

Table of Contents

Introduction	3-5
1. <i>Emma</i> as a Female Bildungsroman	5-8
2. The Marriage Plot	8-11
3. Representation of Three Female Characters in <i>Emma</i>	11-13
3.1 Middle Age - Miss Bates	13-16
3.2 Adulthood - Mrs Elton	16-20
3.3 Adolescence - Miss Fairfax	20-23
Conclusion	24-25
Works Cited	26-28

Introduction

The novel *Emma* written by Jane Austen has been popular with readers and critics alike for almost two hundred years, ever since its first publication in December 1815. *Emma* is a Bildungsroman and offers a vast array of themes to discuss. It deals with topics ranging from romance, patriarchy, feminism, community, friendship and gender. As Claudia L. Johnson states in *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*: ““Jane Austen” has mobilized powerful and contradictory ideas” (15).

In the last forty years, critics have shifted their focus from emphasizing the more traditional primary development of the male hero (cf. Buckley 1974) to the role of the heroine of the female Bildungsroman (cf. Labovitz 1986). In Labovitz's introduction to *The Voyage in Fictions of Female Development*, she describes how Buckley's masculine plot differs from the female journey in the Bildungsroman. Whereas the male protagonist begins his Bildung by venturing into the outside world, the women are confined to their domestic surroundings, and “unable to leave home” (Labovitz 8) and develop only within this domestic environment.

In even more recent years, research has seemed to suggest that the existence of separate public and private spheres for men and women in the long eighteenth century affected the lives of women in terms of female development, relations and roles available to women (cf. Ross 2006). As a result, the separate spheres enabled women to form bonds, depend on each other in their lives of domesticity. Women lived within the private sphere of their own home or homes of other women within their near surroundings (cf. Labovitz 1986). Claudia L. Johnson, in her analysis of *Emma* in *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, focuses on “strength rather than a decorous concession to “feminine” weakness or ignorance.” (Johnson xxv). *Emma* is different and unique as she possesses qualities of “female strength,” (Johnson 124) in abundance. Mary Ferguson, in Abel, Hirsch and Langland, argues the importance of the role of motherhood in aid of the female protagonist's Bildung, “so that they may replicate

the lives of their mothers.” (228). Ruth Perry, in *Novel Relations*, supports the importance of the role of motherhood as well, despite the mothers often not being represented in literature of the time (336). Additionally, Marianne Hirsch argues that this absence “gives the space in which the heroine’s plot and her activity of plotting can evolve.” (57) and therefore the Bildung of the female protagonist can begin.

For sixteen years, since the passing of Emma’s mother, Emma’s governess, Miss Taylor, “had fallen little short of a mother in affection.” (Austen 5). Upon the marriage of Emma’s sister Isabella, the governess-student relationship changed to one of “equal footing” (Austen 6). When Miss Taylor marries and leaves her post as governess, Emma’s Bildung starts. Emma is confronted by a “danger of suffering from intellectual solitude.” (Austen 7) and a lack of somebody to educate her in developing from adolescence to adulthood which is the next natural stage of her life.

Given that *Emma* is written by a female, Jane Austen, the title of the novel is feminine, the first sentence of the novel is credited with a description of the female protagonist Emma and given that there are more female characters present in *Emma* than male characters, it seems therefore arguably logical to trace Emma’s Bildung and journey through the representations of women. In Chapter one, this thesis will argue that Emma’s journey into maturity, shares characteristics of a female Bildungsroman as outlined by Abel, Hirsch and Langland.

In order to place the novel in its framework, the second chapter will outline the marriage plot as one of the most important traditional literary tools of the nineteenth century, employed by many authors in Austen’s time and how it relates to the social aspect of the novel. Austen used the framework of the marriage plot to suit the purpose of the novel which William H. Magee refers to as “detailing the growth” of her respective heroines (198).

Furthermore, the third chapter will illustrate this growth, by using characteristics of the female Bildungsroman as outlined in chapter one. Emma's journey from blindness to insight will be modelled on three female characters in the novel belonging to three different stages in life: adolescence, adulthood and middle age. These women individually complete Emma's collective Bildung differently by contributing to and influencing Emma's development of self and her social role.

This thesis aims to argue that Emma's Bildung is first and foremost constituted by a psychological transformation of internal blindness to insight which is emphasized by Karin Jackson and Donald D. Stone. This transformation is a process of the development of Emma herself. She learns through the experiences of and interaction with three pivotal female characters in the novel, who in turn represent three different stages in life. As Silvana Colella indicates, the novels of Jane Austen "illustrate the profits to be gained from the maturity, the end of youth and the harmony of a perfect "match,"" (20). In the case of *Emma*, the 'profits' to be gained are, first and foremost, psychological in nature.

1. *Emma* as a Female Bildungsroman

Up until this day, Jane Austen remains one of the most popular English female authors. It is fair to assume that many people enjoy her novels because they are romantic love stories. *Emma*, as a novel, appears not to be different, in the sense that the novel deals with the topics of marriage, love, and even ends with three marriages. However, upon closer analysis, one cannot omit the theme of personal development. The Bildung, of twenty-year-old Emma, is required to mature in order to become a responsible, respectable, understanding and self-understanding woman. As Catherine Reef states: "Austen's novels are not really about love" but are rather "about growing up."

The birth of the Bildungsroman as a genre is generally ascribed to the publication of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1795–96. The tradition of development, Bildung, is described later by the critic Wilhelm Dilthey (Labovitz 2). Bildung traditionally happened to the male protagonist in nineteenth-century novels. The Bildungsroman is a novel of formation of the main protagonist who “discovers himself and his social role through the experience of love, friendship, and the hard realities of life,” (Labovitz 2).

The archetype of the Bildungsroman, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, was published at the end of the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, approximately twenty years later, the genre had evolved when Jane Austen presented a Bildungsroman, *Emma*, with a female protagonist, and with a strong emphasis on Emma's journey of development from adolescence into a mature woman.

As mentioned in the introduction, the original model for the protagonist of the Bildungsroman is the male hero. In Jerome Hamilton Buckley's study *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* the development of the English Bildungsroman is discussed at length. However, Buckley focuses exclusively on development of the male protagonist.

In reaction to the neglect to include female authors and in particular the female protagonist, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland edited *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, an anthology specifically on the female novel of development including essays by Susan J. Rosowski and Mary Anne Ferguson.

Female Bildung does not follow the same pattern as characterised by the traditional male Bildungsroman. Even though there are similarities in the male and female Bildungsroman, such as relationships to family and friends, education (formal and informal), finding a place in society as a mature man or woman, love and the ultimate goal of

development of the self. Abel, Hirsch and Langland propose to create a *new* definition. Despite the fact that their anthology does not discuss *Emma* as a text, some of the findings outlined by Abel, Hirsch and Langland, and in particular those by Mary Anne Ferguson, can be applied to Jane Austen's *Emma*.

Firstly, the female Bildung begins somewhat later than is the case for her male counterparts, whose journey often starts in childhood (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 7). Secondly, most female protagonists do not receive formal schooling and even if they do, the lessons learned "do not significantly expand their options" (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 7). Therefore, the future role of the female protagonist is predominantly inward, and still takes place within the private sphere whereas the male protagonist is educated to a role in the public sphere.

The female protagonist is also not able to leave home in order to grow and mature which Ferguson calls "circular" (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 228) as she remains at home in order to learn the ways of her mother instead of venturing outside of the private sphere. Both Esther Kleinbord Labovitz and Rita Felski emphasize the importance of a female role model as a characteristic of the female Bildungsroman in an effort to "further their self-development" (Labovitz 248) either solitarily or in company of women, whereby "the model of the female community offers an alternative form of intimacy grounded in gender identification." (Felski 132). The female protagonist is therefore guided by other women who understand on the basic principle of being female, live within the same private sphere and limited possibilities.

Far too many readings of *Emma* have discussed the role of Mr Knightley as a mentor to Emma. However, Emma is not guided by a male mentor as would be the case for a male protagonist. Mr Knightley is first of all a man, a gender Emma cannot identify herself with. He has developed an independent self away from the community whereas Emma, as the

female protagonist, will remain at Highbury. Additionally, Mr Knightley is one of the few people, who sees Emma's flaws and points these out but does not understand. According to Emma, he is "the worst judge in the world,..., of the difficulties of dependence. [And he does] not know what it is to have tempers to manager.'" (Austen 153). Instead, as this thesis will argue, Emma is educated informally by female characters who do understand, share their respective experience and influence the position of the female protagonist within the novel.

Inevitably, the journey of the self as a female protagonist touches upon Emma's social development which will be outlined in the next chapter of the marriage plot, but the goal of *Emma* as a female Bildungsroman is not "a happy marriage"(47) as argued by Merryn Williams in *Women in the English Novel, 1800-1900* (1984). Instead, as Catherine Reef stated, it is about the journey of self-development of the female protagonist whose Bildung is traced from the beginning until the very end when she has matured and is then, and only then, rewarded by marrying the man she loves and who loves her (cf. Shaffer 1992) .

2. The Marriage Plot

Abel, Hirsch and Langland stress the importance of the relationship of the Bildungsroman and the marriage plot as "successful *Bildung* requires existence of social context in order to grow" (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 6, emphasis author). The marriage plot gives the nineteenth-century novel its form and framework. The narrative of *Emma* can be seen as reflecting the society and culture the female protagonist lives in. Jane Austen's novels are stories of her time, her present, and as such could not entail a framework other than one where marriage is at the close.

In Elizabeth Sabiston's *Private Sphere to World Stage from Austen to Eliot*, she demonstrates that Jane Austen was aware and "confronted with the dilemma of effecting an elision of public and private spheres, of articulating ranges of experience often considered so

personal as to be incommunicable.”(2). By virtue of writing and publishing her novels, Jane Austen placed her work in the public sphere of her time and therefore “recognized the implications...of the marriage market theme,” (2).

As the printing culture spread from London to the countryside (Trevelyan 427), so did Jane Austen’s novels reach a greater audience of women through which they were informed and educated on topics related to and about women.

More often than not, women grew up in a patriarchal household and, when married, moved into their respective husband’s homes. In legal terms, a married woman became invisible as she did not have a separate, independent legal identity. The husband owned her property, had legal rights over the children and handled her affairs. Single women had the same legal position as men but being a female would still exclude single women from rights and responsibilities men had. Women were often faced with poverty if they did not marry and hence the status of being single or married defined a woman’s social position.

As a result of the increase of publishing and printing, a novel like *Emma* written by a female author became available to a larger public especially women. Emma’s world, with its framework of the marriage plot emphasizing female characters and the social position they lived in, came alive through the eyes of early nineteenth-century women and came to exist beyond the boundaries of the text. Susan J. Rosowski calls this a “dual movement, both inward to self-knowledge and outward, toward awareness of social...truths,” (Abet et al 67).

This world comes with expectations of understanding and knowledge of how to behave, respect, and adapt to any new situation in Emma’s public and private world. These expectations form the norm, which in turn provides and reconfirms order in her surroundings which has been unsettled by the marriage of her former governess Miss Taylor (Stewart 157).

Jane Austen appears to intend the marriage plot to function as a literary convention which allows the female protagonist to grow, successfully mature and “argue for a positive

empowerment of women.” (Shaffer 67). This development promptly starts at the beginning of the novel where Emma is confronted with the consequences of marriage on her life. Her social life was very limited and her private formal or informal education did not contribute to her development as a mature woman. The consequence of Miss Taylor’s marriage forces her to journey outwards and create a future for herself. However, Emma is at a loss as she has “none of the usual inducements of women to marry.” (Austen 90) and additionally does not know what she wants, what her role is, how to act and behave towards others, especially of her own gender.

In the introduction to the Wordsworth Edition of Emma, Nicola Bradbury shows that “it is the business of marriage to negotiate social distinctions” (IX). It allows the novel to present complex issues related to gender and social standing within the community in relation to marriage. The novel addresses the roles available to women and represents how to adhere to the norm while adjusting to the norm in a changing environment. It achieves this by presenting multiple female characters living in different stages of their lives and their social standing affected by marriage. Displaying female characters within the marriage plot removes the critique of nineteenth-century readers away from Austen. Therefore she, as a female author, was able to address the issues underlying and present in her society when using the courtship novel.

Consequently, this technique allows the novel to present the gender and marriage issues. Being married, wishing or not wishing to marry should not be taken lightly as Emma does by match-making female characters in her surroundings. In the case of Emma, contemplating marriage only becomes possible when she has gained self-knowledge, insight, and maturity. As Merryn Williams states the “heroine had a great deal to overcome” (47).

The process of Emma’s development, her Bildung, displays her initial lack of guidance, maturity and understanding of her personal and social responsibilities. The outer

framework of the marriage plot allows Jane Austen to address the norms of the social world and at the same time follow the development of Emma. Her Bildung, which Moretti calls “‘that pact’ between the individual and the world,” (22), is displayed through the interactions and representations of different female characters in the novel.

Once her Bildung is complete, framed within the marriage plot, respected in its tradition of a nineteenth-century novel written by a female author, then and only then can the novel end with marriage.

3. Representation of Three Female Characters in *Emma*

“Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich,” (Austen 5) is introduced to the reader in the first paragraph of the novel. Emma is portrayed as such but she is not perfect as she is used to “having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself;” (Austen 5). These two less desirable qualities are threatening her little distressed world when faced with the consequence of Miss Taylor having become Mrs Weston: “How was she to bear the change?” (Austen 6).

This change has left Emma without her only female companion, resigned to her home; as a consequence she is responsible for her own internal education. In order for Emma to become capable of dealing with this change as a consequence of marriage and despite her flaws, she must first develop and grow from adolescence into a mature woman as she is on the brink of turning twenty-one. Emma is challenged severely by not being surrounded by female role models at Hartfield whom she can learn from either in her private sphere of close family or friends in the same social class. Sadly, Emma’s mother passes away when Emma is only five years old. Isabella, her only other sibling, marries when Emma is fourteen years old, and even though “only sixteen miles off, was much beyond her daily reach;” (Austen 7).

Unfortunately, there is not one woman in her private circle as unique as her with so many “best blessings of existence;” (Austen 5) who could become her role model.

Unbeknown to the immature Emma, the wider community of Highbury is populated by women who collectively can contribute and can assist in developing herself. Jane Austen centred the novel around women, with Emma as the protagonist and use of female characters which Johnson refers to as “unempowered characters” (xxiv). The effective use of these women “enables Austen to expose and explore” (xxiv) development of the feminine self and the social world of her time.

Johnson further argues the importance of the female gender in *Emma* where “woman *does* reign alone.” (Johnson 126, emphasis author), and that “all of the people in control are women:” (Johnson 126). Margaret Kirkham further supports the importance of the role of Emma and female characters in *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*. Kirkham shows that Emma’s role as a devoted daughter has failed “to take adequate account of her responsibilities outside her family, and particularly towards other women.” (125). Furthermore, Emma’s development and growth are not just focused on her maturity of the self but also on her role and responsibilities “towards her own sex.” (Kirkham 139) and social position.

The change instigated by the marriage of Miss Taylor allows or rather forces Emma to expand her horizon beyond the domestic interior of Hartfield as her immediate future becomes unstable. It also forces Emma to reflect upon her own status and what she absolutely does not want: “Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want:” (Austen 90). She is pushed from the comforts of adolescence to find her mature self.

Thus far, Emma’s upbringing is affected by the changes caused by marriage of her sister Isabella first and followed, seven years later, by her governess Miss Taylor. These changes have been of negative consequence to Emma and her social position. She is left

without anybody to challenge her mind, educate her or somebody to accompany her. In combination with the “real evils indeed of Emma’s situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself;” (Austen 5), Emma has therefore no other choice but to start her own *Bildung*. The female characters in the novel play a vital role in Emma’s journey from blindness to insight as they *do* want, need or are affected by the aforementioned fortune, employment or consequence. That is, an economic and social choice or lack thereof.

These women represent three different stages of life: middle age, adulthood and adolescence. Each stage reflects Emma’s immaturity towards her personal development and social position within the larger community of Highbury. It is essential for Emma’s *Bildung* that she should grow into a mature twenty-one-year-old woman who is aware of her own mind, her social position, her role within the community and towards other women, and her own future. It is in this precise network of women where Emma’s journey takes place, and in which "continuity between generations" (Moretti 5) develops.

As Emma’s journey unfolds in interacting with the three different women at Highbury, she learns to reflect. This reflection leads her to insight, which in turn secures her future as a mature self and a woman of social standing. She develops from not being able to “quarrel with herself.” (Austen 73) to “seem to have been doomed to blindness.” (Austen 445) and eventually realising her own flaws: “her own behaviour had been so very improper! She was deeply ashamed,” (Austen 468). Emma’s journey of development has been influenced by these women as she is blind to the importance of consequence, fortune and employment in relation to Miss Bates, Mrs Elton and Miss Fairfax.

In the next three segments of this chapter, each female character will be presented in more detail in relation to the stages of their respective lives, characteristics of the female

Bildungsroman, the position they occupy, how each female contributes to Emma's development of self and social standing within her community of Highbury.

3.1 Middle Age – Miss Bates

There are not many female characters of middle age represented in *Emma*. There are in total three older women in the community of Highbury who “were the ladies whom Emma found herself very frequently able to collect;” (Austen 23). Miss Bates is one of them and whose “youth had passed without distinction, and her middle of life was devoted to the care of a failing mother,” (Austen 22). She is an old friend of Emma's father, part of Emma's private sphere and “almost always at the service of an invitation from Hartfield,” (Austen 21).

Miss Bates, as the daughter of the former vicar of Highbury, lives with her widowed mother in a humble abode as an unmarried spinster and frequents the same circle as Emma's father who describes her as “very worthy” (Austen 204). Miss Bates, however, is “in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour; and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her, into outward respect.” (Austen 22).

It is exactly this lack of respect which Emma, as the female protagonist, displays towards Miss Bates and which is unbecoming to Emma as a younger lady who is “first in consequence”(Austen 7). Amanda Vickery shows that the affluent gentry in Emma's society had “an obligation to ‘treat’ their dependants,” (196). Due to only receiving a small income, Miss Bates and her mother are “dependent upon her former peers for company, entertainment and small attentions” (Berendsen 63).

However, Emma fails to understand Miss Bates's popularity or her place within the community as Miss Bates is “neither young, handsome, rich, nor married.” (Austen 22), “tiresome” (Austen 161) and part of a “second set” (Austen 21) of friends to Emma's father.

Contrary to what Emma voices, (“I am convinced there never can be any likeness, except in being unmarried.” (Austen 91)), Emma and Miss Bates do share similarities as they both are caretakers, reside and remain home, are devoted daughters, are unmarried (Emma for the large majority of the novel), hold a unique position within the community and are attached to their respective nephews and nieces. Unlike Emma, Miss Bates accepts and treats everybody with respect as individuals, regardless of age, appearance, and value or marriage status. A striking difference between them is that Miss Bates has had and still has the advantage of having her mother in her life. Therefore, she has had a female role model all her life who clearly taught her to respect all within the community, regardless of consequence.

When visiting Miss Bates one morning as there “was always sufficient reason for such an attention;” (Austen 161), Emma is merely fulfilling her duty “inquiring after” (Austen 169) Miss Bates, as opposed to being genuinely interested in the company she is calling upon. Instead, she reluctantly sits through the lengthy news Miss Bates shares about Miss Fairfax and her upcoming affairs. It is not only the content of the conversation, or this conversation in particular, but the continuous stream of words flowing which annoys Emma. Marja Berendsen ascribes this “flood of words” (63) to Miss Bates’s insecurity and consequence. However, it is not until the Box Hill incident that Emma publicly offends Miss Bates. Emma exceeds herself in public rudeness and reflects “She never had been so depressed. [...]; and Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks all the way home,” (Austen 395). If attention, in future, could do away the past, she might hope to be forgiven.” (Austen 396). As Emma reflects: “it should be the beginning, on her side, of a regular, equal, kindly intercourse” (Austen 396).

Unfortunately, the consequence of Miss Bates’s social life is impacted by her own circumstance of being a middle-aged, unmarried, poor woman. In the novel, Miss Bates does not marry and she is impacted negatively by circumstance whereas Emma has not. This

‘consequence’, which Emma does not want, is linked to her status as a single woman. It does not only highlight Miss Bates’s social constraints placed on her as a middle-aged spinster, but it also makes Emma reflect upon her situation as an unmarried woman. Even though Emma is convinced she could never “ever be like Miss Bates!” because Emma is not “so silly – so satisfied – so smiling – so prosing – so undistinguishing and unfastidious -” (Austen 91), but if she ever thought she was, she “would marry tomorrow.” (Austen 91).

The consequence of being a poor middle-aged spinster and Miss Bates’s unmarried social standing in the community has not altered her as a person. She has remained true to herself, her mother, niece, friends and children of her friends like Emma, who in the end respect her. Therefore Miss Bates functions as an example and should be respected and treasured to guide others, like Emma, in her. Miss Bates provides stability to the future, being respected as an elder, a caretaker, an excellent aunt, as an informant about norms and as a woman who is integrally part of the community. Therefore, as an older woman and in a different stage of her life as well as part of a different generation, Miss Bates is “critical to the success” (Perry 366) of Emma. She functions in the end as a female role model, providing insight on her journey of self-development. As Kirkham points out that Emma’s “growth is closely associated with an improvement in the respect she accords to her.” (127) and therefore critical.

3.2 Adulthood – Mrs Elton

Mrs Elton – formerly Miss Hawkins - is introduced to the novel when she has already married Mr Elton. By virtue of being married, Mrs Elton is in a different stage of life, namely adulthood, compared to Emma who is still an adolescent. As exemplified by Emma’s older sister Isabella, these adult, married women are an “advocate for matrimony” (Austen 101)

and follow the norm to move away from home when married. Therefore, they represent a conventional image of a mature married woman of the nineteenth century.

Whereas Miss Bates is aware of the consequence of moving to a new community as a newly married woman, Miss Bates welcomes Mrs Elton without passing judgement and calling her “very good people;” (Austen 183) without passing judgement, Emma is cautious “[as] to who, or what Miss Hawkins is,” (Austen 183). Emma is challenged to adapt to the changes Miss Hawkins brings to herself and her own existence.

Emma’s reaction when interacting with Mrs Elton is of arrogance towards her use of language and heritage. Mrs Elton is described by Emma as “self-important, presuming, familiar, ignorant and ill-bred.” (Austen 292). It is Mrs Elton who brings with her a change to Highbury. Mrs Elton is part of the up and coming nouveau riche in her society. She is more outspoken and less reserved towards the higher classes and those with old money. According to R.E. Hughes in *The Education of Emma Woodhouse*, Mrs Elton “is a walking emblem of an acquisitive society;” (72) and will provide Emma with a “lesson in economics” (71).

Upon her first encounter with Mrs Elton, Emma shows her good manners in paying her respect and “would not allow herself entirely to form an opinion” even though Emma instantly “did not really like her” as “there was too much ease.” (Austen 280). This ease “represents the lack of tradition of the ‘new rich’, commercial class from the town, and is intended to contrast with the traditional good taste of the rural, provincial order,” (Bradbrook 47).

According to Emma she becomes an “[i]nsufferable woman!” (Austen 289), and is seen as “full of vulgarisms, and excess” by Nicola Bradbury in her introduction to *Emma* (Wordsworth Edition xiii). Mrs Elton patronises Emma in the first “quarter of an hour” (Austen 282) of their first private conversation by suggesting “a charming introduction for [Emma], who [has] lived so secluded a life;” (Austen 285). Additionally, Mrs Elton fails to

fulfil decorum which is evident from her omitting to use appropriate titles. This infuriates Emma extremely: “Worse than I had supposed. Absolutely insufferable! Knightley! – I could not have believed it. Knightley! – never seen him in her life before, and call him Knightley! – and discover that he is a gentleman!” (Austen 289). Mrs Elton’s disregard of the older generation is even more disrespectful as she refers to Emma’s father as “this dear old beau of mine” with “all that quaint, old-fashioned politeness;” (Austen 314).

Emma is nevertheless too quick to judge Mrs Elton in relation to her short but quick attachment to Mr Elton and assumes that she may “perhaps [have] wanted a home,” (Austen 281). In fact, this is not the case, since Mrs Elton brings her own fortune to her marriage. Therefore, Mrs Elton is like Emma in not wanting or being in need of ‘fortune’. The similarities continue as Mrs Elton is described by Emma as “extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance;” (Austen 282), which is in fact similar to Emma’s own “evil” (Austen 5) flaws.

This apparent competition between Emma and Mrs Elton progresses as Mrs Elton takes Miss Fairfax under her wings just as Emma did with Miss Smith, and Mrs Elton’s sister Selina did when Mrs Elton’s parents passed away. Unlike Emma though, Mrs Elton has a female role model in her sister, is mature, is married, has connections in the world outside of Highbury and she assists Miss Fairfax in obtaining a position as a governess. In that respect, Mrs Elton has more mature connections, knowledge and independence which she has gained due to her upbringing among the nouveau riche.

Unfortunately, Emma and Mrs Elton do not grow close nor is she part of Emma’s inner circle of “the small band of true friends” (Austen 508). Mrs Elton’s efforts to fit in are in vain due to her persistence in claiming to be part of the Highbury elite by discussing how she was accustomed to “every luxury” (Austen 287) by comparing Maple Grove to Hartfield, disregarding any form of social decorum, being in a different phase of her life as a mature

married woman, and being an intruder in Emma's private sphere. Emma does learn to accept Mrs Elton as being part of her life in the community of Highbury "as her objection was nothing but her very great dislike of Mrs Elton," (Austen 370). Therefore, Mrs Elton assists in Emma's *Bildung* by helping Emma to adapt to change; specifically to change in accepting or tolerating new members of the community with their own manners and standards into her almost exclusive environment.

The continuation of Emma's *Bildung* and adaptation to change is very much linked to the different social status Mrs Elton holds compared to Emma. As a married woman, Mrs Elton receives instant respect in the community despite her bringing "no name, no blood, no alliance." (Austen 192) and despite being "always the first in company," (Austen 290). Emma adapts to this change only on the merit of Mrs Elton's social position as a mature married woman. Due to Mrs Elton status of being married, she is the first to dance at the Crown which affects Emma as she "must submit to stand second to Mrs Elton" (Austen 339) which "was almost enough to make her think of marrying." (Austen 339) and Mrs Elton is also first to receive her carriage after the Box Hill incident. Emma realises that "Mrs Elton had undoubtedly the advantage," (Austen 340).

Even though Mrs Elton appears to be of great help to Miss Fairfax in obtaining a position as governess, the former is less privileged or independent than Emma even though she is married. Claudia L. Johnson points out that "Mrs Elton defers, nominally at least, to the rule of her husband," (124), who, in turn, has improved his life due to her fortune. Mrs Elton herself informs Emma of certain "evils of matrimony." (Austen 283) as she had to leave her home in Bath and has to adjust to a new life as the wife of a vicar in a new community. She refers to her moving to her husband's house as being "transplanted" (Austen 283), and a "retirement" of "parties, balls, plays" (Austen 287).

Mrs Elton therefore represents a generation of married woman who assert some independence due to their fortune gained from economic prosperity. At the same time, her new social position as a married woman within Highbury makes Mrs Elton dependent on her husband and his offering of a home and social life within this community. Through Mrs Elton, Emma learns to adapt to the change this outsider brings, with her nouveau riche manners, her mature status as a married woman, her knowledge of the world outside Highbury and connection to fortune. Emma realises that she is no longer first and unique, which is directly linked to the similarities she shares with Mrs Elton in their flaws. At the same time, Emma is made aware of the advantage and importance of being married regardless of Mrs Elton's lack of decorum. Whereas Emma does eventually learn to adapt to this change in her community, Mrs Elton is reluctant to adapt and according to Marjet Berendsen "will always remain a stranger in Highbury" (107).

3.3 Adolescence – Miss Fairfax

Unlike Miss Bates and Mrs Elton, Miss Fairfax is at a different stage of her life. Like Emma, Miss Fairfax is still an adolescent, albeit it in the later stage of adolescence. Miss Fairfax is the much loved niece of Miss Bates and new protégé of Mrs Elton. Emma and Miss Fairfax share many similarities: the same age, unmarried, grown up without a mother, accomplished in art, well-educated, learn through experience, and finding a role in society. In contrast though, Miss Fairfax is fortunate in having several female role models in her life who offer support, love, and personal education: her loving grandmother Mrs Bates, excellent aunt Miss Bates, surrogate mother Mrs Campbell, surrogate sister Miss Campbell and the role model of Mrs Elton, even if it is short and forced.

Miss Fairfax has not visited Highbury for two years and since then Emma bases her judgement about Miss Fairfax through the encounters with Miss Fairfax's aunt Miss Bates

who talks about her all the time and “was an eternal talker!” (Austen 174). Much to Emma’s dislike everybody praises Miss Fairfax: “she was made such a fuss with by every body!” (Austen 174). Instead of befriending her on the basis of all her good qualities, their shared upbringing, same stage of life as an adolescent and “because their ages were the same, every body had supposed they must be so fond of each other.” (Austen 174), Emma criticises her for her “coldness and reserve” as “these were her reasons – she had no better.” (Austen 174).

As Emma’s flaws are exposed by the conversations around and encounters with Miss Fairfax, her immature reasoning is reflected upon by Emma herself upon their first visit, albeit it very briefly initially. Emma contemplates Miss Fairfax’s “history”, “situation”, “beauty”, she feels “compassion and respect;” (Austen 175). However, “former provocations reappeared” (Austen 175) and on that basis “Emma could not forgive her” (Austen 177).

Merryn Williams adds emphasis to Emma’s unease by explaining that she “transgressed the duty of woman by woman” (Austen 240) when gossiping about Miss Fairfax to a man and therefore trespassing the private sphere of women. However, the ‘situation’ of Miss Fairfax makes Emma realise that Miss Fairfax is “an unprovided woman with no prospects in life” (Watt 117), in need of ‘employment’, obtaining a profession as governess, despite her being educated and superior in the art of singing and playing. This reflection contributes to her development of self as Emma learns to acknowledge the important difference between Jane and herself “when she took in her history, indeed, her situation, as well as her beauty; when she considered what all this elegance was destined to, what she was going to sink from, how she was going to live,” (Austen 175).

In *Educating Women*, Christina De Bellaigue provides a background to the role of the governess in the early nineteenth century. Being a governess was the only profession available to a middle-class woman “without losing caste.” (43) and moving lower on the social scale. The role was seen as an “alternative to marriage” (235). Arnold Kettle, in

Mellor's *Romanticism & Gender*, argues that Jane Austen is known to not favour women working and "insisted that the English women of her day were little better than domestic slaves," (58). In *Emma*, Miss Fairfax is trained to become a governess due to her economic situation: "With the fortitude of a devoted novice, she had resolved at one-and-twenty to complete the sacrifice, and retire from all the pleasures of life, of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope, to penance and mortification for ever." (Austen 172).

When Emma learns why Miss Fairfax has been so cold and reserved, her development progresses from accepting the consequences of 'employment' to the advantage of marriage and social position. Miss Fairfax has secretly been engaged and it is the combination of this secret, of an unapproved match based solely on love, and the effect on her situation which changes Emma's mind about Miss Fairfax: "If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Fairfax's.[']" (Austen 421).

The announcement of the engagement rescues Miss Fairfax of the sacrifices of 'employment' as her "days of insignificance and evil were over." (Austen 423). The insignificance reflects the need for employment and the evil social status of being single. Miss Fairfax will marry for love and therefore Emma thinks that "[']the merit will be all on her's [sic]." (Austen 440). The effect "furnished Emma with more food for unpleasant reflection, by increasing her esteem and compassion, and her sense of past injustice towards Miss Fairfax." (Austen 441). She now cautiously admits to have had "envious feelings" (Austen 441) towards Miss Fairfax.

Emma's journey from adolescence towards maturity then climaxes through her reflections on Miss Fairfax and makes her contemplate her own heart and social position. Miss Fairfax evolves into a mature woman before Emma does. Miss Fairfax gains her independence by barely escaping the governess trade and being engaged to the man she loves instead of marry for the sake of fortune. Emma fears the future before her if "all took place

that might take place among the circle of her friends, Hartfield must be comparatively deserted.” (Austen 442). Emma’s only “consolation [...], was in the resolution of her own better conduct, and the hope that, however inferior in spirit and gaiety might be the following and every future winter of her life to the past, it would yet find her more rational, more acquainted with herself, and leave her less to regret when it were gone.” (Austen 443).

The three female characters confront Emma with her flaws, which are central to her being unable to cope with the change in her life and “in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude.” (Austen 7). This change is a consequence of Miss Taylor’s marriage to Mr Weston and therefore leaving Emma without a female companion. Emma is blind to her community, her peers, herself, her role as a woman, her immaturity and her limitations despite her not being in want of anything, ‘consequence, fortune, employment’. By interacting with a triptych of female characters who are in three stages of their lives, Emma grows from an immature adolescent to a mature adult. She learns to respect unmarried elders as they provide stability to the community (Miss Bates), to adapt to change in a new economic society brought into the community by married nouveau riche women (Mrs Elton), and to accept the consequence of trades available to young adolescent, unmarried women as well as wanting a marriage out of love (Miss Fairfax).

Upon the verge of completion of her successful *Bildung*, that is the psychological development of herself, set within the framework of the marriage plot, Emma fears for her own future as she seems “to have been doomed to blindness” (Austen 445). However, this fear of the future before her – remaining a single woman, immature, caretaker, daughter, sister, aunt, lady of Hartfield and friend without lacking consequence, fortune or employment - removes her blindness to her own heart. This internal, psychological journey is the crucial stage in Emma’s *Bildung*. As a consequence, Emma is rewarded and secures her own future by marrying the man she loves.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that three female characters living in three different stages of their lives (middle age, adulthood, adolescence) are of crucial importance to the development of Emma's self after Emma is forced to deal with change after Miss Taylor's marriage. The journey from blindness to insight, set within the genre of the female Bildungsroman (self) and framework of the marriage plot (social), has allowed Emma to grow. Emma's Bildung from an immature, adolescent female with flaws to a mature adult is facilitated by Miss Bates, Mrs Elton and Miss Fairfax whose lives are affected by 'consequence, fortune, employment'. Emma learns by interacting with these women, who are different but also share similarities. These three important women lead Emma to a greater insight into herself, make her aware of her own circumstances, realise her role as a woman in relation to herself but also in relation to others.

Throughout Emma's journey, she has learned to respect others, to adapt to change within her community, realise the privilege of her position, reflect and accept her own heart. Thereby, Emma has found herself and her social role within the private and public sphere of her community, resulting in a secure future for herself in Highbury. Therefore, the completion of her journey emphasises that her Bildung comes first and foremost, and marriage serves as the reward when Emma has completed her development of self. The current findings add to an ever growing body of knowledge regarding Jane Austen's novel *Emma* and the pivotal role of female characters in it.

Finally, a number of limitations require to be considered. For the purpose of this thesis only one novel, *Emma*, by Jane Austen, was used as a primary source. In addition, a selection was made from the vast array of secondary sources discussing the journey of development, Bildung, of the female protagonist and illustrating the psychological transformation of Emma and the role of women set within the nineteenth century.

In future research, it might be interesting to extend this research and explore the concept of blindness and insight further in comparing other characters found in novels by other female authors of Jane Austen's time set within the genre of the female Bildungsroman and framework of the marriage plot.

Works Cited

- Abel, E., M. Hirsch, and E. Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983.
- Austen, Jane. *Emma*. London: Penguin Classic, 2006.
- Berendsen, Marjet. *Reading Character in Jane Austen's Emma*. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., 1991.
- Bradbrook, Frank W. *Jane Austen: Emma*. London: Edward Arnold LTD., 1961.
- Bradbury, Nicola. Introduction. Austen, Jane. *Emma*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited., 2007.
- Buckley, J. H. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Colella, Silvana. "Intimations of Mortality: The Malthusian Plot in Early Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24.1 (2002): 17-32. Web. 30 November 2012.
- De Bellaigue, Christina. *Educating Women: schooling and identity in England and France, 1800-1867*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2007.
- Felski, Rita. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Ed. and Trans. Eric A. Blackall and Victor Lange. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother-Daughter Plot*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Hoffman Baruch, Elaine. "The Feminine Bildungsroman: Education through Marriage" *The Massachusetts Review* 22.3 (1981): 335-357. Web. 30 November 2012.
- Hughes, R.E. "The Education of Emma Woodhouse" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16.1 (1961): 69-74. Web. 05 November 2012.

- Jackson, Karin. "The Dilemma of Emma: Moral, Ethical, and Spiritual Values" *Jane Austen Society of North America* 21.2 (2000). Web. 10 January 2013.
- Johnson, Claudia L.
Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Johnson, C.L. and C. Tuite, eds. *A Companion to Jane Austen*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009.
- Kirkham, Margaret. *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*. London: The Athlone Press, 1997.
- Korba, Susan M. "'Improper and dangerous distinctions': female relationships and erotic domination in 'Emma'" *Studies in the Novel* 29.2 (1997): 139-163. Web. 20 December 2012.
- Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century: Dorothy Richardson, Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf*. New York: Peter Lang, 1986.
- Magee, William H. "The Courtship and Marriage Plot in Jane Austen's Novels" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 17.2 (1987): 198-208. Web. 20 December 2013.
- Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism & Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Moretti, Franco. *The way of the world: the Bildungsroman in European culture*. London: Verso, 1987.
- Perry, Ruth. *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Reef, Catherine. "Jane Austen's Great Subject: Growing Up", 05 Sep. 2009. Web. 28 December 2012.

Ross, Cathy. "Separate Spheres or Shared Dominions?" *Transformation* 23.4 (2006): 228–35.

Web. 05 November 2012.

Sabiston, Elizabeth. *Private Sphere to World Stage from Austen to Eliot*. Aldershot and

Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008. Web. 06 January 2013

Shaffer, Julie. "Not Subordinate: Empowering Women in the Marriage Plot" *Criticism* 34.1

(1992): 51-73. Web. 28 December 2012.

Stewart, Maaja A. *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions*. Athens, GA: University of

Georgia Press, 1993.

Stone, Donald D. "Sense and Semantics in Jane Austen" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25.1

(1970): 31-50. Web. 10 January 2013.

Trevelyan, G.M. *English Social History*. UK: Pelican Books, 1967.

Vickery, Amanda. *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's lives in Georgian England*. New

Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988.

Watt, Ian, ed. *Jane Austen: a collection of critical essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

Williams, Merryn. *Women in the English novel, 1800-1900*. Basingstoke and London: The

Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984.