

## IMPERFECTION IN EMMA'S CHARACTER BASED ON JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*

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**Abstract** : The purpose of this study is to investigate the imperfection of Emma's character in the novel *Emma* by Jane Austen. This research is qualitative research since the researcher collects data in the form of words quoted from the work itself to support the research. This study used the feminist literary approach to explain the situation that occurred to Emma as a woman and how her character develops in that time as described in Jane Austen's novel *Emma*. The results of this study show that imperfection is part of Emma's character. Jane Austen developed her most flawed protagonist within the confines of *Emma*. Emma is imperfect due to her complexity and many more enticing things besides; her jealousy, judgmental, and selfishness.

**Keywords** : *Imperfection, Feminist Approach, Jane Austen, Emma*

### INTRODUCTION

Austen from the beginning of her work entitled *Emma* described Emma as a beautiful figure (Mila, Maru & Kumayas, 2021). She wrote that 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. However, in the same time Austen described Emma as a girl who lacks a mother's affection "She was the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father; and had, in consequences of her sister's marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period" (Austen, 2004). The rumor of Highbury is consumed with perfection or imperfection on each other.

An individual's beauty comes from their imperfections. If everyone were to attain perfection, they would be identical. It is the imperfection that gives uniqueness to each individual. The flawless character is static and imperfection character is a dynamic state that can be linked to truth. That is, we value the actual character of imperfection, whereas there is always a

lack of authenticity in supposedly perfect character. The inability to describe a perfect thing or picture is analogous to the absence of evolution of a perfect character (Rustamov, *et al.*, 2021). Imperfection can add aesthetic beauty to the character of the fault, making it more dynamic and rounder, just as it can beautify the beauty of the surrounding. For this dynamic to have a beneficial outcome, this character must acknowledge its flaws and have the desire to continue on their quest for righteousness and truth.

The definition of imperfect is a person or something who has at least one flaw or who is not fully formed and incomplete. Imperfection is the specifics things that make something or someone less than perfect. Besides a disability, imperfection can also mean a general state of not being perfect. There is only the best, to be the best you can and always fight to defeat your last best. A Japanese aesthetic has a way of describing the value of imperfection called Wabi-Sabi. There is no direct translation of these words into English. According to Buetow & Wallis (2019), the fundamental idea that imperfection carries beauty and individuality is highlighted by two

Japanese aesthetic currents, Wabi-Sabi and the appreciation of defects in humans and objects brought about by the passage of time. It is a way to see and understand the value of imperfection, Jordán, *et al* (2018) explain, “The fact that something is imperfect, fragile and fleeting does not imply, according to the theory of the Wabi-sabi, that it lacks beauty, but, on the contrary, the authenticity immanent to these characteristics can increase its beauty more than a feigned perfection, which would be hiding the inevitable defects that every created being possesses.”

According to Plumb (2010), “When we say that something is perfect we mean that it is ‘complete’ ... Beauty is measured by its completeness.” Imperfection, therefore, is the quality of the human condition, and by displaying it in protagonists, the reader’s feelings grow. It is one of the characteristics of Jane Austen’s style, in whose work we always appreciate her interest in realistically reflecting her character, both by the attitude and behavior, and by the way they speak. She sees perfectibility as a condition of human life, but not perfection. Buetow & Wallis (2019) argue, the idea recognizes the delicate appreciation of truths that lies beyond polarities like beauty and ugliness, and emphasizes authenticity, humility, incompleteness, fragility, and impermanence again.

Based on opinion and understanding about imperfection, it about something not perfect or do not qualify and satisfy social standards. Everyone in society has a standard for measuring perfection, which is why nothing ever really becomes perfect. The truth is, imperfection is perfection in its best form because ultimately, nothing is ever completely perfect. The character in Austen’s novel is a woman of good personality and quality, but also with real flaws. This writer’s protagonist cannot qualify as a portrait of perfection in any case, because in the book, different parts are shown where their weakness is revealed. In fact, it may even

make the main character even more interesting because of their imperfect condition. Austen wrote *Emma* as a challenge of showing the beauty of imperfection through a heroine who is very different from her other heroines (Chen, 2014). Austen includes some flaws in Emma’s character but does not point them out directly. Austen shows how Emma’s power comes with her flaws as a woman (Garofalo, 2017). In the novel, Jane Austen describes Emma Woodhouse as someone who is proud of her social status, more trusting of her own judgment, becomes someone judgmental and selfish (Lane, 2013). Those Emma’s shortcomings are influenced by personal and social aspects.

This study is used to reveal Emma’s character because usually when it comes to women, people demand that women be perfect. Lolowang (2010) states, “the fuss about the objectification of women’s bodies explains the norm that has been going on in the society and the reaction against this phenomenon.” Jane Austen described Emma as someone “whom no one but myself will much like”. It is an honest assessment and why people are connected with the characters. Emma as real as people nowadays shows their imperfection, making the same mistakes like other people made. Faultless can be ideal, but characters with weakness, faults, and mistakes can be really learn from.

Hudson (1965) defines literature as a reflection of human life since it includes the emotions, ideas, and experiences of people from many eras, locations, and languages. It encapsulates the essence of what people have observed, experienced, and thought about in relation to the enduringly fascinating aspects of life (Pabur, 2017). According to Sabudu (2020) and Rorintulus (2018), literature also serves as a mirror for society, illuminating social and cultural phenomena. Wuntu (2015) further explains that literature has the ability to profoundly alter and shape human consciousness

because of its emotive nature. According to Tampi, Mamentu, and Liando (2018), literature is an innovative way to express oneself that mimics or mirrors real life while also giving readers a chance to ponder the intricacies of human existence while also giving them pleasure. In the end, literature includes all fiction that has been written and interprets the meaning of life, nature, and the common human experiences that fuel our need to understand, express, and share (Maru, 2009).

### RESEARCH METHOD

In accordance with Bogdan & Biklen's (1992) definition of descriptive qualitative research, the current study concentrates on acquiring data in the form of words through open-ended conversational contact. The main data sources in this research is the novel *Emma* by Jane Austen (Published by Broadview Press in 2004). In order to study how Emma Woodhouse, a flawed character, is portrayed in Jane Austen's work *Emma*, the author takes a feminist literary method, specifically using liberal feminist theory. This strategy tries to investigate how literature, including cultural works, might support or oppose the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression that women endure, as addressed by Tyson (2006). Armstrong (1993) adduces that femininity is linked to a sentimental, nostalgic past that places restrictions on women.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the researcher identified the data contained in the novel *Emma* by Jane Austen. The data is analyzed through a feminist literary approach in order to describe the Emma's character as an imperfect woman who is the heroine and shows how her character was different from other women at the time in novel *Emma* by Jane Austen. At that time, the nineteenth century is a time where the impact of industrial revolution causes a big

differentiation between the gender roles, especially of the upper and middle class.

Katharine M. Rogers, in her book "Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England," published in 1982, explores the advancement of female authors at the time, including Jane Austen. She attributes this advancement to the work of earlier female writers who had a "feminine awareness." Austen, like her forebears, emphasized smart young women who offered viewpoints on both genders and the wider world. Tóth (2012) asserts that Austen's attempt to create a distinctive character, Emma Woodhouse, produced a heroine with a rare combination of qualities and defects. What makes Emma genuinely memorable is her capacity to keep a fine balance and generate a profound, unmatched effect.

The protagonist of the book *Emma* is shown on her path of development as she rises above her selfish and immature impulses to live up to social expectations. It examines the underlying nature of people as well as the traditional social structures that keep women in submissive positions in patriarchal societies (Wood, 2019). Jane Austen, a female author, makes an effort to communicate her identity via her literary works, which is clear from the experiences of the characters in the novel (Wells, 2023). However, some critics overlook Austen's deeper features and only see her work as a straightforward romantic tale written in a feminine perspective (Sussman, 2022). The significance Austen placed on femininity is what makes her writings so appealing.

In today's society, women frequently have to choose between being admired or respected, rarely feeling both at once. This is similar to Given's (2020) observation that women are treated mostly based on their attractiveness. The female characters in Austen's novels exhibit the art of femininity, which is frequently obscured in current society by the desire for success in

both job and family, despite the fact that they lack legal rights.

In *Emma*, Austen creates a strong bond between the reader and the protagonist that allows for a developing closeness with a self-aware woman, as highlighted by Setiawan (2013). Both private and public circumstances have an impact on Emma's character development. Although some people consider Emma to be a special character because of her physical allure, education, artistic talent, financial security, social standing, and powerful position, it is important to remember that Emma's unintentional harm is caused by her misuse of power and abilities rather than her malicious intent. Tony Tanner (1987) stresses Emma's vulnerability to error while highlighting her lack of malice.

### **Emma Woodhouse**

In analyzing imperfection in Emma's character, firstly, it must be understood how Emma's character is. According to Bander(1999), "Imperfection is not necessarily a bad thing. The problem with perfection is that is static, impervious to growth or change, rather like Mr. Woodhouse." Emma is stunning, wealthy, and intelligent. She is educated and talented in a variety of areas (piano, art, literature), but she lack dedication. She had never submit to anything demanding labor and patience, and surrender of the imagination to the understanding. Emma is a popular figure in Highbury since she is clever and friendly. Jane Austen describes Emma Woodhouse as someone who is proud of her social status, more trusting of her own judgment, and also has a tendency to make comparisons with others. Emma, who could 'appreciate what she liked, hate, praise, condemn something, grieve, rejoice-but she could not feel as others do, is described in following way:

*"Emma Woodhouse was handsome, clever and rich, with comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessing of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world*

*with very little to distress or vex her."* (Austen, 2004, p 2)

In the first chapter of the novel, Emma was described as handsome, clever and rich. Jane Austen wrote Emma as someone that people would make others feel envious when they see her. Emma is called beautiful and pretty: "Pretty! Say beautiful rather. Can you imagine anything nearer perfect beauty than Emma altogether- face and figure?"(Austen, 2004, p. 30)

### **Selfishness**

Everyone wants a happy life as long as they can afford it. Just like Emma, do what they want to do without think about what society thinks about her. She does what she believes and she trust for. She wants to archive her target as soon as possible. She try to takes right and wrong ways to proof herself right.

*"The real evil, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; those were disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her."* (Austen, 2004, p. 3-4)

The quotation explained how Emma always thinks that she is right. To get her happiness, she is being selfish. All things around her society drives her become a selfish person. The lack of love and attention from her biological mother make her want to do everything on her own way.

*"She was 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. Her mother had died too long ago for to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses, and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman of governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection."*(Austen, 2004, p.3)

Emma just a girl who lack of attention and love from her own mother. Human history and society cannot be separated

from the presence of woman. Existence of woman especially mother can be really influencing their children's life. Emma, she needs someone to rely on her problem and someone to talk to about life correctly. Emma just need someone to support her, give her some advice about life, and taking care of her, just like mother did. Despite all her fault, Miss Taylor has never shown Emma that she was wrong. Instead, Miss Taylor "had such affection for Emma as could never find fault" (Austen, 2004, p. 18)

Miss Taylor is the one who consistently justifies Emma's flaws and mistakes. When Emma draws Harriet, her drawing does not look like Harriet, Miss Taylor does not have the nerve to declare it, and she says that "Miss Woodhouse has given her friend the only beauty she wanted... The expression of the eye is most correct, but Miss Smith has not those eyebrows and eyelashes. It is the fault of her face that she has them not," (Austen, 2004, p. 51). Miss Taylor denying it and tell that it is Harriet's face which is imperfect, not Emma's drawing.

This kind of mentality might be good if Miss Taylor is just a friend, but not good for a governess whose duty is to help her student to grow by softly identifying their faults and correct them. Making things go more wrong, Miss Taylor does not only defend Emma's faults, but also assures them and turns them right "where Emma errs once, she is in the right a hundred times," (Austen, 2004, p. 45). Miss Taylor teaches Emma to twisting the situation, the fact that makes Emma feels immune to make mistakes. Miss Taylor have no potentials to be a governess; as a result, the role of teacher-student is reversed. Mr. Knightley reproach Miss Taylor:

*"You might not give Emma such a complete education as your powers would seem to promise; but you were receiving a very good education from her, on the very material matrimonial point of submitting your own will, and doing as you were bid."* (Austen, 2004, p. 45)

*"Mr. Knightly also tells her, "You never could persuade her to read half so much as you wished. You know you could not."* (Austen, 2004, p. 44)

Likewise, Emma ignores her piano lessons and never developing her abilities, which are lately pictured in the novel when she feels inferior to Jane Fairfax playing piano: "She did unfeignedly and unequivocally regret the inferiority of her own playing and singing. She did most heartily grieve over the idleness of her childhood," (Austen, 2004, p.201). Despite Emma is to blame for her laziness, it is Miss Taylor's fault in the first place. As a teacher, she should have urged Emma to developing her piano skills. The unhealthy relation between both of them denies Miss Taylor the ability to bend Emma's laziness to her will. Emma feels free to do "just what she liked, highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own," (Austen, 2004: 17).

### **Judgment**

Emma was born with nothing to worry about because she is come from royal family, so harmony and she has a power to influence people in her society. She is also so talented and an educational. But, like what society said that the higher rate you valued yourself, you will come and judge others to falling down. As a part of powerful person in her society, she had make people feel disadvantage.

*"That may be, and I may have seen him fifty times, but without having any idea of his name. a young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is, therefore, in one sense, as much as above my notice as in every other he is bellow it."* (Austen, 2004, p. 26).

*"He is very plain, undoubtedly - remarkably plain: - but that is nothing*

*compared with his entire want of gentility. I had no right to expect much, and I did not expect much; but I had no idea he could be so very clownish, so totally without air. I had imagined him, I confess, a degree or two nearer gentility.”* (Austen, 2004, p. 29)

From those quotation above explained how Emma give attention to Mr. Martin and judge him. Mr. Martin comes from a poor family and lower society. He is just a young farmer and a good guy that had special relationship with Emma’s friend Harriet. For Emma, their relationship seems like a big problem. Emma wants Harriet married to a guy that suitable with her and who can fix Harriet future. Emma always thinks she knows better about everything.

*“Mr. Knightly, I shall not allow you to be fair judge in this case. You are so much used to live alone, that you don’t know the value of a companion; and perhaps no man can be a good judge of the comfort a woman feels in society of one of her own sex, after being used to it all her life. I can imagine your objection to Harriet Smith. She is not the superior young women which Emma’s friend ought be.”* (Austen, 2004, p. 33-34)

From quotation above explain how Mr. Knightly takes Emma’s attention in judging people around her. Emma takes her place and show him that she is the one who can judge people around her especially when it about women and her best friend Harriet. Also same thing happens with Jane. Jane takes Emma’s attention in judgment. Emma thinks that Jane, who is from middle class, is dependent. It can be seen from Emma’s thought of Jane. “She was sorry that she could think of no young man in Highbury who might want to marry her and so make her independent”(Austen, 2004, p. 58)

### **Personal Aspect**

Claudia L. Johnson (1988) states, “what makes Emma unusual is that she is a woman who possesses and enjoys power, without bothering to demur about it. Jane

Austen introduces Emma by emphasizing her good fortune: “Emma Woodhouse was handsome, clever and rich, with comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessing of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her...” (Austen, 2004, p. 2) From quotation above describes how Emma’s life. Emma lived a happy life almost twenty one years without any little trouble or difficulty for her in her own world. She has power to have something more in her own way and the tendency to think something good about herself. But also Emma’s stubbornness and arrogance produced many conflict in the novels, as Emma struggled to develop emotionally.

*“her mother had died when she was very young and she had no clear memory of her. Miss Taylor had been engaged to act as governess,”* (Austen, 2004, p. 2).

*“Her first sorrow came on the day that Miss Taylor married, the event promised every happiness for her friend,”* (Austen, 2004, p. 9).

The quotation is expressed by Emma as a description of her feelings. Emma lives with Miss Taylor since she is a child till, she matures. She has lost the figure of a mother and misses the cares of a mother since her mother’s death. After Miss Taylor married, Emma feels left out and lonely in her own. Emma’s role in this period of her life is quite ambiguous, and her identity is not formed in a healthy way. Emma finds herself in a difficult position as a woman in her society as a result of Miss Taylor’s marriage.

*“With all her advantages, natural and domestic, she was now in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude. She dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful.”* (Austen, 2004, p. 18)

Austen gives a rundown of a lonely in the first three pages, comedown young lady, her tears close to her eyes her family and society “afforded her no equals.” Miss

Taylor's marriage invents "melancholy change," for Emma, now she is alone just with her father. She wonders, "How was she to bear the change?" She sighs "in mournful thought," meditating sadly "what she had lost," and continues to "sigh over it and wish for impossible things, till her father awoke and made it necessary to be cheerful," (Austen, 2004, p. 19).

The opening few chapters are important because they reflect Emma's views about Miss Taylor marriage and her relationship with her father. The father-daughter relationship is created in the opposite direction; the daughter looks after her father, who is expected to be her mentor and defender. Jane's arrival at Highbury annoys Emma Woodhouse, a Highbury neighbor. Emma is envious of Jane's musical ability. When Jane outperforms Emma at the piano one day, Emma tries to divert attention away from her.

*"But Emma's friendly feeling did not last long. The evening was like so many former occasions when Jane was there. Miss Bates spent much time praising Jane, and then told them at great lengths of her anxiety about Jane's health and how little she would eat. Later on they had some music. Emma played the piano then had to listen while Jane played and gave a better performance."*(Austen, 2004, p. 58).

*"If anything could be more, where all was most, she was more reserved on the subject of Weymouth and the Dixons than anything. She seemed bent on giving no real insight into Mr. Dixon's character or her own value for his company, or opinion of the suitability of the match. It was all general approbation and smoothness; nothing delineated or distinguished. It did her no service however. Her caution was thrown away. Emma saw its artifice, and returned to her first surmises. The probably was something more to conceal than her own preference; Mr. Dixon, perhaps, had been very never changing one friend for the other, or been fixed only to Miss Campbell, for the sake of the future twelve thousand pounds."* (Austen, 2004, p. 163)

Jane Fairfax takes Emma's interest on herself. Emma did not like Jane as well because all attention that Jane got from people around her. The jealousy makes Emma talk bad about Jane and ruined her images. She spread the rumor about Jane that she had special relationship with a married man and try to talk to Jane to get some secret information about her relation. "Emma was obliged to play; and the thanks and praise which necessarily followed appeared to her an affectation of candour, and air of greatness, meaning only to show off in higher style [Jane's] own very superior performance"(Austen, 2004, p. 150). Emma grows envious because she knows Jane was capable of limiting her movements. She knows Jane far more talented than she is.

### **Social Aspect**

Erikson (1959) states "it is difficult to understand the individual away from his or her social sphere that Individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in a continual change." Her moral progress in the novel that bears her name is not so much a metaphorical climb from base camp to peak as it is an acknowledgement of her need to keep climbing. According to Bander (1999) "Paradoxically, to achieve perfection, Emma must recognize that she is not perfect". Emma thinks that Jane cannot get along with people from upper class in Highbury. Because Jane is very reserved girl and talks very little. "Emma found her reserved, and very difficult to know, for, in contrast to her aunt, Jane talked very little"(Austen, 2004, p.58).

In fact, Jane actually can break that stereotype. This can be seen from Emma's opinion about Jane. Jane, whom Emma thinks is a reserved girl, actually can get along very well with the Eltons. The Eltons is a family where Jane works as a governess. They are from upper class who lives in Highbury.

*"Emma was greatly surprised that Jane should accept their attentions and be with*

*them so much. She heard of Jane walking with the Eltons, sitting with the Eltons, dining with the Eltons, spending the day with Eltons. She could not have believed that Jane could endure such society”* (Austen, 2004, p. 88).

Another stereotype from Emma’s thought is that the poor (middle class people) is incapable and uneducated. It is stated in the novel from Emma’s thought. “She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations or extraordinary virtue from those, for whom education had done so little, ...” (Austen, 2004, p. 57).

Jane Fairfax, who is not from a wealthy family, is very confident and is able to prove that love does not look at social status. She gets along very well with the people in Highbury and in love with a man from there, Frank Churchill. This can be seen from the conversation with Emma and her best friend, Harriet about the engagement of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill.

*“I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! but I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband’s house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man’s eyes as I am in my father’s”* (Austen, 2004, p. 83)

The assumed reasons as Emma states have some validity, but there is a more real reason. Emma’s prevention is indeed a rejection for adult duties and commitments, she refuses to enter the adult world and be responsible. It is obvious that Emma scales love and marriage materially; this explains why she does not want Harriet to marry Mr. Martin,

she believes that Mr. Martin is too much poor for Harriet as Harriet for Mr. Knightley. It is also clear that Emma projects her lack of intimacy on others; she does not really appreciate marriage, which is based on true love and intimacy.

## CONCLUSION

Without knowledge of one’s imperfection, there can be no improvement, no growth toward perfection. Emma acts badly, but she also recognize her flaws, ponders them, express regret, and seek improvement. The struggle is enough to make her a heroine worthy of other’s affection, because human perfection is attained by a process of self-reflection and self-correction, which no-mortal character is capable of. As previously stated, imperfection is a dynamic state that can be linked to the truth. That is we value the actual nature of imperfect characters, whereas there would always be a lack of authenticity in seemingly perfect ones.

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