

LOVE TRIANGLES IN JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*

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Love triangles are enchanting medleys of confusion based on misconception and concealed feelings of the various characters in a novel. Usually love triangles are formed between two men and women or two women and a man. These triangles add spice to the love stories and enhance reader's interest. They have always been a very popular and interesting subject amongst the novelists, film makers and television serial makers too. Whether it is Tom Jones by Henry Fielding, *Adam Bede* by George Eliot, the *Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James, or *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, all deal with love triangles in their own different ways. Though love triangles may not form the central theme of these novels yet are inseparable from it, Likewise ,in almost all the novels by Jane Austen one comes across a number of love triangles .Emma Austen's last comedy to be published during her lifetime, deals with the greatest number of love triangles, all coming together in the end. As Jane Austen was also fascinated by the complexities of relationship like Henry James, she very well in the most sophisticated manner demonstrates these conflicts arising in the triangles of love. The purpose of this present paper is to scrutinize the triangular shape of desires in Emma which makes Austen's last comedy much more interesting and loveable than her previous work.

Austen's novels are essentially love stories and are all different studies of love. In their complete detachment from the outside world of humdrum life, and in having the theme of love as the nucleus of the novels, these novels resembles the comedies of Shakespeare and it is believed that Emma is to Austen what Hamlet is to Shakespeare, but apart from just being a fable of love and marriage, each of Austen's novel is the history of process of self correction and self-knowledge with inner harmony, understanding, integrity and self approval as goal.

The central motif with which Jane Austen, like Fielding and Richardson is concerned in Emma is marriage. The opening sentence of *Pride and prejudice*, "it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in search of a wife" (01) with more or less variations makes Austen's intension much clearer. It is the business of the female characters in her novels to find husbands and the business of their male counterparts to serve as partners for the marriageable females. And one of the distinguished characteristic of Emma is that its grouping is not binary, but triangular. These triangular shapes of desire occurring in the novel are the result of Emma's feminine age for match making and herself delusion. She is totally deceived and even when in possession of facts she misinterprets or refashions them to suit her own whim and fancies.

Everything is subsidiary to the probation of Emma Woodhouse, and the course of the story in comparison to *Mansfield Park* is rectilinear. Emma is a young woman of great social talents, being cast by nature as an heiress and leader of society in High- bury, she thinks herself

competent for the part of amateur providence charged with the destinies of her less far-seeing neighbors, whom she is prepared to couple off according to her views of matrimonial suitability. She falls into one delusion after another, but it is not a mere succession of scrapes from which she extricates herself in turn; the embarrassments due to the first, and the second, and then the third blunder continues and complicate each other, till she finds herself in a position that threatens her own best chance of happiness and leads to self-enlightenment.

Beatrice Marie states that; “Austen’s resembles a chessboard on which the unattached characters are free to interchange themselves within a fixed number of position” (53) It is interesting to see how various character of the novel are positioned on the board of chess by Emma, how well they the game of love, and how the play ends when all the players have been appropriately paired, not as per the will of Emma but as per the command of fate.

“Emma woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich with a comfortable home and happy deposition” (5) possesses two deficiencies : she thinks a little too well of herself and has an inclination to have things her own way. There in lies the origin of all her mistakes, the one makes her a snob, the other blind to other person’s point of view .The opening scene of the novel engages the mechanism of a triangular rivalry, which Emma thinks, she commands but which will quickly develop beyond her control.

At the very outset Emma chiefly thinks that she is chiefly responsible for the marriage of Miss Taylor, her governess and friends with Mr. Weston and proudly calls it her success. However Mr. George Knightly the friend and advisor of the woodhouse family tells her that in Miss Taylor’s case she “made a lucky guess; and that is all that can be said”(11) even Mr. woodhouse, Emma’s father shares the same opinion and prays “do not make any more matches”.(10) But Emma is eager to embark upon her campaign of match-making and find a suitable match for High -burry’s young vicar Mr. Elton .Mr. Knightly again advises her ,not to set out such an adventure :”Depend upon it, a man of six or seven-and-twenty can take care of himself” (12).But Emma is Emma, and she cannot help being but herself.

The novel proceeds to set little traps for Emma’s vanity and self importance and she falls into every one of them. Emma plans to fill the gap (with the marriage of miss Taylor) left in her interest and affection by assuming the role of an educator herself. She takes under her protection Harriet Smith “the natural daughter of somebody”(18), a simple girl of small fortune and illegitimate birth who boards at a local school. Emma’s intention is to form Harriet’s tastes and opinion by telling her own before her as an example. In effect, she is consciously offering herself as a model for Harriet to imitate.

But Emma’s decisions to serve as Harriet’s model are not without its dangers. Emma’s goal is a good marriage for Harriet and she ends up constructing the novels paradigmatic triangle between herself, her protégée, and Mr., Elton. She interferes in the flourishing relationship of Harriet with a poor farmer. Mr. Robert Martin and persuades innocent Harriet to reject a proposal of marriage from Martin, not because Harriet does not love him, but because Emma does not like him. She asks Harriet to wait, as the right man will come in due course of time. Her attitude is in line with Jan Austen’s own advice to her love sick niece, Fanny knight:”well, I shall say as I have often said before. Do not be in a hurry, depend upon it, the right man will come at last”(Ram 49).In this respect the novel may be said to be autobiographical with the heroine taking some other traits from her creator.

The right man, according to Emma, is Mr. Elton, she therefore, encourages Harriet to like and love him. Her intention is to displace Robert Martin from her heart and plant Mr. Elton instead. Emma is ignorant of herself and about other, occupied in encouraging Harriet towards

Mr. Elton, she overlooks things that are observable even to the casual reader. For instance, Mr. Elton's anxiety is evidently not over Harriet's sore throat but over its infection to Emma herself, "A sore throat: I hope not infectious, I hope not of a putrid, infectious sortLet me entreat you to run no risks" (84).

She even interprets his unrestrained enthusiasm for her drawing skill as desire on his part to own a likeness of Harriet. She admits to herself that he is almost too amorous to be in love, but fails to notice that this enthusiasm is directed more on her than on Harriet. However, Emma runs away with her own speculations and whims. She is naturally surprised when Mr. Elton confesses his love for her, not for Harriet. For the first time Emma realizes her mistake and her match – making plans goes to backfire.

Elton's unwelcome avowal demonstrates the fragility of the triangle of external mediation, the tremendous irony in this situations cannot escape our attention .Emma has built up Harriet's expectation to marry a man of standing like Mr. Elton, on this part, has set his sight on the estimable miss Woodhouse. Both of them are reaching beyond their social levels and Emma has encouraged both. Now only when the game gets out of Emma's control, can she see her folly and blindness. On the other hand, Mr. Elton, furious at the rebuff, and burning to show that he is not an unacceptable person rushes off to bath, and soon comes back with a showy and even more silly wife than himself, who has the temerity to challenges Emma's precedence at High bury.

Emma's first mistake makes her realize that she can also be mistaken in life. But , the match-making inclination is still predominant in her, although a consciousness has been aroused. Now a fresh possibility for the wounded Harriet appears, in *Frank Churchill*, the stepson of Emma's old governess Mrs. Weston. In her second attempt to marry off Harriet, Emma gets involved in a more serious trouble, she constructs a second mimetic relation between herself and Harriet with Frank Churchill substituted for Elton.

Initially Frank had made some impression on Emma which made her image that she must be a little in love with him but as soon as she realizes "that she would not be very much in love" (198); she plays with the idea of a match between Frank and Harriet who shows signs of having transferred her affection from Mr. Elton to Mr. Churchill. But Frank has other designs. He is secretly engaged to Jan Fairfax, who stays occasionally with her Aunt, Miss Bets in High bury. Miss Fairfax is a young lady whom the imaginative Emma , on the slenderest event of Mr. Dixon rescuing her from falling overboard in a water party, suspects of having been the unhappy object of a love affair with Mr. Dixon, Who was Jane's best friend's(miss Campbell) husband and lived in Ireland. Emma is foolish enough to impart her suspicion to Frank who flirts with her, and fools her in spite of being involved elsewhere. Likewise Sophia in Henry Fielding's Tom Jones is also seen being a little too friendly with Blifil in spite of being in love with Tom , so that her aunts' suspicion is not aroused.

Emma thus, become the internal mediator of the triangle the clever Churchill constructed between himself, Emma and Jane, while she is or she thinks she is the external mediator of a triangle between herself, Churchill and Harriet .Emma's triangle of desire proves an illusion whereas, Churchill's triangle, on the other hand, functions with the efficiency of a machine .He not, Emma, is the master –manipulator of others desires. Beatrice Marie comments; "Like Julian Sorel, Emma is a failed narcissist, but Churchill has the true solipsistic self-love that sets all desire flowing toward him"(57).

The irony of the desire that Churchill triangulates between himself, Jan and Emma is apparent mainly in retrospect. It precipitates the period of mimetic triangles, which reduce Emma to the democracy of desire and she unknowingly gets involved in the game, which she herself

had laid down for others. While Emma was trying to get Harriet's interested in the handsome and eligible Frank, Harriet's mild encounter with the gypsies and her rescue by Frank sets her imagination racing. She sees it as a way of making her fantasy about Frank and Harriet come true and even encourages Harriet by saying that; "More wonderful things have taken place, there have been matches of greater disparity"(256).

But when Frank openly announces his engagement with Jane Fairfax and Harriet informs Emma that she is not in love with Frank Churchill at all, but with the incomparable Mr. Knightley and has reasons to believe her sentiments returned them Emma realizes that all the while when she was talking of Frank and the service he rendered to Harriet without divulging his name, she merely succeeds without knowing it in making the girl fall in love with Mr. Knightley by and it was Mr. Knightly not Frank whose generosity of escorting Harriet to the dance floor and saving her from the embarrassing rudeness of Mr.Elton which had attracted Harriet and she fell in love with him.

Harriet's lack of emotion leads to the explanation that destroys Emma's illusions. With Harriet's confession of her love for Mr. Knightly Emma's world suffers a total collapse, she realizes the truth of her own heart. Within moments, she admits to herself "Mr.Knightley must marry no one but herself"(307).Emma realizes the mistake she has made in trying to improve the girl and bitterly recalls Mr. Knightley's words on the subject of when he accused her for being "no friend to Harriet Smith"(48).

One can see that Emma's supreme folly has been to under –estimate the depth of her feelings for Mr. Knightley.Her pride and vanity have prevented her from understanding "her own head and heart"(310).Her world of illusions come tumbling about her, and she realizes the "false and insolent estimate"(312) of her own merits. With "a clearness which had never blessed her before" Emma sees the "blindness" and "madness" that "leads her on" (307).

With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of every body'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.(310).

Emma's confronting her own vanity and self –deception reminds us of Clarissa doing the same thing in Richardson's Clarissa. Emma's self awareness break on her "with the speed of an arrow"(307).but the making of it has been in process for some time now, of all the painful lessons she has undergone, none is as distressful to her as this one. Harriet's desire can be said to create Emma's where before only feelings of friendship existed. Their rivalry projects from the solitary splendor into the world of common human conflicts, the world of democratic desire what she will make it, turns on the evaluation of the recite's subsidiary mimetic structure, a figure of which she is also the pivot.

Mr.Kinghtley's implication in the novel's triangular dynamic parallels that of Emma. "He has been in love with Emma and jealous of Frank Churchill from about the same period, "one sentiment having probably enlightened him as to the existence of the other."(325). Mr.Knightley thinks of Emma in more than a friendly way and the very first hint that one gets is when he asks her to dance; "Indeed I will.... You know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it all improper.Brother and sister! no, indeed "(248).

In the Box Hill incident, where “Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse flirted together excessively” (276), brought Jane to the breaking point and turns her from a passive to an active character in the emotional relationships and this also convinced Mr. Knightley that they both are in love with each other. Whereas, Emma interned and imagined Mr. Knightley to be in love with Harriet. But when Churchill announces his secret engagement, Knightley hasten to comfort Emma and finds himself confessing his love. Emma understands her own love only when she finds that Mr. Knightley could become Harriets’s love and Knightley has been taught to love by his mediator, Churchill, he proposes to Emma, Knightley is also reduced from aloof social arbiter to a jealous lover through the mediation of an erotic rival and Harriet in now free to go to her first love Robert Martin.

Thus, it is clear from Emma’s imaginary traits that she lives and thrives more on imagination rather foolishly indeed than on reality and make things worse for herself and for others. She is also seen as someone, who always wants to be in light of everyone’s preference and is almost lacking in any emotional life. From the moment she substitutes herself for Mrs. Goddard’s schoolgirl in Harriet’s imagination, mimetic relationships replicate, until on Knightley’s entry into the story. Emma’s attempt to play God is made to involve her in a variety of situations, all of which contribute in the end to her self – knowledge and enlightenment.

The attainment of self- knowledge on the part of the central figure and sometime other characters as well, is always Jane Austen’s Theme. Edmund in *Mansfield park*; Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and prejudice*; Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*, all follow a painful way of enlightenment and self- knowledge, though it may not always be as powerful as Emma’s but it does bring them from moral blindness to the attainment of self wisdom.

Thus, Jane Austen with the delicacy of touch, sense of balance and sweet reasonableness had very well explored the various facets, situations and tangles in love. And when all the romantic tangles are solved, all the triangles coincide, angles are righted, the figure is stabilized, the novel ends with the ringing of wedding bells and happy unions of the destined partners , not the intended ones which is both real and logical in Emma which was the last novel published in her lifetime.

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