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"Improper and dangerous distinctions": female relationships and erotic domination in 'Emma.' (Jane Austen)

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Abstract: Emma Woodhouse, the main character in Jane Austen's novel 'Emma,' is sexually attracted to women. Emma's sexual identity was created in a patriarchal world, where men have all erotic power. Since she cannot openly express her feelings about women, and since she wants to control others' lives, the ending of the novel with heterosexual pairings forces her into a life as a "normal" woman and wife.

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She always declares she will never marry, which, of course, means just nothing at all. But I have no idea that she has yet ever seen a man she cared for. It would not be a bad thing for her to be very much in love with a proper object.

Intimacy between Miss Fairfax and me is quite out of the question. -Jane Austen Emma

Austen critic LeRoy W. Smith asserts that, "contrary to the traditional view, Austen does not avoid the subject of sex in her fiction," that, in fact, "she is well aware of sexuality's powerful role in human behaviour."(1) Similarly; in *Sex and Sensibility*, Jean H. Hagstrum warns readers of Jane Austen against allowing the author's "considerable modesty" to obscure "the real passion that seethes beneath the controlled and witty surfaces" of her novels.(2) He points out that "anyone so seemingly cool and rational has of course invited speculation about what is being kept out of sight" (p. 269). The critical debate over Austen's novel *Emma* may be seen as a case in point. For years, critics of *Emma* have been circling around the apparently disconcerting issue of the protagonist's sexuality. Claudia Johnson finds that "(determining the common denominator in much *Emma* criticism requires no particular cleverness. *Emma* offends the sexual sensibilities of many of her critics. Transparently misogynist, sometimes even homophobic, subtexts often bob to the surface of the criticism about her."(3) Johnson cites Edmund Wilson's ominous allusions and Marvin Mudrick's dark hints (p. 123) about *Emma*'s infatuations with and preference for other women as examples of the unease aroused by this particular Austen heroine. In examining these critical responses, she concludes that much of the discomfort generated by the novel results from the fact that *Emma* "is not sexually submissive to and contingent upon men" (p. 123), and that she "assumes her own entitlement to independence and power--power not only over her own destiny, but, what is harder to tolerate, power over the destinies of others--and in so doing she poaches on what is felt to be male turf" (p. 125).

Certainly *Emma*'s adoption of the masculine role and the implications of her usurpation of social power are contentious issues. But it is the doggedly recurrent (yet inevitably dismissed) suggestion of *Emma*'s possible lesbianism that seems to arouse the most

critical discomfort. It becomes clear upon examining Smith's and Hagstrum's readings of Austen that the passions "seething" beneath her "controlled and witty surfaces" are seen to be exclusively heterosexual passions. Hagstrum finds no evidence in Austen's works of the "perverse" lesbian sensuality that he briefly examines in other eighteenth-century novels,(4) and which he refers to as "morbidity" or "irregularities." Smith states that Austen "controls her use [of sex] to fit her settings, avoid offence and keep attention where she feels it belongs. One wonders if it is not Austen's critics who are determined to keep attention where they feel it belongs."(5) Although several recent analyses have posited a more sexually radical Austen,(6) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's characterization of the bulk of Austen scholarship as critically timid seems largely justified.(7) For the most part, approaches to Austen conform with "the vast preponderance of scholarship and teaching ... even among liberal academics [which] does simply neither ask nor know. At the most expansive, there is a series of dismissals of such questions."(8) Accordingly, while Christine St. Peter challenges readers of Austen to "discover previously unremarked aspects in her treatment of women's relations,"(9) her response to the suggestion that Emma's sexual orientation is homosexual rather than heterosexual is emphatically and contemptuously dismissive:

In my rejection of a narrowly defined marital love I do not intend to introduce here a parallel error of discovering in Austen the crypto-lesbian. I know well that in our post-Freudian critical world any mention of intimacy between women conjures up an image of sexual bonding. Austen was aware of this possibility, too, and quite severely rejects it. (p. 475)

Claudia Johnson herself sees the suggestion of Emma's possible homosexual proclivities as nothing more than the misogynistic projections of critics who are "at a loss to account for how Emma could like Harriet more than she likes Mr. Elton."(10) While Johnson's point is well taken, it illustrates the limitations of a feminist perspective that remains resolutely heterocentric. Critics consistently resist what Sedgwick refers to as "the rich, conflictual erotic complication of a homoerotic matrix"(11) present in Austen, refusing to take seriously the possibility of an alternative to the prescriptive heterosexual paradigm. The fact that Emma possesses a measure of social and sexual power, and that she is a woman who, in a number of significant ways, "plays man"(12) throughout the novel, implies as much about Emma's place in the novel's sexual configurations as it does about her appropriation of masculine social prerogatives. Her relationships with Miss Taylor (later Mrs. Weston) and Harriet Smith exemplify her attraction to and infatuation with docile and malleable members of her own sex, women over whom she exerts control and influence, and in whose sexual destinies she evinces a passionate and active involvement; and her relationships with the male characters in the novel--Mr. Knightley, Frank

Churchill, and even Mr. Elton--serve to demonstrate Emma's marked sexual indifference to men, and, more importantly, her strong sexual identification with them.

Feminist scholar Carole S. Vance suggests that

The external system of sexual hierarchy is replicated within each of us, and herein lies its power. Internalized cultural norms enforce the status quo. As each of us hesitates to admit deviations from the system of sexual hierarchy, nonconformity remains hidden, invisible, and apparently rare. The prevailing system retains hegemony and power, appearing to be descriptive as well as prescriptive, a statement of what is as well as what should be.(13)

Thus, according to Vance "feminism must be a movement that speaks to sexuality ... We cannot be cowardly, pretending that feminism is not sexually radical. Being a sex radical at this time, as at most, is less a matter of what you do, and more a matter of what you are willing to think, entertain, and question" p. 23, [emphasis mine]). Accordingly, I propose an investigation of the controversial issue of Emma's erotic sub-text that poses the following questions: How do Emma's relationships with the various male and female characters in the novel reveal the nature of her sexual orientation?(14) What are the underlying dynamics that animate her sexual identity?(15) And finally, and perhaps most importantly, why must analyses of this particular heroine ultimately reinscript a normative heterosexual identity? Why shouldn't Emma be a lesbian?(16)

Susan Morgan, in "Emma Woodhouse and the Charms of Imagination," offers some insights into the psychology informing Emma's relationships. She suggests that Emma is a novel about "the fact that people have an internal life of their own, and that the recognition of this personal existence, this self in someone else, is the necessary requisite for morality and for love."(17) She observes that "within her small world [Emma] knows no boundaries, recognizes no limits. And because there is no point for Emma where her sphere of influence ends there is no room for anyone else's to begin" (p. 37); as a result, Emma constantly "violate[s] the inner lives of the people she tries to control" (p. 46). The unconsummated friendship between Emma and Jane Fairfax is central to her argument: "Emma's inability to go outside herself and grant the value of others must cost her something. And Jane Fairfax is the measure of what Emma loses" (p. 42). Ultimately, Morgan concludes that Emma is about the unfolding of an "educational process" in which the heroine learns "to accept her limits and the inviolability of others" (p. 46). Her analysis, despite its avoidance of the sexual/erotic forces afoot within the text,(18) provides a convenient point of departure from which to attempt an investigation of the complexity of Emma's sexual identity: Morgan has identified, albeit unwittingly, both the

erotic dynamic at work in *Emma*, which I believe to be a subliminal form of "erotic domination" as delineated by psychoanalytic critic Jessica Benjamin,(19) and the principal erotic relationship within the novel, which, I will argue, is the one that exists between Emma Woodhouse and Jane Fairfax, our heroine's real object of desire. In the discussion which follows, I will examine this concept of "erotic domination" as I see it operating covertly within *Emma*, focusing on several issues that I believe are central to an attempt to understand the complex construction of Emma's sexuality: her relationships with Miss Taylor, Harriet, and Mr. Knightley; her identification with the "male" sexual role, particularly in terms of sexual object choice and the wielding of power; and her involvement with Jane Fairfax, the erotic relationship around which all the others may be seen to revolve. It is this relationship that, for various reasons, is unavailable to Emma throughout most of the novel, and that reveals, finally, the insurmountability of the sexual and social limitations that circumscribe her. It is Jane's ultimate (and, I would argue, necessary) inaccessibility that leads Emma back to Mr. Knightley. Alice Chandler has noted that "marriage is : ... a sexual act in [Austen's] novels--usually a reconciliation between a man and a woman whose inner feelings and conscious knowledge have been at odds throughout the story";(20) ultimately, Emma does retreat from "playing man" and marries Mr. Knightley. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the real "reconciliation" in this novel is not between Emma and Mr. Knightley at all, but rather between Emma and Jane--and that, despite this reconciliation, they must then part. Each ends up with her respective husband, and the heterosexual social order is maintained.

However, an examination of the various sexual relationships in *Emma* reveals that this heterosexual social order--"the normal" order, as opposed to "the perverse"(21)--is governed by the same underlying principle that animates Emma's amatory relationships. It has been noted that, in Austen's novels, "love and power cannot be separated as ruling independently in the private and political orders."(22) Accordingly, Sandra Lee Bartky points out that since "the subordination of women by men is pervasive ... it orders the relationship of the sexes in every area of life ... a sexual politics of domination is as much in evidence in the private spheres of the family, ordinary social life, and sexuality as in the traditionally public spheres of government and the economy."(23) It would then follow that the dynamic of erotic domination, a concept that "mingles love with issues of control and submission ... flows beneath the surface of `normal' adult love" and runs "throughout all relationships of arousal";(24) in *Emma*, it permeates all sexual relationships, both heterosexual and homoerotic. Indeed, Benjamin contends that domination "is not a nasty additive to nice eroticism but its essence, for, in patriarchies, domination and submission constitute erotic excitement."(25) Thus, the structure of Emma's intercourse with other women, epitomized in the paradigmatic relationship with Harriet Smith, is mirrored in each of the novel's heterosexual attachments, including those of Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, John Knightley and Isabella, as well as that of Emma and Mr. Knightley. The way in which the desire to dominate is expressed varies in each of the relationships: with Mr. Knightley, it is through overt control and the assertion of superiority; with Frank, it manifests in cruel games and the tormenting of his partner; with Emma, it is through manipulation. The submissive partner in each relationship is usually female, a "sweet, docile, grateful" young woman like Harriet(26)--or a "worshipping" wife like Isabella (p. 92). Nancy

Chodorow points out that "[w]omen find it difficult to integrate agency and love and often accept whatever love they can get in Achange for identification with and love from a man"--for women, this often involves "submission, overvaluation, masochism, and the borrowing of subjectivity from the lover."(27) Mr. Knightley, who is wont to express his views of relationships in language permeated with such terms as "submitting" and "subjection," affirms this view of the woman's role in a discussion with Mrs. Weston, in which he characterizes her as the ideal wife, one trained in "'the very material matrimonial point of submitting your own will, and doing as you were bid'" (p. 38); he assures her that, as a consequence, had he been asked by Mr. Weston "'to recommend him a wife, I should certainly have named Miss Taylor'" (p. 38). Ironically, Mr. Knightley credits her relationship with Emma for having turned her into such "an excellent wife" (p. 38)--as Emma's intimate companion, she has been well-trained in the role of the submissive partner.

Typically it is the male partner who occupies the dominant position in the erotic relationship. Susan Contratto observes that "Power has a gender: charismatic power with its excitement, visibility, and privilege is male."(28) Thus, Mr. John Knightley is said to be "no doubt ... in the habit of receiving" his wife's "pleased assent" (p. 113) to his dicta, despite his tendency to "act ungracious, or say a severe thing" (p. 93); Mr. Weston's marriage to Miss Taylor gives him "the pleasantest proof of its being a great deal better to chuse than to be chosen, to excite gratitude than to feel it" (p. 17); Frank Churchill, who behaves with "shameful, insolent neglect" of his betrothed, and, worse, with "such apparent devotion" to Emma, "as it, would have been impossible for any woman of sense to endure" (p. 441), exits the novel with the woman of his choice, having been unable to "weary her by negligent treatment" (p. 428); and Mr. Knightley, with his "downright, decided, commanding sort of manner" (p. 34) and his fondness for "bending little minds" (p. 147), acknowledges having "'blamed ... and lectured'" Emma throughout their relationship, conceding that she has "'borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it'" (p. 430). Emma, however, is able to "bear" Mr. Knightley's attempts to dominate her because she does not recognize his right to dictate to her, and when he refuses to forgive her for contravening his wishes, she is "sorry, but could not repent" (p. 69). Her will--her sense of the legitimacy of her own power--matches his at almost every turn.

Emma occupies a rather unique and peculiar position in the novel's relationship paradigm. LeRoy Smith finds that, in Austen's fiction, "some women, instead of acceding to dependency, sustain their self-esteem by a compensatory striving for power that takes the form of imitation of the dominant male."(29) Indeed, Austen's creation of Emma at times seems to directly address the kinds of questions that Jessica Benjamin poses in her examination of sexual power: "Why does femininity appear to be linked to passivity? And why do men appear to have exclusive rights to sexual agency, so that women seek their desire in men, hoping to have it recognised through the agency of an other?"(30) As Smith points out

The hard truth about Austen's world is the fact of male domination.

Women, characteristically, are devalued ... Their social status is narrowly and rigidly defined; passivity is their expected state. Any attempt by them to acquire or exercise power is viewed by men as "manipulative, disruptive, illegitimate, or unimportant." But the female's craving for power is as deeply rooted as the male's [emphasis mine].(31)

Emma firmly rejects the notion of passivity as her "expected state." She is laughingly dismissive of Harriet's wonder that, with all of her charming qualities, she "should not be married, or going to be married!" (p. 84), explaining that "My being charming, Harriet, is not quite enough to induce me to marry; I must find other people charming--one other person at least. And I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all" (p. 84). It is clear that Emma recognizes and relishes the power and autonomy of her somewhat anomalous position when she asserts that she has "none of the usual inducements of women to marry"--that she would, in fact, "be a fool to change such a situation as mine" (p. 84). Austen has placed Emma Woodhouse in the position of sexual dominance usually associated with men. What is more, she possesses a considerable degree of power, which is almost exclusively associated with "male mastery"(32) "Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want; I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield" (p. 84); Mr. Knightley remarks disapprovingly that "ever since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all" (p. 37). Arguably, Emma wields a degree of power equivalent to that of any of the male characters within the novel; more, in some cases, as demonstrated by her rejection of Mr. Elton, and her proven ability to deprive Robert Martin of his choice of a wife. This power is one that comes with social prestige, financial security, and a character allowed to develop without the restraints usually imposed upon women; in short, power that usually comes with the label of the male gender. However, Emma is free to exercise her need to control as long she violates only the selfhood of the women with whom she conducts relationships, and not the social boundaries that circumscribe them. Ultimately, Emma will discover that the power she possesses will not allow her to avoid the fate that she attempts to arrange for everyone but herself; her claim to having "very little intention of ever marrying at all" (p. 84) is one she will have to retreat from, once she realizes that if "all took place that might take place among the circle of her friends, Hartfield must be comparatively deserted; and she left to cheer her father with the spirits only of ruined happiness" (p. 422). Once everyone is settled in the security of heterosexual coupledness, Emma will have no outlet for her desire, no object upon which to exert erotic control--her power will no longer matter anything.

In Emma, power and sexuality are inextricably linked, and it is Emma's desire for and limited exertion of erotic mastery that provide the framework for Austen's narrative.

Susan Morgan identifies Emma's "problem" as a failure to "see the boundaries of oneself and the separate life of others." (33) Similarly, Jessica Benjamin explains "erotic domination" as the failure to recognize the Other "as like, although separate, from oneself"; at the most basic level, it is an impulse imbued with the individual's desire for mutual recognition, for selfhood, and for transcendence. Erotic domination has its psychological origins in an individual's earliest experience, in the failure to achieve "true differentiation." This is a somewhat paradoxical process in which the individual acquires a sense of identity through the development of the ability to see herself and others as independent and distinct beings and learns that her acts and intentions can have an impact on others, and theirs on her; at the same time, the individual is dependent upon the recognition provided by her earliest care-giver, usually the mother, in order to reaffirm this autonomous identity. Benjamin explains that the problem of erotic domination begins with the denial of this dependency--this need for recognition from the maternal Other:

To escape from this conflict it is all too tempting to imagine that one can become independent without recognizing the other person as an equally autonomous agent in her ... own right. One need only imagine that the other person is not separate--she belongs to me. I control and possess her." (34)

The resulting relationship is one in which the dominant partner must subjugate the submissive partner as a means of establishing her own autonomy through the negation of the other person's. In Emma, this dynamic is not manifested physically between Emma and anyone else; rather, Emma's need to dominate the women who serve as her objects of desire, to repudiate dependency "while attempting to avoid the consequent feeling of aloneness" (p. 285), is sublimated in her attempts to direct and control their sexual proclivities and to determine the final configurations of their heterosexual unions. In this way, she is able to take an erotic sort of pleasure in exercising mastery, without transgressing the sexual norms of her society or acknowledging the possibility of such desire.

In Emma Woodhouse's case, the failure to differentiate may be seen to have its roots in her early childhood: "Her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses; and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection" (p. 5). Miss Taylor, although occupying the maternal space in Emma's life during her formative years, is a problematic figure. In effect, she plays the role of the "permissive parent," as does Mr. Woodhouse, "a most affectionate, indulgent father" (p. 5). We learn that "[e]ven before Miss Taylor had ceased to hold the nominal office of governess, the mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint" (p. 5); Emma becomes accustomed to "doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own" (p. 5). Benjamin explains that if

the first other we encounter is our mother ... then it is through our ...
impact on her that we experience ourselves as existing and our intentions
as meaningful and potent. If our acts have no impact on her, we feel
powerless. But if we overpower her, there is no one to recognize us.
When we affect her it is necessary that she does not simply dissolve
under the impact of our actions ... If, for example, the mother sets no
limits for the child, if she obliterates herself and her own interests ...
she ceases to perform the role of other person ... If the mother does not
at some point remove herself from the child's control she becomes simply
an object, which no longer exists outside the self. (P. 284)

It is clear that Emma has come to objectify the maternal figure of Miss Taylor, a woman who "had devoted all her powers to attach and amuse her" for sixteen years (p. 6). Emma considers her an essential appendage to herself, "a friend and companion such as few possessed" (p. 6); and it is apparent in the first conversation we witness between Emma, Mr. Woodhouse, and Mr. Knightley, that Miss Taylor has long been considered a "possession" of the Woodhouse household (pp. 10-13). Her function has been "to please" both Emma and her father (pp. 10-11), a function that she is now expected to perform for her new husband. It is significant that Emma claims to have orchestrated the union between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston: "If I had not promoted Mr. Weston's visits here, and given many little encouragements, and smoothed many little matters, it might not have come to anything after all" (p. 13). Emma's view of Miss Taylor's marriage is one that privileges her own role and degree of control rather than that of the actual participants, illustrated by her claim that "I made up my mind on the subject" (p. 12); she sees the marriage primarily in terms of how it involves and affects herself, much as she sees the objectified person of Miss Taylor. In effect, she is unable to maintain "the essential tension of the contradictory impulses to assert the self... without effacing the other." It is this "dialectic of control" upon which the achievement of true differentiation depends: "[I]f I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist." [35] Benjamin draws upon Freud and Hegel to explain how the breakdown of this tension leads to the desire for domination:

According to Freud the earliest self wants to be omnipotent, or rather it
has the fantasy that it is so. Subsequent omnipotence fantasies are seen
as regressions to this necessary first stage. Hegel says that

self-consciousness wants to be absolute ... to be recognized by the other in order to place itself in the world and make itself the world. The I wants to prove this at the expense of the other; it wants to think itself the only one; it abjures dependency.

For Hegel and Freud, then, the self gives up omnipotence only when it realizes its dependency ... The subject discovers that if it completely devours or controls the other, it can no longer get what it originally wanted [recognition]. So the subject learns better. But although the subject may relinquish the wish to control or devour the other completely, it does so unwillingly, with a persistent if unconscious wish to fulfill the old omnipotence fantasy. This is a far cry from a real appreciation of the other's existence as a person. The truth in this view of the self seems to be that acknowledging dependency is painful, and that denying recognition to others because of this pain leads to domination ... predicated on the denial of the other person's independent subjectivity and autonomy ... It makes the other person an object but retains possession of her. (Pp. 284-85)

Morgan observes that Emma "really sees herself as a director and the other people around her as extensions of her will";(36) her relationships with the other women in the novel-- Miss Taylor, Harriet Smith, and Jane Fairfax--are all shaped by the underlying desire for control and domination. When combined with her passionate and obsessive responses to and interest in each of the women, particularly in their individual sexual relationships, a picture of Emma Woodhouse's own sexual identity begins to form.

Emma's erotic predilection for members of her own sex can be traced throughout the novel and in each of the relationships she has with other women, and it is in these relationships that the underlying dynamics of erotic domination are most in evidence. Emma clearly has identified with the dominant role in the "self-other relationship,"(37) a role that Benjamin suggests is usually occupied by the male, while both Miss Taylor and

Harriet Smith can be seen to occupy the corresponding submissive role, the "traditionally female side of selfhood" with its characteristics of "dependency, connectedness, [and] yielding" (p. 294). Emma's experience of the failure of differentiation, "the core experience underlying erotic domination," while different from "the male experience of differentiation," has in common with it several important factors. During the formation of male gender identity, the male child repudiates the mother once it is discovered that he "cannot be, or become, her":

The repudiation of the mother ... has meant that she is not recognized by the child in the normal course of differentiation. She is not seen as an independent person, another subject, but as something other ... as an instrument or object, as less-than-human. An objectifying attitude comes to replace the earlier interactions of infancy.(38)

It is the male experience of differentiation that Benjamin links to the tendency to assert control, to make "the other an object and instrument of one's own will" (p. 293)--to subject her to erotic domination. Yet Emma Woodhouse's early childhood experience of the Other, the self-obliterating maternal figure, is one that has placed her in a peculiarly similar position: she also desires the submission of the other, and the mastery that comes with erotic domination. Benjamin points out that the submissive position is generally associated with the female and the dominant with the male and that the basis for this division is found in the mother's "lack of subjectivity for her children." However, the fact that "actual men and women often play the opposite role does not contradict this association. It affirms rather that erotic transgression is an opportunity to express what is ordinarily denied" (p. 294). And, as LeRoy Smith notes, Emma's development appears to be further complicated by her

identification with the position or role of a model that represents a fantasised projection into the situation and behaviour of the model. The model attracts emulation because of his or her role or status ... Emma's most influential model is a male figure, Knightley, whose position and role she comes to wish for herself.(39)

Throughout the novel, there are many references to Emma's being identified in a distinctly "male" position, often by other characters. During a discussion about Mrs. Weston's marriage, John Knightley suggests that "'You and I, Emma, will venture to take the part of the poor husband ... the claims of the man may very likely strike us with equal force'" (p. 95). At times, Emma herself seems to speak from a "male" point-of-view, as

when she asserts "I know that such a girl as Harriet is exactly what every man delights in--what at once bewitches his senses and satisfies his judgment" (p. 64); she later passionately defends the absent Frank Churchill to Mr. Knightley, saying "I wish you would try to understand what an amiable young man may be likely to feel in directly opposing those, whom as child and boy he has been looking up to all his life" (p. 148), a statement that reflects her own position in her adversarial relationship with Mr. Knightley. But it is in her dealings with Harriet where Emma's behavior seems most "male." Emma considers Harriet "a valuable addition to her privileges," and is "quite convinced of Harriet Smith's being ... exactly the something which her home required" (p. 26), sentiments reminiscent of a traditionally proprietorial male attitude and more appropriate to a successful young man deciding the time is right to acquire a wife. Emma, in fact, manages to "win" Harriet away from a male rival. When she comes to realize that Robert Martin poses a serious threat to her relationship with Harriet, her amused tolerance of Harriet's connection to the Martin family changes, and "other feelings arose" (p. 27). Emma coolly manipulates the girl into re-evaluating Martin's desirability, and although she encourages her to compare the "very clownish" (p. 32) manners of the young farmer to those of Mr. Knightley, Mr. Weston, and Mr. Elton, it is Emma, and not any of Harriet's more lofty male acquaintances, whom Martin is being matched against. Later, when, Martin has proposed, Emma successfully brings about Harriet's refusal of him:

"You must be the best judge of your own happiness. If you prefer Mr. Martin to every other person; if you think him the most agreeable man you have ever been in company with, why should you hesitate? You blush, Harriet.--Does any body else occur to you at this moment under such a definition? Harriet, Harriet, do not deceive yourself ... At this moment whom are you thinking of?"

The symptoms were favourable.--Instead of answering, Harriet turned away confused, and stood thoughtfully by the fire ... Emma waited the result with impatience, but not without strong hopes. (P. 53)

Emma makes it very clear to Harriet in the ensuing conversation that her acceptance of Martin would have precluded further intimacy: "I must have given you up" (p. 54). The choice Harriet makes is between intimacy with herself, or marriage to Martin--and, in this instance, Emma, not Robert Martin, "gets the girl."

Moreover, Emma seems to be impervious to the idea of being attractive/attracted to members of the opposite sex. She is at first amused at the idea of Mr. Elton as a possible

suitor: "'Me!' she replied with a smile of astonishment, are you imagining me to be Mr. Elton's object? ... What an idea!" (p. 112). While it is true that Emma's incredulity is based as much on her specious desire for Elton to love Harriet, and her belief that his social inferiority precludes his aiming as high as herself, it is odd that someone of her physical beauty and accomplishments should never even consider herself a potential object of male sexual attraction. In projecting her own feelings about Harriet onto the various men of their acquaintance, she instead repeatedly imagines Harriet as such an object, despite the fact that, except for Robert Martin and Emma herself, no one in the novel evinces any sexual interest in a girl described as merely "'pretty, and ... good tempered, and that is all'" (p. 61).

Other characters in the novel notice Emma's curious sexual inaccessibility: Frank Churchill, despite the flirtation he indulges in with Emma, admits that "'Amiable and delightful as Miss Woodhouse is, she never gave me the idea of a young woman likely to be attached'" (p. 438). Her relationship with Frank is one which elicits nothing but the most superficial response from Emma, and begins, in her head, before she has even met him. It is the idea of Frank, rather than the flesh-and-blood reality, which appeals to her. Significantly, she is said to have "frequently thought--especially since his father's marriage with Miss Taylor--that if she were to marry, he was the very person to suit her" (p. 119). She convinces herself that she "'must be in love; I should be the oddest creature in the world if I were not--for a few weeks at least'" (p. 262); but she is content "'not [to] persuade myself to feel more than I do. I am quite enough in love. I should be sorry to be more'" (pp. 264-65). Her ultimate desire regarding Frank and "the progress and close of their attachment" is that "she refused him. Their affection was always to subside into friendship ... they were to part" (p. 264). When she later confesses to Mr. Knightley that there was really nothing to the relationship with Frank, she says that, "'in short, I was somehow or other safe from him'" (p. 427), the implication being that it is her unrecognized love for Mr. Knightley that has rendered her "safe" from Frank's charms. However, there is little evidence in the novel to suggest that Emma feels any genuine sexual interest in anyone of the opposite sex. In speaking to Harriet of the possibility of falling in love with a man, she states that it will have to be "'somebody very superior to any one I have seen yet, to be tempted ... I would rather not be tempted. I cannot really change for the better'" (p. 84). Yet she has "seen" Mr. Knightley all of her life, and she is only "tempted" when her other options have been exhausted.

Emma exercises these other options through her involvements with members of her own sex, in her attempts to establish a form of erotic mastery. In a relationship of erotic domination, "[o]ne person maintains ... her boundary, and one allows her boundary to be broken"(40)--this seems an accurate description of the sort of dynamic that Emma strives to establish in her relationships with other women. For the most part, she achieves mastery through manipulation, as when she subtly maneuvers the gullible Harriet into spurning Robert Martin's offer of marriage. However, at times she resorts to more overt methods, as when she joins with Frank in humiliating Jane at Hartfield, in an attempt to punish her for her reserve. From the outset of the novel, it is clear that there is a pattern to Emma's choice of female company: she is attracted to women who, like Miss Taylor, possess a "mildness of ... temper" (p. 5), who defer to Emma's will, and who are

"peculiarly interested in herself, in every pleasure, every scheme of hers" (p. 6). These qualities are even more exaggerated in Harriet Smith, described as a "humble, grateful, little girl" (p. 25) whom Emma can mold:

She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers. (Pp. 23-24)

One is reminded of Mr. Weston's satisfaction in "its being a great deal better to chuse than to be chosen, to excite gratitude than to feel it" (p. 17) in his own choice of a sexual partner. Miss Taylor's friendship with Emma has consisted of "submitting [her] own will, and doing as [she was] bid" (p. 38); Harriet comes to "understand the force of influence" (p. 31) as wielded by Emma, whose resolution of "driving ... out of Harriet's head" (p. 34) any desire or attachment Harriet might feel towards anyone Emma deems unsuitable seems to her perfectly within her rights. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in "Female Changelessness; Or What Do Women Want?", states: "What do women want? Ideal women want whatever men want them to want." (41) In considering Emma's relationship with Harriet, we could ask: "What does a woman chosen by Emma Woodhouse want? Whatever Emma wants her to want." Accordingly, Emma seems most to love Harriet when she is most effusively humble and compliant:

"You, who have been the best friend I ever had in my life!--Want gratitude to you!--Nobody is equal to you!--I care for nobody as I do for you!--Oh! Miss Woodhouse, how ungrateful I have been!"

Such expressions, assisted as they were by every thing that

look and manner could do, made Emma feel that she had never loved

Harriet so well, nor valued her affection so highly before. (Pp. 268-69)

It is significant that Harriet seems to value her relationship with Emma far more than she values a romantic union with Robert Martin. When Emma reveals to her that such a union would have destroyed the possibility of any further intercourse between them, Harriet is "aghast"; she "had not surmised her own danger, but the idea of it struck her forcibly . . . 'What an escape! Dear Miss Woodhouse, I would not give up the pleasure and honour of being intimate with you for anything in the world ... It would have killed me'" (pp. 53-54). Interestingly, in keeping with the underlying sexual dynamic that pervades the novel,

Harriet's willingness to defer to Emma in all things, to place her in the position of prominence usually occupied by the male suitor or husband, ends when Harriet believes herself beloved by someone whom she perceives as more powerful than Emma--Mr. Knightley.

Emma's attachments to her particular female friends are passionate and somewhat obsessive. Miss Taylor's absence "would be felt every hour of every day" (p. 6), and Emma wonders how she will be able "to bear the change?--It was true that her friend was going only half a mile from them; but Emma was aware that great must be the difference between a Mrs. Weston only half a mile from them, and a Miss Taylor in the house" (pp. 6-7). Certainly Miss Taylor's marriage, despite Emma's self-congratulatory claim of having made the match herself, is an impediment to Emma's desire for dominance, since, as Mrs. Weston, she is no longer subject to Emma's control. Emma must needs find a replacement for Miss Taylor--this will prove to be a pattern in her erotic fixations. As the focus shifts from her feelings of loss at Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston, to her growing interest in Harriet Smith, the language Austen employs seems to become increasingly sexual. The relationship that Emma had shared with Miss Taylor is described as that of "friend and friend very mutually attached" (p. 5). It is replaced with something that is described much more overtly in terms that traditionally evoke the romantic heterosexual relationship. Emma's initial interest in Harriet is a very physical one: "Miss Smith was a girl of seventeen whom Emma ... had long felt an interest in, on account of her beauty" (p. 22); "She was a very pretty girl, and her beauty happened to be of a sort which Emma particularly admired" (p. 23); on several occasions, we not only find Emma "busy in admiring those soft blue eyes" (p. 24) of her favorite's, but assuring Harriet that her "soft eyes shall chuse their own time for beaming" if Harriet will but "Trust to me" (p. 76). A particularly charged scene between the two women occurs after Emma has "decoded" Mr. Elton's riddle:

"Dear Miss Woodhouse"--and "Dear Miss Woodhouse," was all that Harriet, with many tender embraces could articulate at first; but when they did arrive at something more like conversation, it was sufficiently clear to her friend that she saw, felt, anticipated, and remembered just as she ought. (P. 74)

Significantly, Austen's language here anticipates that used in the romantic declaration scene between Emma and Mr. Knightley, where it is Emma who ultimately finds herself saying and doing "[j]ust what she ought" (p. 431). After all, a lady--a heterosexual lady, that is--always does.

Emma's feelings about Harriet become increasingly possessive; her remarks concerning Harriet are indicative of the way in which she views the younger woman in relation to herself: "The business was finished, and Harriet safe" (p. 55); "Now I am secure of you

for ever" (p. 53); "We will not be parted. A woman is not to marry a man merely because she is asked" (p. 54). Consequently, Emma's desire for Harriet to attach herself to Mr. Elton, although an alliance that would "confirm our intimacy forever" (p. 74), is somewhat questionable. On the one hand, since Emma cannot actually "have" Harriet herself, the power to decide who does in some measure satisfies her unexpressed sexual desire. As well, Harriet's connection to someone whom Emma will be able to interact with socially will ensure Harriet's continued accessibility. (We must wonder, however, how Harriet, as Mrs. Elton, and therefore mistress of her own household, would be any more accessible to Emma in the way she seems to need her to be than Mrs. Weston.) On the other hand, her manipulation of Harriet's sexual focus takes her away from the one man who really does want her, and encourages her to fantasize about belonging to men who do not, and who, in reality, present no threat to Emma's proprietorship. Once Emma has successfully manipulated Harriet into refusing Mr. Martin's proposal of marriage, we learn that Harriet "slept at Hartfield that night" (p. 57), something that occurs with increasing frequency as Emma's influence over her grows.

Not surprisingly, it is Jane Fairfax's lack of Harriet-like humility, her "coldness and reserve," her "indifference whether she pleased or not" (p. 166), which frustrates Emma and creates in her what seems to be a strong repulsion to Jane that lasts until almost the end of the novel. Emma, in her enthusiasm over Harriet's "tenderness of heart" and evaluation of her desirability as a wife, is driven to make unflattering comparisons to Jane: "Dear Harriet!--I would not change you for the clearest-headed, longest-sighted, best-judging female breathing. Oh! the coldness of a Jane Fairfax!--Harriet is worth a hundred such.--And for a wife--" (p. 269). Austen continually emphasizes Emma's resentment over Jane's determination "to hazard nothing," and her feeling that she "was disgustingly, was suspiciously reserved" (p. 169). It is this reserve for which "Emma could not forgive her" (p. 169), a sentence that ends Volume 2, Chapter 2, and that is insistently reiterated at the beginning of Volume 2, Chapter 3. Susan Morgan observes that "Jane, to Emma's outrage, thinks for herself and feels for herself and so controls herself. She does not hand her character over to Emma";(42) more tellingly, Elizabeth Jean Sabiston states that "Jane Fairfax ... resists all of Emma's efforts to probe her."(43) Jane will not allow Emma to violate her boundaries, and so prevents her from establishing the dominant/submissive dynamic upon which her other relationships are built: "A distinctive quality about Jane is that she is not part of Emma's domain ... primarily because Jane has an independent sense of self which Emma cannot absorb."(44) As a result, her resentment leads Emma to some very adamant disclaimers about any attraction to Jane Fairfax: "I must be more in want of a friend, or an agreeable companion, than I have yet been, to take the trouble of conquering anybody's reserve to procure one. Intimacy between Miss Fairfax and me is quite out of the question" (p. 203). Yet Emma seems to be more than aware of Jane's attractiveness and desirability. Whereas Emma initially thinks of Harriet as "a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect" (p. 23), her first impression of Jane after her two year absence is that she is "very elegant, remarkably elegant; and she had herself the highest value for elegance" (p. 167)--she has, in fact, the sort of "elegance, which, whether of person or of mind, she saw so little in Highbury" (p. 167). She recognizes in Jane both "distinction, and merit" (p. 167); in short, Jane possesses in abundance the

qualities that Emma feels would make Harriet "quite perfect." And, despite Emma's declared antipathy towards Jane, she finds her "'the sort of elegant creature that one cannot keep one's eyes from'" and is "'always watching her to admire'" (p. 171).

Jane's apparent inviolability leads Emma to try and punish her, to force her into the subordinate role she so desperately needs her to occupy in order for Emma to maintain her sense of erotic mastery. She does this through Frank Churchill. Ironically, although Emma cannot know that Frank is Jane's lover, she singles him out as a sort of ally in her attempt to denigrate Jane. Frank and Emma are thus joined in a somewhat bizarre dyad as Jane's persecutors; simultaneously, each occupies the position of rival innamoratos, unbeknown to the other, and, in Emma's case, to herself. It is through their social unity that they manage to inflict the most torment upon Jane, exemplified in their behavior during the word game, when Frank teases Jane with the word "Dixon" (p. 224). Emma reacts with "eager laughing warmth" (p. 348); Jane "blushed more deeply than [Mr. Knightley] had ever perceived her" (p. 349)--the scene is highly charged--with erotic tension? Clearly the prospect of Jane's discomfort and pain affords Emma an exquisite thrill. Emma is complacent in her belief that Frank "perfectly agreed" (p. 203) with her evaluation of Jane and is confident that their feelings are "much alike" (p. 203). The "aliqueness" of their feelings lies deeper than Emma is willing to acknowledge. At their second encounter, "Emma felt herself so well acquainted with him, that she could hardly believe it to be only their second meeting" (p. 203)--yet the bond she feels they are developing seems for the most part based on their various conversations concerning Jane Fairfax. In fact, all of their subsequent intercourse revolves around Jane, much of it initiated by Emma, who constantly pumps Frank for details about Jane's behaviour at Weymouth. Despite the fact that outward appearances lead others to suspect that Emma and Frank are interested in each other, for each of them the focus is most decisively Jane Fairfax--her situation, her supposed feelings for Mr. Dixon, her reserve, her musical skills, her complexion--as their common passion, she is endlessly fascinating to them both.

In fact, it is Jane whom Emma most desires, whose recognition she most craves. It is through Jane Fairfax that the possibility of a reciprocal relationship based on an equal and mutual giving of self is presented. Benjamin suggests that the underlying motivation of the dynamic of erotic domination may be the individual's hope of replaying "the original thwarted impulse to discover the other person as an intact being who could respond and set limits at the same time" (p. 292), but that "the original need for a relationship of differentiation with another person is not really solved in erotic domination ... The aliveness and spontaneity that come from an unscripted relationship is missing" (p. 293). However, Emma continues to resist the sort of intimacy she might find through a relationship with someone like Jane Fairfax, someone who is her equal; Morgan notes that "Emma ... does not want friendship with a real and independent person. She prefers the indulgence of manipulating Harriet."(45) Yet Emma's passionate attachment to Harriet begins to wane, and she eventually grows tired of her "delightful inferiority" (p. 38); Harriet begins to figure less and less in Emma's musings, Jane Fairfax more and more. Benjamin explains that the "exhaustion of satisfaction that occurs when all resistance is vanquished, all tension is lost, mean's that the relationship has come full

circle, returned to the emptiness from which it was an effort to escape" (p. 286). As we observe Harriet kiss Emma's hand "in silent and submissive gratitude" (p. 342) for her latest attempt to direct Harriet's sexual interest and "save her from the danger of degradation" (p. 342), it has already become apparent that the focus has shifted quite decisively to Jane Fairfax and to Emma's complex relationship with her.

Susan Morgan suggests that Emma eventually "learns to recognize the presumptuousness of her games, to accept her limits and the inviolability of others" (p. 46), largely as a result of her relations with Jane Fairfax. I would argue that, on the contrary, Emma continues to resist the idea of a relationship based on mutuality until the end of the novel. Her feelings for Jane Fairfax, long denied and twisted into repugnance, are allowed to surface only when she perceives Jane in a powerless and vulnerable state--the desire for mastery informs all of her dealings with Jane. During their first visit, Emma is filled with "complacency" and a "sense of pleasure" over her resolve to be kind:

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 ... Emma left her with such softened, charitable feelings, as made her ... lament that Highbury afforded no young man worthy of giving her independence; nobody that she could wish to scheme about for her. (Pp. 167-68)

Emma is reassured by Jane's powerlessness; indeed, she seems to dwell with some lingering pleasure on the idea of Jane's coming degradation. Once again, Emma's desire to exercise erotic power is manifested in her deliberation over another's sexual fate--and the possibility that she herself might somehow direct it. Emma has previously devoted a great deal of time and thought to Jane's possible sexual relationship with Mr. Dixon; her fixation on this imaginary situation has, in fact, caused her to behave in ways of which she is later ashamed. It is also interesting that Emma should be unable to come up with a "worthy" heterosexual prospect for Jane, considering that she seems to have no trouble when exerting herself on behalf of anyone else. In fact, she expends a great deal of energy in denying the possibility of any such connection for Jane, save for the non-existent romance she creates around Mr. Dixon and the pianoforte. Her reaction to Mrs. Weston's suggestion that there may be something between Jane and Mr. Knightley is one of horror and repudiation: "'Jane Fairfax ... of all women! ... Jane Fairfax mistress of the Abbey!--Oh! no, non-every feeling revolts'" (pp. 224-25). Similarly, her response to Mr. Knightley's suggestion that she does not "'perfectly understand the degree of acquaintance'" between Jane and Frank Churchill is to protest in hyperbolic, almost manic terms: "'Never, never! ... Never for the twentieth part of a moment, did such an idea occur to me ... There is no admiration between them, I do assure you ... they are as far from any attachment or admiration for one another, as any two beings in the world

can be" (pp. 350-51). Since we know that Emma has no real feelings for Frank, her response would be distinctly out of proportion, unless we assume that it is the thought of Jane's attachment that so upsets her. It is obvious that Emma's attraction to Jane becomes more overt as Jane's situation seems to deteriorate. Emma decides, after Jane leaves Donwell in great agitation, that she does, in fact, pity her and her prospects, and that "'the more sensibility you betray of their just horrors, the more I shall like you'" (p. 363).

Emma's feelings for Jane have been undergoing a change throughout the latter part of the novel; as Jane's autonomy becomes increasingly threatened, Emma's desire for her increases. Once it becomes clear that Jane can no longer avoid the grim necessity of the "governess-trade," and that her departure from Highbury is immanent, her state of pitiable vulnerability is reassuringly confirmed for Emma. It is at this point that Emma desires to "win" her: "the person, whom she had been so many months neglecting, was now the very one on whom she would have lavished every distinction of regard or sympathy" (p. 389). Her interest in Harriet having abated, Emma's behavior to Jane becomes almost obsessive--however, her attempts to visit with and show favor towards the other woman are consistently rebuffed: "It was a more pressing concern to show attention to Jane Fairfax, whose prospects were closing, while Harriet's opened ... with Emma it was grown into a first wish ... She wanted to be of use to her; wanted to show a value for her society, and testify respect and consideration" (p. 389). Susan Morgan characterizes Jane as "the measure of what Emma loses" (p. 42); and Emma herself comes to realize what she has missed:

She bitterly regretted not having sought a closer acquaintance with her ...

had she endeavoured to find a friend there instead of in Harriet Smith;

she must, in all probability, have been spared from every pain which

pressed on her now.--Birth, abilities and education, had been equally

marking one as an associate for her, to be received with gratitude; and the

other--what was she? (P. 421)

Unfortunately, Emma's inability to answer this question--to comprehend the inviolability of the other's selfhood (whether that of Harriet or Jane)--constitutes her real loss.

Significantly, Emma's realization that "Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself" (p. 408) directly follows the scene in which she is informed of Jane's elopement with Frank, and Emma feels "most sorrowfully indignant; ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her--her affection for Mr. Knightley.--Every other part of her mind was disgusting" (p. 412). D. A. Miller, in his article "Emma: Good Riddance," discusses the way in which Emma is able to block out any previous erotic attachment (his example being that of Frank Churchill) by simply deciding that she "has always loved Mr.

Knightley, but simply never knew it; she has never loved Frank Churchill, but only imagined she did."(46) Miller sees this as a "self-revision":

It would seem as though the psychology of being "really" in love required such retraction to help sustain itself. "This time, it's the real thing"; but the reality of the real thing is in part produced by treating previous erotic interest as unreal: inauthentic, delusional, even (as here) non-existent.

In the proposal scene, this closure of desire becomes institutionalised. Desire has recognised its "proper object" and made itself capable of fixing on it; this recognition can now be incarnated socially, in marriage. (P. 73)

Indeed, Emma has undergone a "self-revision": but the "previous erotic interest" she repudiates is the one she feels for Jane Fairfax. Jane has proven to be an "object" who refuses to engage in the dynamics of erotic domination, and who is leaving her sphere of influence completely, through heterosexual union with Frank Churchill and her removal from Highbury. Emma, who has evinced no previous sexual interest in Knightley, is able to convince herself that he has always been her object of sexual desire, and, what is more, that all erotic interest previous to this is a cause for sorrowful indignation, shame, and disgust (p. 412). Miller states that "the assumptions under which erotic desire is locked into place ... [are] in holy matrimony and wholly in matrimony" (p. 73).

Once Jane and Frank have run away together, Emma is forced to deal with what remains to her in the world of Highbury. Harriet's revelation that she is in love with Mr. Knightley and has hopes of reciprocation on his part brings home to Emma the realization that the very fabric of this world, with her at its center, is unraveling:

Till now that she was threatened with its loss, Emma had never known how much of her happiness depended on being first with Mr. Knightley, first in interest and affection.--Satisfied that it was so, and feeling it her due, she had enjoyed it without reflection; and only in the dread of being supplanted, found how inexpressibly important it had been. (P. 415)

This passage is reminiscent of Emma's sentiments about her place in her father's affections: "never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's" (p. 84) and she feels that "Could she be secure of . . . [Mr. Knightley's] never marrying at all, she believed she should be perfectly satisfied" (p. 416). Thus, Emma cannot bear for Mr. Knightley "to be lost to them for Harriet's sake ... to be thought of hereafter, as finding in Harriet's society all that he wanted" or for Harriet "to be the chosen, the first, the dearest, the friend, the wife to whom he looked for all the best blessings of existence" (pp. 422-23). When Mr. Knightley does declare his feelings for her, her first thought is "that Harriet was nothing; that she was every thing herself" (p. 430, [emphasis mine]); later, when the new alliance between them is established, she congratulates herself on her good fortune in obtaining "Such a companion for herself in the periods of anxiety and cheerlessness before her!-- Such a partner in all those duties and cares to which time must be giving increase of melancholy!" (p. 450). Her "love" for Mr. Knightley seems based on a combination of her desire for ascendancy over Harriet or anyone else in his affections, and her fear of Hartfield's being "comparatively deserted; and she left to cheer her father with the spirits only of ruined happiness" (p. 422). Claudia Johnson observes that the

"resources"--beauty, wit, employment, money--which Emma thinks can preserve her from sharing Miss Bates's ignominious destiny as a poor old maid finally amount to very little. It is single womanhood itself, the lack of a circle of people to be "first" with, that turns out to be the evil.(47)

Ironically, the "reconciliation scene" between Mr. Knightley and Emma is yet another manifestation of the dynamic of erotic domination permeating the relations among the characters. Mr. Knightley and Emma have been engaged in a power struggle throughout most of the novel, yet Emma's attitude towards him is generally marked by complacency (save for those instances when she feels deservedly rebuked by him for meanness or bad manners). Having no sexual investment in her relationship with Mr. Knightley, she is able to dismiss his attempts to subjugate her quite easily. While she does "not always feel so absolutely satisfied with herself, so entirely convinced that her opinions were right and her adversary's wrong," she is not so affected by their clashes "that a little time and the return of Harriet were very adequate restoratives" (p. 67). But here, in the reconciliation scene, Emma is finally subdued, "overpowered," in fact (p. 430), by Mr. Knightley. For the first time, she responds from a position of diminished power--in short, from the "female" position: "What did she say?--Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does" (p. 431). Suffering from "wretchedness" (p. 423), from "loneliness, and ... melancholy" (p. 424), with a "prospect before her ... threatening to a degree that could not be entirely dispelled--that might not be even partially brightened" (p. 422), Emma is frightened, vulnerable, and humbled, and she is vanquished by a force more powerful than her own will--Mr. Knightley's declaration of desire, and the comfort and safety to be found in heterosexual union.

However, Austen reserves the truly charged and sexually ambiguous moments for the reconciliation between Emma and Jane Fairfax. Emma visits Jane upon her return; she is "longing to see her" (p. 452), and finds that she "had never seen her look so well, so lovely, so engaging" (p. 453). They are unable to exchange confidences in the presence of Mrs. Elton, and Emma, in the few moments they have alone together, tells her that "'Had you not been surrounded by other friends, I might have been tempted to introduce a subject, to ask questions, to speak more openly than might have been strictly correct.--I feel that I should certainly have been impertinent'" (p. 459). Ostensibly she is referring, of course, to Frank Churchill. The two share an emotional exchange: Jane, "with a blush and an hesitation which Emma though infinitely more becoming to her than all the elegance of all her usual composure" (p. 459), expresses her gratitude to Emma for her interest and forbearance. She chastises herself for her former behavior: "'I know what my manners were to you.--So cold and artificial!--I had always a part to act.--It was a life of deceit! I know that I must have disgusted you'" (p. 459). Strong words. The encounter ends with Emma's realization that "'we are to lose you--just as I begin to know you'" (p. 460).

As the novel ends, all of the principals have been matched up with someone of the opposite sex and married off. Heterosexual order is reaffirmed, and everyone is happy. Yet are they? I have attempted to demonstrate that Emma's sexual interest lies, not in Mr. Knightley, or in any of the other men in the novel, but rather in other women. The novel's ending, then, presents a denial of her sexuality. Furthermore, Emma's sexual identity has been formed in a world where the "the question of power affects who and how you eroticize your sexual need"--that is, a patriarchal world. Consequently, as I have suggested, "the question of power ... is absolutely on the bottom of all sexual inquiry."(48) And, in fact, Emma's sexuality seems to be all about power, expressed through her desire for mastery, for domination, for manipulation. Thus, Emma is subject to a "double whammy," as it were: her erotic predilection for women cannot be openly expressed, and her identification with the "male" role in her most intimate connections with the women she desires renders what is expressed unequal, unhealthy, and ultimately unsatisfying. The only alternative model available to her, which she is forced to embrace at the end of the novel, is no better: Emma must learn to play woman and wife, to submit in her turn.

NOTES

(1) LeRoy W. Smith, *Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983), p. 19.

(2) Jean H. Hagstrum, *Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 269.

(3) Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 122.

(4) Of the relationship between Pamela and Mrs. Jewkes in Richardson's *Pamela*, Hagstrum asserts that "the girl is truly feminine and the woman suspiciously masculine,"

concluding that the "hints are unmistakable that the antithesis is not between sensuality and lack of passion but between two kinds of sensuality, the normal and the perverse, for Mrs. Jewkes obviously has lesbian tendencies" (p. 193). He also finds the friendship between Richardson's Clarissa and Anna Howe in *Clarissa* to be characterized by a strong element of homoeroticism. However, Hagstrum later qualifies his analysis, claiming "it would be wrong to exaggerate this quality in Richardson's concept of love, which would be seriously distorted if morbidities were allowed to intrude ... Richardson, it can be said rather dogmatically, is not consciously drawn to the abnormal. If anything, it is the forcefully heterosexual that attracts him" (p. 217). Consequently, he explains that Richardson "was careful to make the lesbianism of Mrs. Jewkes ... completely odious" (p. 217), and asserts that "in the end we must contend that the Anna-Clarissa love is neither morbid nor irregular. It is in fact entirely natural" (p. 203).

(5) Smith, p. 19.

(6) For example, Ruth Perry, in her article "Interrupted Friendships in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5 (Fall 1986): 185-202, proposes to examine "the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality disrupts and distorts the relationships between women" (p. 198), but ultimately concludes that Austen's "subversive message" is constituted in her "ironic undercutting of romance in this novel, together with the unresolved but repeated plea for friendship between women" (p. 200). More recently, in "'A Low But Very Feeling Tone': The Lesbian Continuum and Power Relations in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *English Studies in Canada* 20 (June 1994): 187-203, Tiffany Potter applies Adrienne Rich's theory of the "lesbian continuum" to female relationships in *Emma*, and demonstrates, through a comparison with Ann Lister's *I Know My Own Heart*, how several of these relationships "consistently use the discourse of lesbianism as it is revealed in the decoded diaries of Lister" (p. 187). However, Potter eventually backs off from the implications of her argument, claiming that applying Rich's theory "is not necessarily to suggest that a character must be read as a genitally sexual lesbian, but rather to acknowledge that her relationships with women fall into the 'range ... of woman-identified experience'" (p. 187) and concluding that none of these relationships "appears to be consciously, explicitly sexual" (p. 196). As Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga point out, in "What We're Rollin' Around in Bed With," *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), "while lesbianism is certainly accepted in feminism, it's more as a political or intellectual concept. It seems feminism is the last rock of conservatism. It will not be sexualized. It's prudish in that way" (p. 403).

(7) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991): 833.

(8) Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), p. 52.

(9) Christine St. Peter, "Jane Austen's Creation of the Sister," *Philological Quarterly* 66 (Fall 1987): 490.

(10) Johnson, p. 123. It should be noted that in her most recent book, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s--Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 195, Johnson modifies her position somewhat, conceding that, while she is "[p]ained ... by the cheeriness of their misogyny," Mudrick and Wilson, et al. "were basically right about Emma," whom she here describes as "quite susceptible to the stirrings of homoerotic pleasure."

(11) "Masturbating Girl," p. 826.

(12) Johnson, p. 123.

(13) "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality," *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Carole S. Vance, ed. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 20.

(14) In this analysis, I use the term "sexual orientation" to refer specifically to Emma's sexual attraction to other women. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 160 n. 23, notes that the term "sexual orientation" is a problematic one, citing Bell Hooks' claim "that it is a reification that falsely signals an openness to all members of the sex that is designated as the object of desire." Butler points out that orientations "are rarely, if ever, fixed" since they can shift through time and are open to cultural reformulations that are never univocal. Sedgwick, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, points out that the "by now unquestioned reading of the phrase 'sexual orientation' to mean 'gender of object-choice'" can in no way encompass the multiplicity of possibilities inherent in the term, citing examples of "object-choices" which are not connected to gender or genitality (or even other people), as well as examples of "orientations" which have nothing to do with object-choice at all (pp. 34-35).

(15) Sedgwick, invoking Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, points out in "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," that "the conceptual amalgam represented in the very term sexual identity, the cementing of every issue of individuality, filiation, truth, and utterance to some representational metonymy of the genital, was a process not supposed to have been perfected for another half- or three-quarters-century after Austen" (p. 823). I wish to employ the term "sexual identity" to describe what I believe to be several aspects of Emma's sexuality, namely, her attraction to women, her occupation of a traditionally "male" role, and her establishment and sublimation of the dynamic of "erotic domination" as a form of sexual expression.

(16) Catherine R. Stimpson, in "Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Winter 1981) provides what she terms a "conservative and severely literal" definition of the term "lesbian": "She is a woman who finds other women, erotically attractive and gratifying ... That carnality distinguishes it from ... affectionate friendships in which women enjoy each other, support each other, and commingle a sense of identity and well-being" (p. 364). As Alison M. Jaggar points out in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), a number of feminists "have

rejected the tendency to broaden the term lesbian on grounds that this would understate the sexual component of women's relationships with each other ... A purely `political' definition of lesbianism obscures the fact, deeply threatening to male dominant society, that women are often interested in each other in a sexual way" (p. 273). In my own analysis, my use of the term "lesbian" follows that of Stimpson.

(17) Susan Morgan, "Emma Woodhouse and the Charms of Imagination," *Studies in the Novel* 7 (Spring 1975): 36.

(18) Morgan elsewhere argues that Austen deliberately "got rid of sex" in her fiction. In "Why There's No Sex in Jane Austen's Fiction," *Studies in the Novel* 19 (Fall 1987), 346-56, Morgan argues that female sexuality in British fiction before Austen meant "male sexual power" and "limited plots" (p. 353), citing such novels as *Clarissa* to make her case. In a "radical" move, Morgan states, Austen deliberately set about "banishing that defining sexuality" (p. 353) in order to concentrate on more important matters: "Austen's heroines are not allowed to define themselves sexually precisely because, in contrast to the limited and powerless heroines of the previous century, they are required to define themselves" (p. 355). For Morgan, sexuality gets in the way of personal potential and fulfillment for female characters--its absence in Austen's fiction is therefore "liberating."

(19) Jessica Benjamin, "Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination," *Powers of Desire*, pp. 280-99. Although Benjamin is primarily concerned with theorizing the sadomasochistic relationship, particularly as it operates within the heterosexual context, her analysis provides us with an extremely useful framework within which to consider the nature of Emma's erotic relationships, and the latent sexual dynamics which govern them.

(20) Alice Chandler, "'A Pair of Fine Eyes': Jane Austen's Treatment of Sex," *Studies in the Novel* 7 (Spring 1975): 102.

(21) Hagstrum, p. 193.

(22) Smith, p. 36.

(23) Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 45.

(24) "Master and Slave," pp. 280-81.

(25) Judith Kegan Gardiner briefly discusses Benjamin's position in "Mind Mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism," *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, Gayle Greene and Coppelina Kahn, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 135.

(26) Jane Austen, *Emma* in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 3rd ed., R. W. Chapman, ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), p. 26. Subsequent parenthetical references in my text are to this edition.

- (27) Nancy Chodorow, *Masculinities, Feminities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1994), p. 59.
- (28) Susan Contratto, "Father Prescence in Women's Psychological Development," *Advances in Psychoanalytic Sociology*, Gerald M. Platt, Jerome Rabow, and Marion Goldman, eds. (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1987), p. 152.
- (29) Smith, p. 52.
- (30) Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 91.
- (31) Smith, pp. 51-52, [emphasis mine].
- (32) "Master and Slave," p. 288.
- (33) Morgan, "Emma," p. 36.
- (34) "Master and Slave," p. 283.
- (35) *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- (36) Morgan, "Emma," p. 37.
- (37) "Master and Slave," p. 294.
- (38) *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- (39) Smith, p. 133.
- (40) "Master and Slave," p. 285.
- (41) Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Female Changelessness; Or, What Do Women Want?," *Studies in the Novel* 19 (Fall 1987): 281.
- (42) Morgan, "Emma," p. 36.
- (43) Elizabeth Jean Sabiston, "Emma Woodhouse: Self-Portrait of a Lady," *The Prison of Womanhood: Four Provincial Heroines in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 29.
- (44) Morgan, "Emma," p. 41.
- (45) *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

(46) D. A. Miller, "Emma: Good Riddance," *Emma: Contemporary Critical Essays*, David Monaghan, ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992), p. 72.

(47) Johnson, p. 139.

(48) Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, "What We're Rollin Around in Bed With," *Powers of Desire*, p. 397.