her brittle health and pale skin. There is also a clear difference from the pretty, plump and decidedly soft, adolescent Harriet, who is not sickly like Jane, but who does get ill, and who faints at times (72-73, 223). Emma clearly has a great many physical advantages over the other two. But out of these, her health – which is put forward as one of her greatest assets – might in the end be a disadvantage in relation to the ideal.

Apart from her looks, Emma is described as having a number of attractive personal traits and accomplishments. She is said to be of a happy disposition, clever, an excellent daughter, a true friend, a fairly skillful amateur artist, and a reasonably proficient piano player (1, 23, 25, 29-30, 151-152). It is also pointed out that Emma wants "neither taste nor spirit in the little things which are generally acceptable" (151-152). In this aspect the portrayal of Emma does live up fairly well to the standards promoted by Fordyce and Gregory. Though Emma has a limited interest in reading and more intellectual pursuits, she possesses a number of pleasant artistic accomplishments coupled with an interest in the

domestic (22-23, 28, 3-4). Even though Fordyce states that he “could heartily wish to see the female world more accomplished than it is” (102), he makes it clear that he does not wish women to become “Learned Ladies” (102) as they might “lose in softness what they [gain] in force” (102). Emma appears to come rather close to this ideal, being fairly accomplished, but in no way running the risk of becoming a learned lady.

Emma seems to put the comfort of her father above everything else (3, 68-69, 293, 303, 314-315, 327), a priority which would surely render her very proper in the eyes of the moralists (Fordyce 7-8; Gregory 60, 74, preface). Mr. Woodhouse is said to be a valetudinarian and “a much older man in ways than in years” (2). Considering his excessively anxious ways, it does seem likely that Emma’s father is suffering from some kind of age related condition. But no matter how difficult he is, even when his ways border on rudeness, Emma is always understanding and caring towards him. Overall, Emma does seem to be a very caring person. When it comes to her nephews and her sister Isabella - who is somewhat like her father – Emma is anxious for all of their comfort, and she appears to be very good with the children. Overall, Emma appears to be good at taking care of people. It is pointed out that she is good with the poor, that she has an understanding of their situation and that she can adjust her behavior and expectations accordingly (58).

The caretaking, charitable and forbearing side of Emma follows Fordyce’s and Gregory’s ideal very well. Fordyce advises young women to be patient and understanding with elderly people, while Gregory urges them to be charitable, and to show compassion with those less fortunate (Fordyce 90; Gregory 21, 39). Fordyce also recommends women to spend much time with older men, as he believes that they will both profit from each other’s company (88-89). Emma does spend much of her time with her father and Mr. Knightley, and she seems to enjoy their company. Gregory encourages women to cultivate the friendship of men of honor, stating that friendship between a man and a woman “occasions an emulation and exertion in each to excel and be agreeable” (84). Thus Emma appears to keep very proper company in relation to the ideal. Apart from her father and brother in law, for most of her life, Emma’s closest friend has been Miss Taylor, later Mrs. Weston (1). Even though Gregory warns young women never to make friends with their servants, a governess would have been employed partly to be a companion of the children (Gregory 81-82). Therefore, from that point of view, Emma’s closeness to Miss Taylor would most likely not have been much of an issue. However, during their friendship, Miss Taylor was not married, and she does not seem to have been a very adept teacher (1, 23). This would render her somewhat less well suited as a close companion from the view of Fordyce (83). On the other hand, the fact that Emma

always respected Miss Taylor and treated her like an equal, yet again shows Emma's caring and emphatic disposition. Governesses were often treated rather poorly, and Emma and Isabella could have made Miss Taylor's life very unpleasant. Margaret Kirkham comments on this, stating that it shows Emma to be "whatever her faults, exceptionally sound in head and heart" (132).

Emma's overall agreeableness is emphasized by her being generally well loved. She is admired by all the male characters, from her father and Mr. Knightley to Mr. Weston, Mr. Elton, and Frank Churchill. In the short space of the novel she is courted and flirted with by three men, and receives two marriage proposals (86-87, 246-249, 289-290). Among the women of Highbury, Emma appears to be almost equally admired. Her former governess, Mrs. Weston can find no fault with her, and this seems to be equally true about Mrs. Cole, Miss Bates, Mrs. Goddard, and young Harriet Smith who adores her. The only people, apart from Mr. Knightley, who ever seem to find any serious fault in Emma's person are Mr. and Mrs. Elton, and possibly Jane Fairfax. However, the Eltons' disapproval can be largely dismissed, as it seems to be based mainly on jealousy, pride, and vanity. Likewise, Miss Fairfax' possible disapproval seems to originate more from her own social insecurity, and the jealousy caused by the disgraceful conduct of Frank Churchill, than from an actual dislike of Emma's own person (297, 310-311).

Indeed, Emma appears to be very good at pleasing and comforting other people. When some elderly ladies visit her father, Emma is careful to make everyone comfortable. She never interferes with Mr. Woodhouse' absurd speeches on health and food, but she always makes certain that the visitors are supplied with ample portions of food (14-15). Likewise, when quarrels or other uncomfortable situations occur during a visit or conversation Emma is the first to step in, smoothing things over and reconciling the parties. Among other occasions, she does this very skillfully during her sister's family's visit to Hartfield (69-70). The habit and skill of helping conversations along, and smoothing over disputes, is seen as a necessary feminine skill by Fordyce as well as Gregory (Fordyce 87, 92, 99-100; Gregory 37-38). In that aspect of Emma's conversation, neither of the moralists should find much fault.

Emma's social skills, in combination with her dedication to her family and community – going herself to visit the poor and bring them provisions – resounds perfectly with Gregory's doctrines to young women. Gregory wishes women to "[cultivate an enlarged charity for all mankind" (21), and "[s]et apart a certain proportion of [their] income as sacred to charitable purposes" (22). There is no doubt he would approve of Emma's taking care to invite the former parson's widow, and her unmarried daughter, to most social gatherings, and

sending them food and other gifts (113, 263). However, Emma's relationship to Miss Bates evokes the subject of Emma's less favorable sides. One of these is clearly shown during the crisis of the novel – when Emma openly makes fun of Miss Bates in front of the whole party at Box Hill (249). Emma is not only rude and unfeeling towards Miss Bates, on several occasions in the novel she is also ungenerous and prejudiced against Miss Bates' niece Jane Fairfax. There is no reason for Emma to dislike Jane, but she still avoids her and gossips about her behind her back (110, 144-145, 234). On the subject of conduct and behavior, Gregory advises women to “[s]how a compassionate sympathy to unfortunate women [...] Indulge a secret pleasure, I may say pride, in being the friends and refuge of the unhappy” (39). He also proclaims that women should “[b]eware of detraction, especially where [their] own sex are concerned” (38). Though Emma visits the Bateses and gives them presents of food, she appears to do it first from feelings of duty, and then from guilt. The way she speaks to and about Miss Bates on Box Hill, and the way she gossips of Jane Fairfax with Frank Churchill would make Emma seem quite remote from Fordyce's and Gregory's ideal.

After the incident at Box Hill, Mr. Knightley confronts Emma and rebukes her for using her wit against the poor Miss Bates (252). In this scolding, Mr. Knightley charges Emma with a fault which Fordyce and Gregory would find close to unpardonable in a woman. Indeed, Fordyce states that “the faculty termed Wit is commonly looked upon with a suspicious eye [...] It is especially ... dreaded in women” (97). The way Emma makes fun of Miss Bates in front of others, would make her appear in a particularly unfavorable light considering Fordyce's reflection: “Who is not shocked by the flippant impertinence of a self-conceited woman, that wants to dazzle by the supposed superiority of her powers?” (99). Furthermore, Emma's comment on Miss Bates is preceded by Emma behaving in what Fordyce as well as Gregory would consider a most improper way – encouraging Frank Churchill in his open flirtation with her (247-252). Fordyce states that “there is nothing more disgusting than the notion of a young woman who cannot be put out of countenance” (52). This extremely pointed remark seems easily connected with Gregory's statement that “Virgin purity is of that delicate nature, that it cannot hear certain things without contamination” (40). In the cases of Jane Fairfax and Harriet Smith, this second statement was fairly applicable, ostracizing them from the narrow frame of the ideal. However, both Jane and Harriet seem to be put out of countenance when subjected to improprieties. Emma however subjects herself to one of the worst faults presented by Fordyce and Gregory – lack of modesty.

Emma may not be vain about her appearance. However, as Mr. Knightley puts it “her vanity lies in another direction” (24). Neither of the moralists would look on Emma's

behavior towards Frank Churchill with kind eyes. Gregory warns that “[t]housands of women of the best hearts and finest parts have been ruined by men who approach them under the specious name of friendship” (85). In his chapter on marriage, Gregory even describes a scenario very similar to Emma’s relation to Frank Churchill: “the deepest and most artful coquetry is employed by women of superior taste and sense, to engage and fix the heart of a man whom the world and whom they themselves esteem, although they are firmly determined never to marry him. But his conversation amuses them, and his attachment is the highest gratification to their vanity [...] God forbid I should ever think so of all your sex” (107). Even though Frank Churchill’s flirtation with Emma is as insincere as her flirtation with him, Emma does not learn that this is the case until at the very end of the novel (266). This means that she would have no valid excuse to offer for what Fordyce and Gregory would consider some terribly indecent behavior (Fordyce 10, 15; Gregory 48).

Though Emma could be said to behave very badly with Frank Churchill, conscious flirtation does not seem to be a habit of hers. Furthermore, unlike Mrs. Elton, Miss Woodhouse is not overly interested in resorts and public places. Instead, Emma is very fond of her home at Hartfield, spending most of her time there, and never venturing far from Highbury. Her fondness of house and home is very much in line with the sentiments promoted by both Gregory and Fordyce (Gregory 59-60; Fordyce 45). However, Emma is so comfortable and secure in her place as mistress of Hartfield that she feels free to state that she has “very little intention of marrying at all” (56). Gregory believes that it is utterly vulgar for any woman to consider marriage necessary for her happiness, and he, Fordyce, and Rousseau might all sympathize with a young daughter abstaining from marriage to care for her ageing invalid father (Gregory 114-115). Still, it seems plausible that they would consider Emma’s declaration vulgar. Even more so when combined with her ardent flirtation with, and encouragement of Frank Churchill. Gregory clearly states that “[t]he sentiment, that a woman may allow all innocent freedoms, provided her virtue is secure, is grossly indelicate and dangerous” (49). Fordyce holds the same views, advising every young woman rather to “carry her bashfulness too far, than pique herself on the freedom of her manners” (53), and that a woman’s virtue and her reputation are “nearly the same” (53). Fordyce also states clearly that he considers matrimony to be “necessary to the support, order, and comfort of society” (84). On these points, both Jane with her reserved manners and Harriet with her youthful insecurity, would seem closer to the moralists’ ideal than the unreserved, confident, and outspoken Emma.

Another serious fault which the moralists would no doubt find in Emma can be found in her behavior towards Mr. Knightley. Gregory is very clear about the importance of honesty: "Have a sacred regard to truth. Lying is a mean and despicable vice" (42). Now, while Jane could be reproved for withholding important facts about her own situation, Emma actually lies to Mr. Knightley's face. After having convinced Harriet to refuse Robert Martin, Emma is confronted by Mr. Knightley. When he guesses her plan, and tells her that he is certain that Mr. Elton will never marry Harriet, Emma tells him that she has no intention of making the match (43). This is not only a flat lie, it also turns into an obvious one when Emma's scheme fails. It is true that Emma's character is generally both open and truthful. However, this instance indicates that, albeit on rare occasions, Emma does lie. This is something which the ideal Regency woman could never do.

The mentioning of Mr. Elton brings about the subject of Emma's conduct towards him. Compared with her behavior towards Frank Churchill, Emma is somewhat redeemed in her relation to Mr. Elton by the fact that she never willingly leads him on. Emma is not very flirtatious when she talks to the vicar, she often attempts to encourage him to admire her friend, and she seems to be genuinely convinced that Elton does favor Harriet. When the truth comes out, as Mr. Elton corners Emma in the chariot, she appears to be genuinely shocked by his behavior (87). Gregory does warn young women about these kinds of situations. He writes that some men's "friendship to woman is so near a-kin to love, that if she be very agreeable in her person, she will probably very soon find a lover, where she only wished to meet a friend" (86). Furthermore, Gregory advises women that "[i]f you ... are determined to shut your heart against him [...] treat him honourably [sic] and humanely. Do not let him linger in a miserable suspense, but be anxious to let him know your sentiments with regard to him" (99). Emma acts in just the way that Gregory prescribes. As soon as she has recovered from the worst of her shock, she makes it very clear to Elton that she does not have, and never had, any romantic interest in him. Even when he perseveres, she stands her ground, dismissing him without attempting to hurt his dignity more than necessary (88-89). Even if Emma could be considered to have some responsibility for getting herself into the situation with Mr. Elton, she does attempt to solve it in just the way that Gregory would seem to recommend.

If Emma would not be blamed for her behavior towards Mr. Elton, she would certainly be reprimanded for her conduct towards Harriet. As mentioned earlier, Emma appears to single Harriet out as a suitable companion largely due to the younger girl's suggestibility. Emma takes advantage of this, willingly influencing Harriet (32-34, 39). This

in itself would be seen as a fault. Emma's influencing might indeed be seen as all the worse, since she influences Harriet on the highly important question of matrimony (Gregory 131). First Emma persuades Harriet not to accept Robert Martin (32-34). She then attempts to justify her conduct when confronted by Mr. Knightley, making a rather progressive speech:

it is always incomprehensible to a man that a woman should ever refuse an offer of marriage. A man always imagines a woman to be ready for anybody who asks her [...] As to the circumstances of her birth, though in a legal sense she may be called Nobody, it will not hold in common sense. She is not to pay for the offence of others, by being held below the level of those with whom she is brought up (39-40).

Not only does Emma speak back to a man, and a man who is her superior in both age and situation, she almost appears to mock what Gregory views as the basis of female love. Gregory makes his position quite clear when it comes to love, stating that "[a] man of taste and delicacy marries a woman because he loves her more than any other. A woman of equal taste and delicacy marries him because she esteems him, *and because he gives her that preference* [emphasis added]" (93). Following this logic, Harriet most definitely ought to have accepted Mr. Martin. However, Emma not only influences Harriet to refuse Robert Martin. She also encourages Harriet to fall in love with Mr. Elton, who is by far Harriet's superior, and persuades her that he even means to propose (50). This would render Emma a very bad influence on Harriet, not only keeping her friend from a healthy marriage, but encouraging the younger woman's vanity (Fordyce 14, 15; Gregory 86).

Emma's statement about marriage and illegitimacy does not seem very far from Wollstonecraft's critique of the view that women "ought to be weak and passive" (173) and it seems to oppose the moralists' vies that it is always women's duty to be agreeable to men. Emma's declaration could be seen as a strong, feminist statement, seeming to string on to Wollstonecraft's thoughts on the situation of women. Wollstonecraft discusses "the State of Degradation to which Woman is Reduced" (141), stating that "[w]omen ... are degraded ... to enjoy the present moment, and at last despise the freedom which they have not sufficient virtue to struggle to attain" (141). Just like Wollstonecraft, Emma questions the idea that women should grasp at any chance they get, always clinging to the present moment. Instead, she offers the idea that they might consider the chance of something better coming along tomorrow.

Mary Waldron states that Emma is "a heroine whom nobody could mistake for an attempt at a conduct-book model" (112), and based on Fordyce's and Gregory's writings this would seem to hold true. Furthermore, Waldron points out that though Emma adheres to a

popular trope in eighteenth-century fiction – the beautiful and rich heroine – she does not succumb to either of the typical evils “material indulgence and personal vanity” (113). This makes Emma stand out from the crowd. Though Emma does not fit into either Fordyce’s or Gregory’s image of the ideal woman, she is in no way an unsympathetic character. Austen is to have stated that “Pictures of perfection’ made her ‘sick & wicked” (Waldron 115). Emma, and indeed both Jane and Harriet to some extent, seems to be reflections of this sentiment. In some ways Emma is the perfect Regency woman, she is most comfortable at home, she cares for her family, she shows charity to those less fortunate. However, in some ways she is very far from ideal. Her flirtatious behavior with Frank Churchill, her influence on Harriet, and her use of wit towards Miss Bates are among the things contemporary moralists would have found hard to forgive.

In her article “Womanhood in Jane Austen’s Novels”, Sylvia Myers argues that Emma’s story is one of a woman trying to distance herself from her female destiny – to become a wife and mother – and finally realizing her own need to fill that same role (229-230). However, this seems like a very narrow and oversimplified view of Emma. Even at the very beginning of the book, Emma is caring and nurturing with the people close to her. Furthermore, she never completely dismisses the idea of marriage, she merely recognizes that it is not her only choice. Reducing Emma to a woman who struggles to realize that she needs marriage to feel complete seems rather more in line with the thoughts of Fordyce and Gregory than anything else.

Claudia Johnson comments that even in later criticism on *Emma*, the character of Miss Emma Woodhouse is often met with “[t]ransparently misogynist” even homophobic sentiments (122). This implies that there are things about Emma which still provoke and bewilder people. Susan Korba points to possible interpretations of Emma as a lesbian or at least not exclusively heterosexual character (139-140). Korba quotes Marvin Mudrick, who states that one possible reason why critics have felt uneasy about Emma is that she “is not sexually submissive to and contingent upon men” (Korba 140). Though this view could be questioned to some degree, it does seem as though Emma respects women just as much as men and she is neither afraid of, nor submissive to Mr. Knightley. Though Emma can be prejudiced, once she has a chance of getting to know a person she endeavors to form a just opinion of them, and treats them accordingly disregarding if they are men or women. Even if Emma is quite obviously far from a model woman, she does seem to be a genuinely decent and lifelike person. She has faults, but when she realizes them she is quick to try and make amends.

Conclusion

Some scholars have stated that Jane Fairfax is the Regency ideal personified, and looking at the ideal promoted by Fordyce and Gregory, Jane is close to perfect in many ways. However, looking closer at Jane Fairfax' character it becomes clear that she is far from flawless. In fact, it is even possible to make the interesting observation that many of the flaws which Rousseau, or Fordyce and Gregory might find in Jane seem to be tied to what they would consider her virtues. Jane is beautiful, accomplished, modest and reserved, but it could be argued that these are the reasons she becomes lonely, secretive and exposed. Had Jane been less beautiful and accomplished, she would most likely never have attracted Frank Churchill, and she might not have raised her sights above becoming a governess. Had she not been so modest and reserved she might have told one of her relations of the situation, or she might at least have gained a friend in whom she could confide. The way Jane's character is presented seems to imply that several of the standards for conduct and disposition promoted by the moralists are indeed incompatible.

Harriet is not made out to be ideal by most modern critics, however in the novel *Emma* comments on Harriet being every man's dream. She is presented as pretty, modest, affectionate, and perfectly docile. Thus, she possesses large portions of the characteristics which are most treasured by Rousseau as well as Fordyce and Gregory. But Harriet is not flawless. She is indecisive, and allows herself to be influenced by others even when she should be making her own decisions. Just like with Jane Fairfax it seems as though Harriet's virtues are very much connected with her faults. Harriet's trusting, meek and soft personality makes her very susceptible to the influence of others, like Miss Woodhouse. Furthermore, a person so docile seems incapable of taking any real initiative, or ever bettering herself. Thus she becomes not only gullible but also unintelligent. In the portrayal of Harriet, the narrator yet again appears to point to the contrariness of many of the traits promoted to young women by men like Fordyce and Gregory.

Neither Austen, nor most critics or readers have ever considered Emma Woodhouse to be an image of the Regency ideal. But almost all of the characters in the novel seem to consider her to be near perfect, and in many ways indeed Emma is close to the Regency ideal. Taking a closer look at her character however, one finds that she has many flaws, and commits several mistakes which Fordyce, Gregory, and Rousseau would find unpardonable. Similarly to both Harriet and Jane, Emma's ideal characteristics look to be

connected with the flaws in her personality. Emma's main transgressions in relation to the ideal would most likely have been considered to be her matchmaking, her flirtation and her use of wit against Miss Bates. Considering why Emma does these things, it seems probable that one of her main reasons would be boredom. Emma is caring, accomplished and clever. Just like the moralists dictate, she does not endeavor to pursue any intellectual interests. Instead she devotes much of her time to caring for her decaying father. But to an intelligent young woman this is not stimulating enough. The novel appears to be pointing out that a young woman, who is both accomplished and intelligent, can not be happy when confined to domesticity in the company of the old and sedate. It is impossible for her not to step out of line when she is not allowed or encouraged to at least broaden her mind, or engage in some useful, challenging employment.

Furthermore, the character Emma could in herself be interpreted as a pointed comment directed at Dr. John Gregory. Just as in the case with Gregory's daughters, Emma's mother passed away when she was very little. Like Gregory's daughters, Emma has grown up with a widowed father of declining health, reminiscent of a slight caricature on the portrait Gregory paints of himself in the preface to *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*. Quite in accordance to the wishes of Gregory, Emma does not embrace her own intellect. The effect of this becomes that she commits most of the errors which Gregory warns of in his text. Whether or not Austen wrote Emma with this in mind, there is certainly a strong resemblance.

Finally, even though Emma as well as Jane, and Harriet, all commit several mistakes throughout the novel they all end up married, and presumably happy, without having to go through any serious redemption. The fact that none of the three women behave in accordance with the ideal and yet manage to make favorable matches, gives the impression that the novel as a whole goes against the teachings of Fordyce and Gregory, as well as Rousseau. The novel does seem to hint to women that they can have flaws, and a free will, make mistakes, and still get their happy ever after. It may be that neither Emma, nor Jane or Harriet could be considered "what every [regency] man delights in" (42). But this does not make them bad or dislikable characters. Austen exposes the contradictory nature of the moralists' ideal, and allows Jane, Harriet, and Emma to be imperfect without making warning examples out of them.

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