Masculinity Depicted In Emma By Jane Austen

The governing questions to this essay are masculinity depicted in Emma and what is the contribution of this portrayal to her other projects and her over contribution to the dynamics of gender and power in literature. Austine’s novels promote the ideology of a society where men forge a different form of masculinity that is much more tolerant to women socially, in addition to public participation, enabling the fulfillment of female desires and needs. In Emma Austen's main protagonist, Mr Knightley, is presented as tolerant and more understanding of female thoughts and wishes in a depiction of gentleman masculinity. Austen's literary works seek to promote a socially approved form of gentleman masculinity by endorsing a male character that is not dependent on the submissive or passive nature of women in domestic relationships.

Jane Austen occupies a significant role in women's literature, in particular, the Victorian era literature, dominated by a highly patriarchal writing society. Austen is considered one of the front runners of women novelists who dominated the novel genre of the nineteenth century. In the highly patriarchal societies that dominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, literature was regarded as a male-only affair and Austen's works set the path for other women writers and novelists. Austen's Emma questions the role of women in society and tries to explore the theme of women having leading roles or commanding authority, in contrast to how women were portrayed at the time. Victorian literature at the time reduced women to the private sphere as unseen daughters and docile wives (Ailwood 15). Victorian women could only gain recognition through marriage and having a husband's title and were expected to subvert themselves to their husbands' needs. In Emma, Austen tries to depict Emma in a new identity different from that of a traditional Victorian woman. Austen's search for women's identity and the depiction of women in a new light leads to a new masculine identity and masculinity. Her works depict scenarios where men leave their hegemonic masculinity and superiority and acknowledge the roles and importance of women. In this case, Jane Austen brings Emma to realize her gender roles through the help of her brother-in-law.

Emma assumes a masculine identity that is not hers, by fiercely taking the role of matchmaker and chief decision-maker when it comes to selecting mates for her friends. According to Austen, masculinity is not a biological or physical attribute and that being male does not necessarily refer to masculinity. Masculinity is performative as perceived by Emma’s actions in the novel. Mr. Knightley's gentle behavior towards those around him, Harriet Smith and Miss. Bates explores a new identity to masculinity in which women are not marginalized and mistreated. Austen's novel tries to highlight the fact that gender is performative, that is, an individual's behavior creates gender identity by merging the roles of men and women. In her work men and women gain their masculine and feminine identity differently from the traditional perception of masculinity and femininity.

In Emma, Austen presents two forms of masculinity for the reader to decipher. That is, on one hand, Austen presents the traditional, patriarchal, and hegemonic masculinity and on the other a gentleman form of masculinity depicted by Mr. Knightley and his encounters with women in the novel. The first conflict between Mr. Knightley and Emma is a depiction of the conflict between traditional masculinity and gentleman masculinity. The first meeting between Emma and Knightley involves her matching Weston to Miss Taylor and her desire to match Harriet to

Mr. Elton, which Knightley disagrees with. In Emma, Knightley's gentleness is used to portray gentleman masculinity and the role it plays in society. We see and learn of gentleman masculinity through Mr. Knightley's eyes (Kirutheeba 12). In the first encounter between Emma and Knightley, the two argue over the marriage of Harriet Smith and Robert Martin. Emma is vehemently against the idea that Harriet should marry Robert Martin, as she considers Martin to be of a lower social standing, and suggests that Harriet should marry Elton, the village vicar. In contrast, Knightley is against the idea of Harriet marrying Elton, as he considers Martin to be a respectable and caring man who would likely take good care of Harriet.

Mr. Knightley's approach to masculinity is being able to perform the tasks required of you, such as adequately taking care of your wife and family. Knightley opposes the traditional views of masculinity where one should because of social standing. He disagrees with Emma's views on marriage relations being based on economic standing and social rank that deems Martin as an unsuitable suitor. The good conduct and behavior that Knightley embodies in the novel is a depiction of his basic standards of masculinity, that make him suitable to marry Harriet (Sadeq 185). Moreover, Mr. Knightley's character is used to portray resistance against hegemonic masculinity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was used to oppress both men and women. And his actions depict an individual who appears to be enlightened and liberal to the various roles women play in society.

In the novel, Mr. Knightley acts as an icon of gentlemanliness who is aware of his duties to all those around him, Martin and Harriet included. His final marriage to Harriet proves that his gentleman thinking and nature finally triumphed. Moreover, the noble actions of Knightley are what guide Emma and several other characters in the novel. Austen uses the conflict between Knightley and Emma, in the beginning, to present the available forms of masculinity present in the Victorian era, and reconstructs this masculinity on the good conduct of men, rather than their social ranking or wealth (Kestner 150). Austen exposes that the sense of gentleman masculinity is based on the duty of the man towards society.

Overall, Austen's novels seek to deconstruct patriarchal hegemony by promoting male characters who do not try to assert dominance and power on women in their domestic relationships or portraying female characters as vocal or domineering. For example, in Emma Knightley’s gentleness in his socialization with women around his is used to further the theme of gentleman masculinity. That is, Austen tries to depict a society where masculinity is not tied to gender but is rather performed. Moreover, in her works we see men and women gain their feminine and masculine identities differently from the traditional or existing perceptions. In several of her literary works, including Jane Eyre, Austen assigns new roles to women contrary to the traditional roles of women in the Victorian era.