Feminism and misogyny in Jane Austen's *Emma*. Woman and gender roles.

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1. Abstract and key words (English and Spanish)

Abstract: This project focuses on the study of the feminist and misogynistic features appearing in Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1815), paying special attention to the role played by the eponymous character. To do so, I will review some of the bibliography produced by feminist critics, especially those focusing on the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the period in which the novel and its author are inserted. Before turning to the analysis of the work itself, it will be interesting to offer a definition of patriarchy as well as a vision of the ideal of female behavior during this time in England. Then the novel itself will be addressed, especially those elements that are linked to an ideal behavior in order to subvert or endorse it. I will also pay attention to the influence the main character exerts on Harriet Smith and the one that may or may not be exerted on her by some of the male characters. Marriage will also be dealt with, so as to explore how it helps articulate the whole narrative and very especially all the changes that Emma experiences. Finally, the narrative strategy used by the author in her work will be also examined.

Key words: feminism, misogyny, gender, patriarchy, Emma, marriage, female ideal, fiction.

Resumen: Este proyecto se centra en el estudio de los rasgos feministas y misóginos que aparecen en la obra de Jane Austen titulada *Emma*, prestándose especial atención al papel que ejerce el personaje principal. Para ello haré un recorrido por la bibliografía producida por la crítica feminista, sobre todo la centrada en el final del siglo XVIII y el principio del XIX, período en el que se inserta la novela y su autora. Antes de pasar al análisis de la obra en sí, será interesante ofrecer una definición de patriarcado, así como una visión del ideal de comportamiento femenino durante esta época en Inglaterra. Después se analizará la novela en sí, especialmente aquellos elementos vinculados con el ideal de comportamiento para subvertirlo o apoyarlo. También me centraré en la influencia que el personaje principal ejerce en Harriet Smith, así como la que puede ejercer o no sobre algunos de los personajes masculinos. Otro de los temas tratados será el del matrimonio con el fin de determinar cómo ayuda a articular toda la narrativa y, en especial, todos los cambios que Emma experimenta. Finalmente, se comentará la estrategia narrativa utilizada por la autora en su obra.

Palabras clave: feminismo, misoginia, género, patriarcado, Emma, matrimonio, ideal femenino, ficción.
2. Introduction

This final project, as the title suggests, aims at examining the feminist and misogynistic elements in Jane Austen’s *Emma*. Specifically, my work will focus on female figures and gender roles, since the date of publication of the book, 1815, coincides with a period of time in which the well-known genre *Bildungsroman* was undergoing some changes. The arrival of Romanticism will cause that many of its followers consider that this literary genre is the most adequate one to tell the problems of their time. Born during the last decade of the eighteenth century and based on the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe entitled *Wilhelm Meisiter’s Apprenticeship*, this genre was focused on the process of formation of the main male protagonist who “discovers himself and his social role through the experience of love, friendship, and the hard realities of life” (Labovitz, 1986: 2). However, the publication of *Emma* meant a change in the conception of that genre, as Jane Austen did not focus her attention to a male protagonist, but a female one.

In view of this, the project is going to be divided into three parts which, at the same time, will be subdivided. First of all, it would be necessary to study the origins of feminism, as well as the main works that promoted its birth and the main critics who helped to develop it, above all female ones. This first part will also be devoted to the study of the female ideal of behaviour within the patriarchy in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as this will be completely necessary in order to develop the second part of this project. Moreover, a brief summary of the social and personal features that surrounded the author will be provided.

Regarding the second part, it will be mainly focused on the study of the novel itself, but connecting and exemplifying it with what has been seen in the previous section. This part will offer an analysis of the main protagonist, Emma, who will show her power as a woman by means of the act of matchmaking, especially towards Harriet Smith. Emma will try to create an identity for her, as many women of their time lacked of one of their own if they did not marry a man. As marriage is what marks the plot of the novel, the next section will deal with it. Then, the influence that some male characters exert on Emma will be analysed. Finally, it will be explained how Jane Austen managed to pass censorship successfully.

Finally, there will be a section devoted to comment on the main ideas that have been developed throughout the project, as well as the conclusions that can be drawn from it. A final section with all the bibliographical references that have been used will also be included.
3. Basis and current state of the issue. General and specific aims

Every project or study needs a theoretical and methodological standpoint in order to support the ideas articulated through the analysis. In our case, the bibliography employed is related to feminism. As a consequence, the theoretical framework will be focused on the main ideas and works of relevant feminist critics, which will be helpful in order to explain how this type of criticism came into existence. Once briefly reviewed the texts that marked the starting point, our study will be centred on the works belonging to feminist literary criticism during the second half of the twentieth century.

On the one hand, while some French feminists will study the language and its phallocentric structure, some others will support the existence of women writing of their own or what Hélène Cixous called in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, écriture féminine. Critics such as Julia Kristeva maintained that this writing was semiotic and that it could produce some problems as, for example, a marginalization from the male side. These two women together with Luce Irigaray will also emphasize in her essay “This Sex” the relationship between the writing and the body of women. She argues that sexual pleasure of women cannot be expressed by means of a masculine language (Murfin, 2017: 461) although this theory was not much accepted since it marked the differences between both sexes, something that was intended to eradicate as, once again, the binary categories were emerging.

On the other hand, critics such a Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Elaine Showalter, writing throughout the 1970s and 1990s, will focus on gynocriticism, that is, the study of texts written by women and dealing about them. However, Ros Coward and Michelle Barrett defend that texts written by men can also be feminist. Finally, Kate Millet, influenced by Simone De Beauvoir’s, will focus her attention towards the differentiation between sex and gender and the relationship between sex, politics and power. In short, the ultimate objective of this analysis is to know the different aspects in which literary female criticism was based to reconstruct the female canon and return women their place in society.

Nowadays, criticism rather than focusing on the retrieval of texts written by women in order to complete the canon, it tries “to recover entire cultures of women” (Murfin, 2017: 465). As a consequence, critics such as Jane Tompkins or Nancy Miller have opted to write autobiographies and personal criticism. However, another part of the criticism is more focused on lesbian studies, gay male sexuality or on how films portray the topic of gender. It is worthy of note to say that gender criticism, which studies gender categories and sexuality,
began as feminist criticism but, nowadays, it is currently being studied individually (Murfin, 2017: 466).

**General aims**
- To define some concepts related to female criticism.
- To provide a quick overview about the history of female criticism, main works and its aims.
- To know how women were represented in literature and which were their main roles.
- To provide some data about the background of the author of the novel that is going to be analyzed.
- To make a description of the female ideal of behaviour during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England.

**Specific aims**
- To establish connections between the main ideas of feminism and the behaviour of the eponymous character.
- To explain the process of identity creation of one of the female characters.
- To analyze the main topic that articulates the whole narrative and influences the behaviour of the main protagonist.
- To describe the role of male influence on women and exemplify it with some of the male characters.
- To make reference to the narrative strategy used by the author when writing the novel.

**4. Theoretical frame: feminist criticism**

Feminist criticism began as a kind of revolution against the traditional literary criticism which was male-centred that considered women’s writing as inferior. A feeling prevailed among the traditional literary critics that women were incapable of any abstract thought and theorizing. The feminist critics were aware of the fact that criticism till then had been male dominated and the critical attention concentrated mostly on male writers. Feminist criticism aims at reviewing and revising the concepts which were earlier considered universal but which actually originate in particular cultures and serve particular goals. It wishes to redefine our concept of human nature and reality and thereby challenge the traditional concern of literary criticism including established cannons and ways of reading (Kumar, 2016: 1).

Feminist literary criticism began as such during the late 1960s and early 1970s thanks to a literary movement headed by women, although its origin comes from the depths of time.
Among the first critics in examine the stereotyped representations of fictional women in literature we find Simone de Beauvoior, Mary Elleman and Kate Millet but, what encouraged them to do so? It was in 1792, with the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, by Mary Wollstonecraft, that gender inequality became evident and women began their struggle for equality (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 765).

Later on, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), by Virginia Woolf, marked another turning point in the feminist literary criticism. In her work she states that women are not allowed to develop their potential, neither their creativity, as a result of the oppression that the dominating ideas of the patriarchal society they live in exert on them. Although it was not easy, women decided that the only way of expressing what they were feeling was by means of writing. Consequently, this brought with it the destruction of the image of the woman as wife and mother in their homes, but also in the society in general (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 765).

Women were represented in literature as a form of socialization. Literature allowed both men and women to know which “set of culturally defined characteristics” (Barry, 2002: 117) were acceptable for women, as stated by Toril Moi, as well as their objectives and ambitions. During the nineteenth century, as will be seen later on, the main role of women in the novels of fiction was that of searching for a husband in order to determine their social position in life (Barry, 2002: 117).

During the 1970s, feminist criticism studied the mechanisms of patriarchy, understanding as patriarchy the institution led by men who, for centuries, displaced women to a place of subordination and complete silence. Under the male rule, women were oppressed and even they were relegated to a state of non-existence (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 765). It provoked what is called “sexual inequality”, so feminist criticism focused its attention to books written by male writers which contained definitions and descriptions of the typical women (Barry, 2002: 117).

In the 1980s their focus of attention changed. First of all, they began to be more eclectic in the sense that they also started to work with what other criticisms such as Marxism or structuralism found. Moreover, they leave aside male works and decided to explore the female world by means of a reconstruction of their lost cannon. Finally, this new emerging canon will bring with him a remodeling of the history of the novel and also, it will help feminist criticism to put women in the place they deserve after years of male oppression (Barry, 2002: 117).
One of the first issues addressed by the French feminist criticism was that of language. After studying the meanings that language can produce, they concluded that language was within the male realm and that its structure was phallocentric, that is to say, language favors men thanks to the association established with him and the male dominating values of the culture they were living in. French feminists also thought that this male-centered language was the result of the separation from the mother during childhood (Murfin, 2017: 460).

In view of this situation, women could either join the view men had of them and, therefore, they would end up speaking of themselves as men did or, on the contrary, they could choose not to pronounce about themselves and remain in the shade (Murfin, 2017: 462). In this sense, it is clear that women have been oppressed both by family and men language. However, a part of the French feminist criticism thought that it was possible for women to develop her own language, an *écriture feminine*, term coined for the first time by Hélène Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (Barry, 2002: 122).

According to Julia Kristeva, this feminine writing was semiotic rather than symbolic, that is to say, instead of a writing related to authority, control or repression, what we find is “not logic and order, but displacement, slippage, condensation, which suggests […] a more randomized way of making connections, one which increases the available range of possibilities” (Barry, 2002: 123). Kristeva pointed that its origin was placed in the pre-oedipal stage between the mother and the child, so she considered that this could be seen as a threat for the patriarchal culture and a possible way for women to express their creativity (Murfin, 2017: 460 y Barry, 2002: 124).

One of the patriarchal roles was to put a curb on the power of women. Men did not want women to develop their own identity, as they considered it was also a sign of power. In order to challenge them, women had to adhere their writings to the male authorial discourse, although they started to use a subjective voice, something that was intended to create a reaction against the established morals. Before that, it is necessary to mention that since men thought that women could not be intellectually equaled to them, they never recognized their works, especially in the seventeenth century with the emergence of the novel. That is why one of the roles of feminist criticism has been to try to reconstruct that canon.

Continuing with Julia Kristeva, she also pointed that an *écriture feminine* could raise many problems: “a feminist language that refuses to participate in masculine discourse, that places its nature entirely in a feminine, semiotic discourse, risks being politically marginalized by men” (Murfin, 2017: 461). Together with Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray,
she also thought that female writing maintained a closed relationship with the female body. According to Cixous, women could displace men power once they were able to write their bodies. However, some critics thought that this theory, which was kind of emphasizing the biological differences between men and women, was not proper as one of their aims was to abolish the sexual categories (Murfin, 2017: 461).

American feminist critics were also interested in the issue of language but they decided to approach texts from a different perspective. On the one hand, some of them focused on analyzing literary texts, specifically, the representations of women and the dominant ideology contained in them and how all this has been introduced in the literary tradition. On the other hand, critics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Elaine Showalter developed what has been termed “gynocriticism”, that is to say, they tried to study texts written by women writers which deal with women. (Murfin, 2017: 462).

Thus, gynocriticism rejects all models and theories coming from the male side. Its aim is that of re-studying women texts from a new female perspective based on her experience. They will also study the trajectory of the author, the reasons why they decided to write and what nurtured their creativity. Moreover, they will bring to light unknown authors until the moment or these authors who have been died away into silence for such a long time and thus, create a new cannon that better describes that new type of writing (Murfin, 2017: 462).

For Elaine Showalter, as Sandeep Kumar points in her essay, “a feminist theory can arise only from within women’s experience or from their unconsciousness; women must produce their own language and their own universe which may not appear rational to men” (2016: 5). She believes that women and men differ in how they perceive reality. However, there are critics such as Ros Coward, who believe that a text cannot be feminist simply because it has been written by a woman, and others such as Michelle Barrett, who think that there are texts written by men which can be catalogued as feminists (Kumar, 2016: 5).

Feminist criticism also had to face the sex-gender system. While sex is understood as something biologically given, gender is something that society has created, especially men, which allow them to exercise their power over women. This division is the one that has created the two femininity images of women that have been seen: on the one hand, women as properties of men and, on the other hand, women as mothers and housekeepers. So, in this sense, feminist criticism will critique this separation as it leaves women in an inferior scale than men, they are considered the second sex, the other (Kumar, 2016: 3).
The first book that criticized these patriarchal attitudes was *Sexual Politics* (1969), by Kate Millett, who was influenced by the book named *The Second Sex* (1949), by Simone De Beauvoir’s. During the 70s, the different movements headed by gay and lesbian and heterosexual women manifested that because of their sexuality, they were feeling oppressed and subordinate to others. As Nicola Gavey points out in her book and in words of Kate Millet, “sex has a frequently neglected political aspect” (2005: 102). The relationship between sex, politics and power was the reason why feminists decided to establish it as another of their aims.

As it has been seen, feminist critics had to recover texts written by women who were not known to exist and also, from the women who had fallen into oblivion, in order to rewrite the literary cannon. As women were relegated to a second place by patriarchy, as they were considered the ‘other’, the feminist criticism also seeks to reconstruct the feminine experience, while paying attention to the representations of women in literature, both in texts written by men and women. They will also examine the extent of patriarchy, as well as the theories of psychoanalysis in order to clarify the issue of identity. Moreover, feminist criticism will try to give an answer to the sex-gender issue and will recognize the role of language in the texts. Concerning the *écriture feminine*, they will think about its possible existence and of whether it is able to be used by men. Definitely, the will try to analyze texts from a neutral perspective, in order to vanish a possible differentiation of sexes (Barry, 2002: 128-129).

5. Jane Austen in her time

Born in between two eras, Georgian and Victorian, that is to say, 1775 and 1817, Jane Austen belonged to an English middle-class family who, according to the social conventions of this period, educated her at home. However, the intellectual atmosphere that she enjoyed - thanks to the status of her father, a clergyman interested in both reading and writing, also did some good to her learning. What we know about her, as Virginia Woolf argued, comes from the letters she wrote to her beloved sister Cassandra and, also, from the books she wrote (Woolf, 1984: 76).

Living in an agitated England due to the economic inequality between the landed gentry and the lower classes, -a political instability derived from the influence of the French Revolution-, Jane Austen decided to portray in her novels the society she belonged to and,
more specifically, she focused on the women living in it. In fact, these two elements served her as the material for her fiction, in which she showed her concern with the role of women in her society and the circumstances of gender and class (Güney and Yavuz, 2008: 527).

Through her observation and personal experiences, she will deal with the problems women had to face because of the influence of the patriarchal society they were living in. She will criticise the institution of marriage and both social and economic dependence women had on men by means of an ironic style and the characterization of her female characters. That is why her novels have received the name of “comedy of manners”, as Güney and Yavuz state in their article “The nineteenth century literature and feminist motives in Jane Austen’s novels” (2008: 527).

Her novels present characters who show us their personality through the context in which they are inserted and their dialogues. Specifically, in the present case, her novel *Emma*, she will deal with the topic of marriage together with moral changes of some their characters, who by the way will show their potential for conflict, and moreover, the female heroíne of the novel will succeed in knowing her real self (Güney and Yavuz, 2008: 527).

6. Patriarchy in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The female ideal of behavior of the epoch.

The position of women under the dominion of patriarchy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that of subordination. As they were considered inferior, non-equal to men, they were totally dependent on them in all spheres of life. Occupying different spheres, men belonged to “the active and aggressive world of politics, the military services and commerce, for instance, where they could use their capacity for logical thought to best effect” (Rowbotham, 1989: 6). On the contrary, women occupied “the more passive private sphere of the household and home where their inborn emotional talents would serve them best” (Rowbotham, 1989: 6).

Barbara Horwitz tells in her essay that eighteenth century writers such as John Locke and Rousseau stated that “the goal of education for women [was] the development of good nature” (1994: 135). For them, the ultimate aim of a woman was marriage and it was thought that they had to be taught “in frugal domestic practices” (Armstrong, 1987: 59) so that men were interested in marrying them. Additionally, to be mothers was also their role (Nye, 1988: 6). Thus, as Elisabeth Kollmann summarizes it in her thesis, women were “told to be selfless” and the ones in charge of home and children (2003: 24). Definitely, they had to achieve the

Throughout the nineteenth century, the image of True Womanhood was developed. According to this ideal, young girls should learn to be obedient and also be able to behave well. The whole series of norms they had to follow appeared everywhere, whether at home, in their social relations, in the church, in books of conduct, etc. Women who preserved their virginity until marriage were valued. Once married, they had to fulfill one of the duties that were attributed to them as women, which was to be mothers. As mothers, they were in charge of educating their children in the values that society demanded, since their education was decisive for the future of society (Cruea, 2005: 188).

As Susan M. Cruea states and related to the last idea, “while a True Woman was assumed to be a pillar of moral strength and virtue, she was also portrayed as delicate and weak” (2005: 189). During this time, it was thought that women had a nervous system more fragile than men because of the functioning of their reproductive system, so as they were considered inferior to them, they needed to be protected by the man of the family (Cruea, 2005: 189; Showalter, 1977: 76). Moreover, another of the things that supposedly differentiated them from men was the size of their brain. They considered that the brain of a woman was smaller, so that is the reason why they should only learn how to behave and show no interest in other types of teaching (Showalter, 1977: 77).

Families during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were interested in educating their daughters in different skills, such as drawing, singing or playing music, among others. It was thought that the more skills they were able to develop, the more likely they were to get married (Kollmann, 2003: 24). Conversely, in what concerns politics and history, topics which were to be debated by men, they were not able to have knowledge about them. They were also encouraged not to have witty dialogues and what is more, not to demonstrate others their knowledge about things (Kollmann, 2003: 46).

Related to history, it has to be said that women were not allowed to write literature or history and, as a consequence, they could not produce knowledge. Writing was the task of men, as it was considered something unnatural (Kollmann, 2003: 60), something that can also be seen in the words by Barbara Horwitz: “learned ladies who exhibited their knowledge were made to appear unnatural and therefore ridiculous” (1994). They were even condemned to abandon the public life or attacked if they did not assure that their works were done just for diversion (Kollmann, 2003: 61).
So as can be seen, the education received by women was totally different from that of men. While they, above all men belonging to the middle class, were able to study at an educational institution and whatever career they wanted, women were educated at home by their parents or, at best, by a governess, although as it has been said, their studies were limited to household chores (Kollmann, 2003: 35). As a result, women were deprived of an economic and social independence, so they had no alternative other than submit to patriarchy and marry someone with a good income (Kollmann, 2003: 78).

However, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, women began to show signs of discontent. They were already becoming aware of the injustices to which they were subjected and, therefore, they tried to begin to distance themselves from the male yoke. Women such as Barbara Leigh thought that “the larger-natured a woman is, the more decidedly feminine she will be; the stronger she is, the more strongly feminine” (2001: 44). This is the answer she gave to those who thought that a cultured woman was more masculine than feminine. Despite these initiatives headed by women, many of them were frustrated by the impossibility, in the vast majority of cases, of achieving their goal.


7.1. Characterization of Emma Woodhouse

“Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (Austen, 1998: 8).

These opening lines by the narrator from Jane Austen’s *Emma* present the reader with an image of Emma as the embodiment of perfection. In general, this view is supported by every character appearing throughout the novel except Mr. Knightly, who seems to find some faults in her that will be developed later on.

Although this vision of Emma is spread through the whole novel, she will never tell us how her personality is or how she is dressed. Instead, what we know about her will be provided by the rest of the characters in the novel, as can be seen as follows in the dialogue between Mr. Knightly and Mrs. Weston:

“…I shall not attempt to deny Emma’s being pretty.”

“Pretty! Say beautiful rather. Can you imagine any thing nearer perfect beauty than Emma altogether – face and figure?”
“I do not know what I could imagine, but I confess that I have seldom seen a face or figure more pleasing to me than hers. But I am a partial old friend.”

“Such an eye!—the true hazle eye—and so brilliant! Regular features, open countenance, with a complexion! oh! what a bloom of full health, and such a pretty height and size; such a firm and upright figure! There is health, not merely in her bloom, but in her air, her head, her glance. One hears sometimes of a child being ‘the picture of health;’ now, Emma always gives me the idea of being the complete picture of grown-up health. She is loveliness itself. Mr. Knightley, is not she?”

Refusing to let the main character being described by herself, Jane Austen is impregnating Emma Woodhouse with the qualities of “modesty and sobriety”, as stated by Unn Segrén (2015: 25). This is something in accordance with John Gregory and James Fordyce, two moralists who wrote about the female ideal during the 18th and 19th centuries, and whose writings A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters (1774) and Sermons to Young Women, Two Volumes in One (1809) will serve as a basis in the following pages.

The description done by Mr. Knightley when he says that there is no vanity in the way Emma looks like fits perfectly with what John Gregory defends: “Do not confine your attention to dress to your public appearances. Accustom yourselves to a habitual neatness […]. An elegant simplicity is an equal proof of taste and delicacy” (Gregory, 1808: 64-65). This can also be seen in the words by Mrs. Elton when she tells that at Emma’s wedding, by the end of the novel, there was “Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business!” (Austen, 1998: 555-556).

But as highlighted in italics by myself, by the end of the quotation about the beauty of Emma there is another quality which seems to stand out as one of the important features that a woman must have in order to fit in the female ideal promoted by the authors mentioned above: to be healthy (Segrén, 2015: 25). While Gregory recommends women that “An attention to your health is a duty you owe yourselves and to your friends” (1808: 57) and also encourages them to practice some exercise in the open air, such as going on a walk or riding (1808: 56), Fordyce believes that there is no need of speaking about it, that is to say, that women must not brag about their strength, neither show others their interest on performing these activities (1809: 53).

In fact, from the way Mrs. Weston depicts Emma, we cannot only infer that she is a healthy person, but also deduce that she is a vigorous woman, something that according to Gregory and Fordyce moves Emma away from the female ideal, as this quality is associated
with men rather than women. So a too strong and healthy Emma would lead us to think of her like a less feminine character (Segrén, 2015: 25) or in words of Fordyce an “unamiable creature”, showing his disagreement on this topic stating that “any young woman of better rank that throws off all the lovely softness of her nature, and emulates the daring intrepid temper of a man – how terrible!” (1809: 53).

Signs of masculinity in Emma are not only seen in the initial description about her physical appearance that has just been analyzed. The way she is described to behave is also related to the ideal of masculine behavior of the age in which the novel was written. She is introduced to us as “the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father; and had, in consequence of her sister’s marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period. […] Emma doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor’s judgement, but directed chiefly by her own.” (Austen, 1998: 8-9).

As stated in the sixth section of this essay, the one related to patriarchy in England during the 18th and 19th centuries, the role of women was that of a passive position and a dependence on a masculine figure, either her father or her husband. As a consequence, the feminine was always defined in relation to the masculine, something that confirms the lack of independence of women, so the main features of this feminine ideal of behavior were passivity and dependence, as just stated, but also intuition, debility and silence (Rodríguez, 2016: 167-168).

Todd Hoffman argues in his article as Joan Riviere did in his essay entitled “Womanliness as a Masquerade” that

“women who seek to integrate into a social network dominated by men are placed in the position of having to appropriate the phallus as a sign of their masculinity, as a sign of their equality or even superiority to men, while simultaneously having to mitigate the possible retribution that such an appropriation might entail” (2010).

What makes the character of Emma interesting is her resistance to phallic authority. On the one hand, Emma is aware of the different social statuses that exist within her society and how she must behave but, on the other hand, she rejects being fixed within the strict hierarchy she is included in. She wants her superiority over men to be recognized, but as a woman situated in an inferior position by the rules of her society, she has to show her femininity in order to prevent her desire of being equalled to men to be know and hide her intentions of going against the social prohibitions (Hoffman, 2010).

From the way Emma is depicted, it can be seen that she was only dependent on her father regarding money, as she is both the lady and the owner of the house in which she lives.
with her father. Neither was she a passive or a quite person. She really appreciates Miss Taylor’s advices, but in the end she does her will, that is to say, she takes her own decisions and that is why she is considered to be independent from her father. But what truly characterizes her as an independent woman is her refusal to marry, as will be seen in depth in one of the following sections (Rodríguez, 2016: 168-169).

Being mistress of Hartfield and in charge of her ill father, Emma seems to have taken the role of man’s authority, she has appropriated the phallus. The only thing that can make that situation be unstable is the idea of marriage. Marrying a man would mean the loss of her possession of the phallus; so, as a consequence, she denies this idea and, at the same time, tries to repress her sexual desires. This is clearly seen in her relationship with Mr. Knightley. He is undoubtedly the best character to occupy that place; however, it will not be until the end of the novel when she accepts to marry (Hoffman, 2010).

So in this respect, the beauty of Emma is one of the traits that qualifies her as sticking to the female ideal commented. Her good state of health also differentiates her from the other two important female characters in the novel, Harriet Smith and Jane Fairfax. The latest “so pale, as almost always to give the appearance of ill health” (Austen, 1998: 229) and Harriet Smith, whose health is kind of staggering, fail to comply with the ideal. Nevertheless, showing an ‘excessively good’ health can lead us think about her in terms of the masculine, something that does not falls into the feminine ideal as well as previously said (Segrén, 2015: 25).

Besides being described physically, Emma can also be pictured from the point of view of how she behaves to others and as to her personal abilities (Segrén, 2015: 25). According to the ideal, “Learned Ladies” (Fordyce, 1809: 102) are offside. Although one of Fordyce desires is to see an evolution of everything which surrounds the female world in order to help it to be more talented, he believes that leaving women to know too much can give them strength and, as a consequence, they will lose the kindness and weakness that the ideal considers to be the perfect features of a good woman (Fordyce, 1809: 102).

Throughout the novel, Emma is described as a “clever” (8) person, as well as of a “happy disposition” (8), but she is also said to have other skills such as painting, singing and playing the piano, as can be seen in the following quotation:

“She played and sang;—and drew in almost every style; but steadiness had always been wanting; and in nothing had she approached the degree of excellence which she would have been glad to command, and ought not to have failed of” (Austen, 1998: 54).
Although she is interested in these areas, she admits that “She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding” (Austen, 1998: 45). She is making reference to reading and other intellectual activities (Segrén, 2015: 25) and this is in the line of what Gregory and Fordyce defend.

Apart from painting, singing and playing the piano, Emma is also very attached to everything that has to do with her home, especially her father (Segrén, 2015: 26). The ideal woman must “Do nothing to make them (parents) unhappy. Do all in your power to give them delight” (Fordyce, 1809: 7). Although it has been stated that Emma is characterized by differing from the ideal because of her independence, she will always be ready to attend the continuous demands of her father (Grossman, 1999: 153): “Emma could not but sigh over it and wish for impossible things, till her father awoke, and made it necessary to be cheerful” (Austen, 1998: 11).

“For having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years” (Austen, 2015: 10). This is how Mr. Woodhouse is firstly described in the novel. Throughout the reading, it can be detected that Mr. Woodhouse suffers a kind of ageing disorder, but no matter how anxiously he sometimes behaves or how rude he is, Emma tries to understand him and takes care of him (Segrén, 2015: 26). This attitude towards her father is viewed by Fordyce as proper of a woman, as he considers that being patient and spending as much time as possible with older people can be very profitable for both (1809: 89-90).

But Emma does not only take care of her father, she also keeps an eye on her nephews and her sister Isabella, trying to make them feel comfortable when they come to Highbury, and on the poor. The following quotation shows how Emma gets on with the poor to such an extent that she is capable to change her behavior and expectations in order to adapt herself to what she is seeing (Segrén, 2015: 26):

Emma was very compassionate; and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse. She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will. In the present instance, it was sickness and poverty together which she came to visit; and after remaining there as long as she could give comfort or advice, she quitted the cottage with such an impression of the scene […]

(Austen, 1998: 105)
The ideal also stands up for relationships between women and “men of honor” (Segrén, 2015: 26) as stated by Gregory (1808: 84). So, as Emma is more often than not accompanied by her father and her friend Mr. Knightley, it can be said that she follows one of the principles of the ideal. But she has not exclusively had male friends surrounding her. In fact, her best friend is the governess Mrs. Weston, who has been her servant during sixteen years, until her marriage to Mr. Weston, and whose relationship has not been seen with good eyes by Fordyce. The reason why he argues that is because Miss Taylor has not been what she was expected to be, that is to say, she has been a tolerant teacher (Segrén, 2015: 26).

Although the friendship between two single women or between a woman and her servant was something difficult to achieve from the point of view of Fordyce (1809: 83), the truth is that Emma, keeping up with her way of behaving, that is to say, trying to please everybody and making them feel as comfortable as possible, establishes with her governess “the intimacy of sisters” (Austen, 1998: 8). No longer with the same reliance as with Miss Taylor, her behavior towards the old ladies coming home would be again that of dwelling on their wellness, ensuring that they lack nothing. Moreover, she will also act as a mediator when disagreements arise from conversations (Segrén, 2015: 27).

Once seen how Emma has been described physically and by means of some, not all, personal abilities, it would be also necessary to analyze her manners, conduct and feelings. These topics will help us to deeply complete the description of our main character but, nevertheless, only a few short sentences related to them will be said now, although they will be explained later on when talking about love and marriage, as they also have an influence on the psychological transformation that Emma suffers in the novel.

As Maaja Stewart points out in her article “The Fools in Austen’s Emma”, the interests of our central character undergo changes regarding what she thinks at the very beginning of the novel. If, at first, she was thinking about her town, Highbury, in terms of hierarchy, there is a certain point in time in which she is inclined to think in terms of relationships. She will be no longer worried about issues related to what comes to a legacy, nor to nose around the secrets of people. Instead, she will work hard in order to establish similarities and differences, or even transform anything that builds up her everyday life and her dealings with others (1986: 74-75).

Emma will progress from a state of mental immaturity towards one more mature in which both her mind and emotions will improve. From the very beginning of the novel Emma is seen as a stubborn, pretentious and a very spoiled girl, who also likes to manage the lives of
those around her. She convinced Harriet Smith, whose origin is unknown, not to marry Robert Martin because of his social status. He was a farmer and Emma thought that he was not the appropriate man for Harriet. Instead of him she thought of Mr. Elton, the vicar of Highbury (Shannon Jr, 1956: 637-638).

She also feels superior to the Coles, a *nouveaux riches* family of traders, and as regards Mrs. Bates and Miss Bates she speaks about them as boring people. After the disappointment suffered by Harriet because Mr. Elton did not love her, Emma and Harriet went for a walk. In order to make Harriet forget what had happened and also as a way of showing good manners, Emma decides to visit the Bates (Shannon Jr, 1956: 638), but this will not be enough “to counteract the persuasion of its being very disagreeable, – a waste of time – tiresome woman – and all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury” (Austen, 1998:178).

The scene that marks the beginning of the psychological and moral change of Emma is when she insults Miss Bates at Box Hill. According to Stewart (1986: 75) this event makes Emma grow apart from her view about herself as “so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right” (Austen: 1998: 103) and starts to think about a possible altruistic relationship with Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax, the two female characters who will be in the centre of attention when talking about the drama of Emma.

But before going on, it would be interesting to compare the way Emma and Miss Bates are described, as it seems that the latest has been portrayed in terms of oppositions with the former, even though there are also similarities. Miss Bates will not appear until the second part of the novel, but an initial description about her is given in the first part, something that accounts for the importance of this character (Stewart, 1986: 76):

[She] enjoyed a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich, nor married. Miss Bates stood in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the publish favour; and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her, into outward respect. […] Her youth passed without distinction, and her middle of life was devoted to the care of a failing mother, and the endeavour to make a small income go as far as possible. And yet she was a happy woman… (Austen, 1998: 26)

If we remember the initial description of Emma which has been provided at the very beginning of this section, we realize that it was said of Emma that she was a “handsome, clever, and rich” (Austen, 1998: 8) woman, but what is found in the previous quotation about Miss Bates is exactly the contrary, she is “neither young, handsome, rich, nor married”. Miss
Bates is also pictured as a “happy woman”, something which reminds us Emma and her “happy disposition” (Austen, 1998: 8). Moreover, what they have in common is that they take care of their parents and they seem unaware of how they can influence others (Stewart, 1986: 77).

In general, the form that the author used in the novel in order to represent the two women allows us to take for granted that Emma is the character who has everything and Miss Bates the one who lacks all. But the thing is, as argued by Stewart (1986: 78), that the “happy disposition” of Emma is just an aptitude restricted “to think a little too well of herself” (Austen, 1998: 9). In contrast, of Miss Bates is said that she has “a mine of felicity to herself” (Austen, 1998: 26) and her happiness is considered to be active. In what concerns their luck, both are said to have an excellent family, but while Miss Bates environment includes family, friends and neighbours, Emma only has her family and few people which she considers also family, although it is not a direct one.

The intention in expressing what they have in common and in which things they differ is that of preparing the steps that the changing process of Emma followed, who by the way at end of the novel will resemblance Miss Bates (Stewart, 1986: 78). But as to reach this point, it is necessary to explain what happened at Box Hill. At the meeting there, the son of Mr. Weston, Frank Churchill, asks the audience to tell Emma what they are thinking of as this is what she desires. It caused a great stir because this was something so impolite, so he then rebuilt the question clarifying that what Emma was requiring were up to three things to which “laugh heartily” (Austen, 1998: 425).

This is the point in which Miss Bates goes into action. In the face of such proposal she answered innocently: “I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth” (Austen, 1998: 425). Immediately Emma, as if she could not hold herself back, said to her: “Ah! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me –but you will be limited as to number–– only three at once” (Austen, 1998: 425). Although Miss Bates did not get right after what Emma replied, when she took the hint she felt embarrassed. This is not the first time that Emma is so rude to Miss Bates. In fact, her niece Jane Fairfax is also excluded by Emma though there is no apparent reason for it.

Emma shows indifference and a contemptible attitude towards this family. She even pronounces prejudices against Jane Fairfax and all that she does in their benefit is as a result of having to maintain the etiquette of the society she lives in. But this behavior is exactly the one that the female ideal rejects in a woman (Segrén, 2015: 28). According to Gregory,
women had to “show compassionate sympathy to unfortunate women […] Indulge a secret pleasure, I may say pride, in being the friends and refuge of the unhappy” (1808: 39).

After the meeting, Mr. Knightley reproached Emma because of having made fun of Miss Bates in front of everyone: “How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?” (Austen, 1998: 429-430). In her way to home Emma starts to reflect on what Mr. Knightley has told her. Starting to cry, she becomes aware of how disrespectful she has been to Miss Bates (Shannon Jr., 1956: 640). This situation overwhelmed her as proves the following quotation:

“Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! – How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued! And how suffer him to leave her without saying one word of gratitude, of concurrence, of common kindness! Time did not compose her. As she reflected more, she seemed but to feel it more. She never had been so depressed…and Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks all the way home, without being at any trouble to check them, extraordinary as they were”.

(Austen, 1998: 431)

Her tears are the starting point of the changes that the personality of Emma is going to suffer. Now she is beginning to become aware of the necessity of this change, as she must follow an example in order to internalize a new conduct and also manage to get Mr. Knightley believe in her again, that is to say, she needs his approval (Shannon Jr., 1956: 641). In words of Stewart, “Emma does feel a thorough and sincere change in her disposition, accepts her action as a sin of the spirit, feels both helpless in her personal guilt but is also eager to submit voluntarily to suffering and punishment to atone for that guilt. Emma, in short, is ready to come of age” (1986: 85).

The next morning she apologized remorsefully to Miss Bates. Furthermore, “her heart had been long growing kinder towards Jane” (Austen, 1998: 436), so when in a visit to the Bates she finds out that Jane Fairfax is ill, she decides to invite her to Hartfield, but Jane refused what Emma offered her. Feeling relieved because she knew that “her intentions were good” (Austen, 1998: 449), Emma understood that sorting out the pain she had provoked during such a long period of time was something difficult to resolve now (Shannon Jr., 1956: 641-642).

Not only has her unfortunate remark to Miss Bates made Emma aware of the change she should undertake. During her changing process, another event will allow her to see how
wrong she has been. Convinced that Mr. Knightley loves Harriet and not her, something somewhat incited by she herself, she starts to suffer because she recognizes that she is in love with Mr. Knightley. Playing to get into pairs is causing Emma a feeling of confusion and humiliation (Shannon Jr., 1956: 643):

“With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody’s feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody’s destiny. She was proved to have been universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing – for she had done mischief. She had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and she too much feared, on Mr. Knightley”.

(Austen, 1998: 474)

Now Emma is completely ready to correct the snobbery with which she has been characterized (Shannon Jr., 1956: 644). If at the very beginning of the novel it is said that Miss Taylor “had such an affection for her [Emma] as could never find fault” (Austen, 1998: 10), after her moral change Emma will be portrayed, as stated by Stewart (1986: 80), and in words of Mr. Knightley as “faultless in spite of all her faults” (Austen, 1998: 496). According to Hagan, “Emma is actually shown as coming only to a better, not a perfect, knowledge of herself and the meaning of her actions” (1975: 548). The change of Emma will be feasible once and for all when she realizes that what she lacks is what she needs in order to fulfil her desires, and she will only reach that point by means of recognizing the reality of Miss Bates (Stewart, 1986: 86).

To conclude this section, it would be interesting to focus a little bit deeper on some of the aspects of Emma which have been said to be unfavourable. As seen in the reprimand of Mr. Knightley to Emma because of how she addressed Miss Bates, he accuses Emma of having used her wit against the unfortunate woman (Segrén, 2015: 28). This faculty was considered by the female ideal as unacceptable, just as Fordyce demonstrates in his work: “Who is not shocked by the flippant impertinence of a self-conceited woman, that wants to dazzle by the supposed superiority of her powers” (1809: 99).

Likewise wit was condemned by the female ideal; flirtation was also punished by them. Right after the accident at Box Hill, Emma incites Frank Churchill to continue flirting with her. One of the faculties that Fordyce values the most in a woman was countenance (1809: 52) and in encouraging Frank, she was not following this precept (Segrén, 2015: 28). This is what Mr. Knightley is referring to when he says that “her vanity lies another way” (Austen, 1998: 48). Although this behavior is not habitual for her, the fact that she declares from the very beginning that she is not interested in marriage is something “grossly indecent and
dangerous” (Gregory, 1808: 49) for a woman, as it can be seen as a way of giving men hope (Segrén, 2015: 29).

Mentioning her worst sins, that is to say, her matchmaking and her ability to lie would fit in this section, but as this is something also related to the third section of this point, they will be commented later on. So as to what we have seen, Emma has both good and bad qualities. She has been described as a perfect woman. She has been graced with the qualities of modesty and sobriety and what is worthy of comment about her is her unity with her home and her father, towards who she has an exceptional attitude.

In contrast, her independence has been seen as an improper behavior as it has endowed her with masculine features, thus making her less feminine. Her conduct has shown us a character who is stubborn and even rude to people. Her ability to influence others, her taste for managing each other lives, together with her snobbery, her flaunting wit and even her flirtation with some the masculine characters of the novel has leaded her to a necessary psychological and moral reformation as has been proved throughout these lines.

7.2. Influence on Harriet Smith

If we observe how the relationship between Mr. Knightley and Emma is, we will discover that there are some coincidences with the one kept by Harriet Smith and Emma. Just as Mr. Knightley performed the role of teacher and mentor of Emma, she felt that she was over Harriet and that is why she decided to influence and govern her. As Emma states, Harriet tallies with the plan she is bearing in mind because she has “a sweet, docile, grateful disposition…only desiring to be guided” (Austen, 1998: 32). Emma also does a declaration of intents: “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 manners” (Austen, 1998: 29).

Although the role of Emma with Harriet can be classified as a father-daughter relationship, the truth is that she also feels drawn to her because of her beauty, so she is also kind of her admirer (Anderson, 2000). Harriet is described in the novel as “short, plump and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness” (Austen, 1998: 28). It is also said that she is free from conceit, although it does not work when talking about her conviction about Mr. Elton and Mr. Knightley proposing her. When compared with Emma or Jane Fairfax, she seems, in words of Mr. Knightley, that “she has
been taught nothing useful, and is too young and too simple to have acquired any thing herself” (Austen, 1998: 75) and certainly, she is lacking in dignity, because of her unknown origin, and intelligence (Segrén, 2015: 16-17).

Despite all, Emma chooses her as her partner because she considers that though there is nothing “remarkably clever in Miss Smith’s conversation, she is altogether very engaging – not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk – and yet so far from pushing, shewing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly greatful” (Austen, 1998: 28). Nevertheless, at the very beginning of their relationship, Emma rather than seeing Harriet as her friend sees her as her project, as someone to get benefit of (Counts, 2003: 47):

As a walking companion Emma had very early foreseen how useful she might find her [Harriet] [...]. She had ventured once alone to Randalls, but it was not pleasant; and a Harriet Smith, therefore, one whom she could summon at any time to a walk, would be a valuable addition to her privileges. [...] Altogether she was quite convinced of Harriet Smith’s being exactly the young friend she wanted—exactly the something which her home required (Austen, 1998: 32).

Moved by the pleasure of Harriet of being “guided”, as stated in the first paragraph, and her belief that Harriet will be “useful” for her, Emma starts to influence Harriet in matter pertaining to marriage, that is to say, her project consists in finding her a husband, something that will be very difficult to achieve because of the ineptness of Emma in matchmaking, as will be proved in the following lines. But before going in search of a husband, Emma will have to deal with the proposal of Robert Martin.

She encourages Harriet not to accept the proposal made by Mr. Martin as she considers that they differ in their rank, being he in a lower position than Harriet. Emma in her subconscious thinks that it “would have given a great deal, or endured a great deal, to have had the Martins in a higher rank of life. They were so deserving that a little higher should have been enough” (Austen, 1998: 216). This has been seen by the critics as a resort used by Emma in order to convince herself of what she was trying to carry out, as she thinks that it is the product of her good intentions towards Harriet (Chen, 2014: 34).

Nevertheless, though Emma wants to make sure everyone knows about her good intentions in promoting not to marry Mr. Martin, what really underlies this conduct is her self-interest. It is not a matter of deserving or not for the Martins a higher rank in the hierarchical structure. What she barely makes out of her speech is that a better position of the Martins, that is to say, an improvement of their social status, would mean that Mr. Martin would be the best
man for Harriet, as she will see her social status also improved and both would be suitable friends for her (Chen, 2014: 30).

It should be noted that, at all times, Emma is afraid of knowing the true origin of Harriet, as this may mean the loss of his male authority to men, who are the true owners of the phallus. If she gets Mr. Elton to marry Harriet, her position of power will be reflected indirectly and Harriet will get her social status recognized. However, if Harriet ends up marrying Mr. Martin, it will be shown that Emma does not own the phallus, but simply what she possesses are pretensions that derive and depend on the bond with her father (Hoffman, 2010).

According to Mr. Knightley, who had an argument with Emma after knowing her influence in the refusal, Harriet was “not likely to be very, very determined against any young man who told her he loved her” (Austen, 1998: 542) because as he said at the beginning of the novel “with her little wit, is not very likely ever to have any that can avail her” (Austen, 1998: 75). Moreover, he adds that the illegitimacy of Harriet works against her. On the contrary, Emma is not able to “admit him [Robert Martin] to be Harriet’s equal” (Austen, 1998: 74), alluding here again to her initial view of society as compounded by a hierarchical structure, and she also points out that Harriet is “exactly what every man delights in” and that she herself would encourage him to marry Harriet if he was ever to marry (Morris, 2005).

Completely dependent on Emma, Harriet was quick to tell her that she has just received a letter from Robert Martin asking her to marry him. But this was not just a simple transfer of information. Harriet wanted Emma to tell her what to do, to have some advice from her. Emma, a little bit thrown because of the attitude of Harriet, who by the way seems happy but, at the same time, unconfident, asked Harriet if she thought that Robert Martin was “the most agreeable man” (Austen, 1998: 64). For Emma, entering into marriage “with half a heart” (Austen, 1998: 64) was illogical, so Harriet “quite determined” (Austen, 1998: 65) now decided not to accept him (Morris, 2005: 9).

If in recommending Harriet not to marry Mr. Martin Emma spoke of him scornfully, once the affair with Mr. Martin is over, Emma uses a different strategy, that is to say, “now she gives place to an impulsion of the purest friendship and goodwill” (Morris, 2005), leading Harriet to think that Mr. Elton is interested in her. Harriet even ends up thinking that she will receive a wedding proposal from the vicar of the church of Highbury, a conceited act, but this is just a figment of the influence that Emma is throwing forwards her, otherwise she will have never thought of it (Segrén, 2015: 19).
Elton is so friendly and kind with Emma and Harriet. His attentions are interpreted by Emma as a consequence of the love that he feels for Harriet (Morris, 2005). Emma asked Elton to write a charade, so that Harriet can include it in her collection. When they received it, Emma said to Harriet: “I cannot have a moment’s doubt as to Mr. Elton’s intentions. You are his object – and you will soon receive the completest proof of it” (Austen, 1998: 89). But the truth is that it was addressed to Emma, as the episode in the chariot demonstrates. There Mr. Elton confesses his love for her. Once recovered from the shock, Emma lets him know that she has never been interested in him (Segrén, 2015: 30).

Before that occurred, it is interesting to see how Harriet cannot resist to the authority of Emma, how she accepts everything that Emma tells her, as can be seen in the answer to the quotation of the previous paragraph (Morris, 2005): “Whatever you say is always right”, she cries; “and therefore I suppose, and believe, and hope it must be so; but otherwise I could not have imagined it” (Austen, 1998: 90). But as stated previously, Emma was wrong and she feels uncomfortable when she confesses Harriet both the indifference Elton feels for her and the mistake she herself has committed (Morris, 2005).

Harriet is infatuated with Mr. Elton, what allow us to see in her that she possesses an affectionate heart. Her pain is causing somewhat also pain in Emma, so she tries not to come to grief. She will be completely free from the pain that the vicar has provoked her in the ball at the Westons (Segrén, 2015: 20). Mr. Elton was accompanied by Augusta Hawkins, whom he married, and he declined to dance with Harriet, maybe as a punishment for Emma due to “the insult she had administered in specifying his social inferiority, both in the match she had sought to contrive, and that to which he had himself aspired” (Morris, 2005).

Being thought as the first suitable pair for Harriet, Mr. Elton was not agree with this idea of Emma as he saw in Harriet an inappropriate girl because of her unknown origin, her lack of prestige in the society they were living in and also, her passivity, as she actually did not show interest in ascending in the social scale. Later, Emma will again fail when thinking about Frank Churchill, whose stepmother is her best friend Mrs. Weston, as the second possibility of pairing Harriet. Due to a series of reason which are not going to be developed here, but most importantly because he was already secretly engaged with Jane Fairfax, he also does not fit in what Emma is looking for Harriet (Counts, 2003: 34).

Nevertheless, Harriet will fall in love with a man without the assistance of Emma. In this very place, the ball of the Westons, was also Mr. Knightley, who seeing how Mr. Elton scorned Harriet and as an attempt to defend Emma against a confrontation, decided to offer
his hand and dance with her. This polite action served her as palliative for her pain, not only due to his initial indifference towards her, but also because of how he treated her in the ball. So deceived because she has really felt affection for him, Harriet experiences at the same time a change in her mood: “Such a change! In one moment such a change! From perfect misery to perfect happiness!” (Austen, 1998: 392), of course referring to Mr. Knightly conduct (Morris, 2005).

Irrespective of how badly Mr. Elton behaved, Emma confesses that she will continue admiring him in the distance and “think of his superiority to all the rest of the world with the gratitude, wonder, and veneration which are so proper, in me especially” (Austen, 1998: 392). But now, she is interested in “so very fine a man!” (Austen, 1998: 40), Mr. Knightley, as she thought of him during their first acquaintance. The “continual course of smiles” (Austen, 1998: 377) during the ball makes Emma spring new feelings (Morris, 2005).

Harriet realizes that she has fallen in love with Mr. Knightley and decides to tell it to Emma, reminding what she told once her:

But you know they were your own words, that more wonderful things had happened; matches of greater disparity had taken place than between Mr. Frank Churchill and me; and, therefore, it seems as if such a thing even as this may have occurred before – and if I should be so fortunate, beyond expression, as to – if Mr. Knightley should really – if he does not mind the disparity, I hope, dear Miss Woodhouse, you will not set yourself against it and try to put difficulties in the way. But you are too good for that, I am sure (Austen, 1998: 468).

It is in that moment when Emma is aware of the “most unfortunate – most deplorable mistake!” (Austen, 1998: 467) she has committed fostering the hopes of Harriet. “Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet’s having some hope of a return? It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself?” (Austen, 1998: 468). Right after Harriet confessed her feelings, Emma admitted that she was in love with Mr. Knightley too. She thinks that Mr. Knightley is going to tell her what he feels for Harriet, but the thing is that Mr. Knightley never realized that Harriet was interest in him and that is why he ends proposing to Emma herself (Hagan, 1975: 649).

Emma decides to keep silence until their marriage has occurred because only in that moment she will be able to give him “that full and perfect confidence which her disposition was most ready to welcome as a duty” (Austen, 1998: 545). Moreover, she thinks that this is what she has to do in order to keep her friend save from disgrace and to maintain her
reputation too. Conversely, she is also acting like this in order to save herself, as bringing to light what really has happened after her marriage was going to assure her the pardon (Hagan, 1975: 550).

After the proposal scene, Emma sends Harriet to the house of her sister Isabella in London as an attempt of having the solace she needed because of the pain she has caused Harriet, but also as a way of preventing an encounter between them. In London, Harriet finds out the engagement between Emma and Mr. Knightley, but she also meets Martin there, who once again makes her a proposal which she accepts (Hagan, 1975: 550-551). Knowing Emma that her marriage with Mr. Knightley was saved, now she admits that she “was a fool” (Austen, 1998: 544) when she first rejected the union between Harriet and Mr. Martin and she wishes their happiness (Morris, 2005).

Reaching the end of the novel, Emma discovers the true origin of Harriet. She was the daughter of a tradesman and she was born out of marriage. Here the snobbery of Emma of what has been talked in the first section emanates again, certain that none of the men she wanted to be with Harriet as well as Mr. Knightley would have wanted marry her after knowing that she was an illegitimate daughter of a tradesman (Hagan, 1975: 552). Regardless, Emma changes her previous view about Harriet as an object and when the romantic adventure of Harriet comes to a happy end, she starts to see Harriet as a “living, breathing person, worthy of esteem” (Counts, 2003: 47-48).

To conclude, Harriet has been proved to be a character without the ability of judgment, that is why she relies in what others tell her. Emma will take her decisions but doing it in a manner that seems that she is apparently doing nothing. In words of Segrén (2015: 23), Harriet has been the “live doll” of Emma, doing of her “the mirror of the people who surround her”. But in the end is seen that Harriet actually possesses wit and is able to have a future without being hand in hand with Emma.

7.3. Love and marriage

“Jane Austen...vividly represents the point which many social historians have made: that marriage, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was an economic necessity for women. Far from being a matter of romantic or personal choice, the constraint on women to marry was very considerable” (Evans, 1987: 46).

This quotation clearly shows the reason why women, more than for pleasure or love, had to get married. As stated in the section dealing with the patriarchy in England, women
were not able to pursue a degree that would allow them to be self-sufficient without the help of men. As a consequence, they were in devoid of an own economy, so their only way out in order to survive in the society was through marriage (Kollmann, 2003: 75).

During these centuries, a woman could emancipate herself and, in a way, avoid marriage, if and only if she worked as a teacher, something which allowed her to earn a living. An unmarried woman was destined to be a useless person. Moreover, governesses were not seen with good eyes, as they were considered to disrupt the joy of the homes. This is the case, for example, of Jane Fairfax, who lives with Miss Campbell and has to work as a governess right after this lady has married a wealthy man so as to make sure her future. The work as a governess will not smooth the way for Jane Fairfax as she has to earn the respect of people and live in a moderate manner because of the low income she receives for her job (Kollmann, 2003: 83-84).

With regard to parents, they were the ones who had the last word, an inevitable influence, on the possible marriage or not between two people. In fact, that is what happens between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, as Mrs. Churchill is opposed to their marital union while she is alive (Kollmann, 2003: 88). A similar situation occurs with Mr. Woodhouse and Emma. Although he appreciates her a lot, Emma feels that she is so tied to him that “marriage, in fact, would not do for her. It would be incompatible with what she owed to her father, and with what she felt for him. Nothing should separate her from her father. She would not marry, even if she were asked by Mr. Knightley” (Austen, 1998: 477).

If at home women were subordinated to the command of their fathers, once they were married, they were even weaker than before. Power was in the hands of their husbands and, what is more, women were considered their property. In this novel, this can be seen in the relationship between Mr. John Knightley and Isabella, who is the sister of Emma. His behavior towards his wife is that of a rude and mean man who easily gets annoyed and remarks on her frail health in a contemptuous manner (Austen, 1998: 112). In spite of all this, Isabella shows a passive behavior and acceptance (Kollmann, 2003: 78), as can be seen when the narrator tells us that while Emma “was quick in feeling the little injuries to Isabella… Isabella never felt [them] herself” (Austen, 1998: 112). Moreover, Emma takes pity on “…poor Isabella, passing her life with those she doated on, full of their merits, blind to their faults, and always innocently busy, might have been a model of right feminine happiness” (Austen, 1998: 165).
So far we have shown how the figure of parents, above all fathers, plays an important role when determining the social status of their daughters and, in a minor way, of their sons. Furthermore, women had a predisposition to marry since that meant securing their economy and welfare, but also it was a way of being defined and accepted within the society they lived in, something that would not happen if they were maiden women. In the case of Emma, although the image she projects is that of an independent character who does not want to get married unless she was truly in love, the truth is that she ends up marrying as part of the process she has to fulfill in order to adhere to this social convention. However, Emma does not marry Mr. Knightley because of an economic necessity as she has enough money (Kollmann, 2003: 95, 101), but so as to maintain a standard of conduct (Kollmann, 2003: 145).

Emma Woodhouse is of the opinion that a “woman is not to marry a man merely because she is asked” (Austen, 1998: 66) and she also strongly believes, when referring to Robert Martin and Harriet, that denying a proposal of a man is her “female right” (Austen, 1998: 80). In fact, that is what she does with Mr. Elton and Frank Churchill. Indeed, from her perspective and taking into account her social and economic position, she advocates that women in her own situation do not get married, as it leads to a lowering of the power they already have. Although this idea is not what was established in the conventions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in doing so Jane Austen is showing the audience that men were not as indispensable as they were thought to be.

In her essay, Elizabeth Kollmann cites a fragment of Nancy Armstrong, extracted from “Captivity and Cultural Capital in the English Novel” in which she comments that in a marriage, the position of the man was that of oppressor, the head of the household and as such, that gave him the right to exercise violence against the woman when needed (2003: 107). Frank Churchill states that choosing the woman you like the most and checking that they are “in their own homes, among their own set, just as they always are” (Austen, 1998: 427) is the only thing you have to do as to get married. But Jane Austen, by means of the language she uses in her novel (Kollmann, 2003: 107), sometimes makes us believe that women are not a property, but men, as can be seen when Emma implies that a man can be “the prize of a girl would seek him” (1998: 475).

Women had to await men to propose to them; otherwise, society will see them as desperate women (Kollmann, 2003: 110). In the case of Harriet Smith, she does not show any desperation at all, since she seems to settle for any man who decides to propose her.
Throughout one year, we are told she falls in love three times, that is to say, first of all with Mr. Martin, then with Mr. Elton and, finally, with Mr. Knightley, although as has been said before, in the end she, who in words of Mr. Knightley seems not to be a “determined” (Austen, 1998: 542) girl, will marry Mr. Martin after his second proposal (Kollmann, 2003: 111).

According to some critics, Jane Austen with her novel and, particularly, with the way in which she portrays the topic of patriarchy and marriage wants to show the reader that she does not believe in happy endings, although she actually tells us in the end that the marriage of the main protagonists, Emma and Mr. Knightley, is blessed. As Elizabeth Kollmann (2003: 113) points out in her essay and in words of the critic André Brink in his work The Novel: Language and Narrative from Cervantes to Calvino (1998: 121):

It may be argued that, however paradoxically, towards the end, marriage offers Emma a prospect of liberation…but this appears to be contradicted by all the preceding evidence from other marriages. At the very least one has to bear in mind that from very early in the novel marriage is viewed, as far as women are concerned, as no more than domestic service…

7.4. Male characters: Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightly.

So far we have seen how the main character shows its power through its influence on other characters as is the case of Harriet Smith, but it is also interesting to see how she is influenced by the other side, that is to say, the male characters. First of all, we find the figure of the father, Mr. Woodhouse. He is an old man who suffers from hypochondria, which he uses to exercise his power, authority and influence over his daughter. By means of his illness, he is able to manipulate Emma, as he does in her opinion about marriage, and even makes sure that she will always obey him (Mitra, 2007: 194).

Mr. Woodhouse continuously praises the devotion his daughter professes for him. This accounts for the psychological link that exists between them but it also shows the reader a relationship based on subjugation, that is to say, Emma is always there to fulfill the orders and desires of her father. As Malabika Mitra points out in her essay, this situation can be linked to the following words by Wollstonecraft (2007: 195):

…the early habit of relying almost implicitly on the opinion of a respected parent is not easily shook, even when the matured reason convinces the child that his parent is not the wisest man in the world. This weakness […] of obeying a parent only on account of his being a parent, shackles the mind, and prepares it for a slavish submission to any power but reason.
If in previous sections we have seen how Emma showed its power over other characters, now we see here the opposite. Jane Austen shows us a weak character, who acts under the command of her father selfishness. Despite this, the paternal figure does not come out well either, since although it is described in the text like one of the main important men of Highbury, its dependence on Emma makes him an un-manly and insecure man, a description that does not fit within the ideal of men of the time (Mitra, 2007: 195).

As stated by Malabika Mitra, “Mr. Woodhouse is another example through whom Austen questions the moral authority of patriarchy in which such men misuse the power and authority vested in them” (2007: 195-196). As has been said above, although Mr. Woodhouse does not support marriage and tries to instill that thought in his daughter, she ends up marrying Mr. Knightley. He accepts this marriage not because he really believes that it is what a father should do as responsible for his daughter, but this reflects one again the insecurity he has been performing throughout the novel, his inability to judge anything of what happens, as well as his selfishness. In this sense, Mr. Knightley shows himself to be more of a father figure than the father himself (Mitra, 2007: 196).

As Kathleen Anderson also points out, “her biological father seems, in his confidence of Emma’s perfection and indulgence of her wishes, more of a lover type than Knightley does” (2000). Mr. Knightley performs in the novel the role of teacher and mentor, which were typical of a father figure. Almost instructively, he tries to change the way Emma behaves arguing that his age gives him a better judgment of life (Austen, 1998: 119). Despite their age difference, sixteen years, he “loves to look at her” (Austen, 1998: 48), although he shields himself in that he is an “old friend” (Austen, 1998: 48), which sounds rather paternalistic (Anderson, 2000).

Knightly thinks that the role of women as wives is that of obedience and submission, as his conversation with Mrs. Weston shows when talking about how Emma taught her about marriage (Austen, 1998: 46). He thinks that Emma must apply to herself what she taught Mrs. Weston. In this way, it can be seen how Mr. Knightley is an authoritative figure whose subconscious tries to prepare Emma to be a good wife to him. But, in the end, he will be the one submitting to the will of Emma, as she puts her father before Mr. Knightley and, after marrying him, she decides to stay at Highbury and not going to Knightley’s house (Anderson, 2000).
Although throughout the novel it is maintained that Mr. Knightley maintains at all time a correct moral, the truth is that this moral is undermined by its jealousy towards Frank Churchill. Quoting Peggy Kamuf, Sean Ashley determines that such jealousy comes from “a masculine determinant” and that this “essential masculine jealousy”, which origin is the inability “to possess… feminine difference”, is contrasted with the “historically conditioned feminine resentment of masculine privilege” (2011: 13). The belief that she may be in love with Frank Churchill makes him afraid of not possessing her “feminine otherness” (Ashley, 2011: 13).

7.5. Fiction as a narrative strategy

Throughout this essay, we have seen how the main purpose of Jane Austen was to depict in her novel the female ideal of the era she was living in, that is to say, the early nineteenth century. As Diane M. Counts asserts in her thesis and pointing to the words of Claudia L. Johnson in her book Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel of 1988, the author used fiction as a strategy in her writing in order to help women find their place in a world which was mainly ruled by men (2003: 24).

As I have previously argued, being a women and a writer was not very well considered in her society. As a consequence, she had to write a fiction in order to avoid her novel from being censored. So, what she actually does is tell us the story of a fictional character, someone who does not exist in real life, although the truth is that behind Emma she will “[cifrar la verdad] en la mentira para que el censor, que en este caso podría ser el discurso patriarcal, no pueda precisarla ni tampoco perseguirla de forma abierta” (Rodríguez, 2016: 176).

According to the French philosopher and critic Michel Foucault,

“in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Young, 1981: 52).

The procedures Foucault is talking about are prohibition and the oppositions reason-madness and true-false. By subverting the discourse, none of these procedures fit in the strategy Jane is using, so that is what makes possible her writing; this is the only way she has
to talk about the ideal feminine without being questioned or even censored (Rodríguez, 2016: 177).

By means of fiction, Jane Austen is able to express what is in her mind but as if she was not the one who speaks. She confers that role to the character inserted in the story she is reporting and also to a narrator. As neither of them exist in her everyday life, their voices have no limit; cannot be censored. The author has the possibility of entering a character and, at the same time, denies everything that it represents since it is not itself. She can imply that what she is telling is part of an unknown reality; one which she does not agree (Rodríguez, 2016: 177).

What is interesting of the narrative used by Jane Austen is that

[She] provided subjective and objective perspectives simultaneously to allow her audience to engage in practiced empathy and multiple realities. She did not make judgments for her audience; rather, her use of narrative perspective allowed readers to view others more generously, reassess their own assumptions, and experience a nuanced, complex world without answers—a fictional experience with further applications in reality. (Chen, 2014: 37)

Although what she intended with her novel was to cause some effects in her society, more specifically in women, the truth is that she had to “find a way to conceal her voice in order to be adjusted to the patriarchal discourse without breaking openly with the established values and, at the same time, find a way to explore their role and identity in society” (Gerassi, 1997: 130, my own translation). In doing so, she got her work published without censorship issues and, most importantly, her fictional novel was widely read (Rodríguez, 2016: 177).

8. Conclusions

After developing the general and specific objectives marked at the beginning of this project, it can be concluded that feminist literary criticism, although initially based its studies on the role of women within literary works, gradually expanded its objectives. Among them, it is worth mentioning the fact that they undertook a task of reconstruction of the feminine literary canon, recovering works that had been despised or even those unknown until that moment. It is also notable their interest in other types of theories such as psychoanalysis or structuralism, as well as an awareness of feminist works written not only by women, but also by men.
As for the role of women in the society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, we have been able to verify that this is of a total subordination to men, either to the father or to the husband once they leave the family home. Therefore, we can speak of a social situation strictly marked by the difference of sexes, obviously a relationship of inequality that disadvantages women in all aspects of their life, that is to say, in their education, social relations, etc. Primarily, the only role assigned to them is that of wife and mother. This situation will improve briefly at the end of the 19th century.

From the analysis of the work we can extract the interest of the author in showing the social reality of her time through a fictional story, in which by means of the main character, Emma, she will express her vision about the situation, always making clear that it leads with an unreal character and that what is narrated has the only goal of entertaining its readers. Although what narrates is real, Jane Austen will use this technique to avoid a possible censorship.

Emma will embody the author's desire to advance in society and achieve equality between the sexes. With her behavior and actions, she will sometimes show a certain adherence to the principle of phallocentrism, that is, she will acquire the role that was usually proper of men. Likewise, refusing to marry, as this would jeopardize the power he possesses inside her house, she will dedicate herself to create an identity to Harriet, which allows her to have a good social position and make her more suitable for her company.

Taking the novel as argument the theme of marriage and love, something that Emma rejects, we will see how by the end of the work she ends up surrendered to the norms of patriarchy. Although she resists the social bans that determine her position within the patriarchal social structure, Emma is aware of where she lives, so her attempts to marry Harriet are attempts to maintain the integrity of society. The same thing happens with her, who ends up marrying Mr. Knightley, who throughout the novel has had rather a paternal role than one of a friend or possible lover. The fact that they end up living at Highbury should not be seen as a submission on the part of Emma to her husband, but as an act of respect and affection on the part of Knightley towards which was his great friend and now father-in-law Mr. Woodhouse.

**Conclusiones**

Tras desarrollar tanto los objetivos generales como específicos que se marcaron al inicio de este proyecto se puede concluir que la crítica literaria feminista, aunque en un principio
basó sus estudios en el papel de la mujer dentro de las obras literarias, poco a poco fue ampliando sus objetivos. Entre ellos cabe destacar el hecho de que emprendieran una labor de reconstrucción del canon literario femenino, recuperando obras que habían sido despreciadas o incluso aquellas desconocidas hasta el momento. También es destacable su interés por otro tipo de teorías como el psicoanálisis o el estructuralismo, así como una toma de conciencia con respecto a las obras feministas escritas no solo por mujeres, sino también por hombres.

En cuanto al papel de la mujer en la sociedad de los siglos XVIII y XIX en Inglaterra, hemos podido comprobar que este es de total subordinación al hombre, ya bien sea al padre, o bien al marido una vez abandonen la casa familiar. Por lo tanto, podemos hablar de una situación social estrictamente marcada por la diferencia de sexos, obviamente una relación de desigualdad que desfavorece a la mujer en todos los aspectos de su vida, es decir, tanto en su educación, relaciones sociales, etc. Principalmente, el único papel que se les asigna es el de esposa y madre de familia. Esta situación mejorará brevemente a finales del siglo XIX.

Del análisis de la obra podemos extraer el interés de la autora por mostrar la realidad social de su tiempo a través de un relato ficticio, en el por medio del personaje principal, Emma, plasmará su visión sobre la situación, dejando siempre claro que se trata de un personaje irreal y que lo que se relata solamente tiene el objetivo de entretenecer a sus lectores. Aunque lo que se cuenta es real, Jane Austen utilizará esta técnica para esquivar una posible censura.

Emma encarnará los deseos de la autora por avanzar en la sociedad y conseguir la igualdad entre sexos. Con su forma de comportarse y sus acciones, mostrará en ocasiones una cierta adhesión al principio del “falocentrismo”, es decir, adquirirá el papel que por norma era propio del hombre. Así mismo, rehusando de contraer matrimonio, ya que eso haría peligrar el poder que posee dentro de su casa, se dedicará a crearle una identidad a Harriet, que le permita tener una buena posición social y la haga más apta para su compañía.

Teniendo como hilo argumental la novela el tema del matrimonio y el amor, algo que Emma rechaza, veremos como al final de la obra acaba rendida a las normas del patriarcado. Aunque se resiste a las prohibiciones sociales que determinan su posición dentro de la estructura social patriarcal, Emma es consciente de donde vive, por lo que sus intentos por casar a Harriet no son más que una forma de mantener la integridad de la sociedad. Exactamente ocurre lo mismo con ella, quien acaba casándose con Mr. Knightley, quien a lo largo de la obra tenía un papel más paternal que de amigo o posible amor. El hecho de que acaben viviendo en Highbury no debe verse como una sumisión por parte de Emma hacia su
marido, sino como un acto de respeto y cariño por parte de Knightley hacia el que era su gran amigo y ahora suegro Mr. Woodhouse.

9. Bibliografía


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