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Materialism as Ideology in Jane Austen's Emma: A Marxist Analysis

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Dedication

First of all, I dedicate this work to Allah, who granted me the strength to continue when giving up felt easier.

To myself, who learned that growth often begins in uncertainty and who turned every struggle into progress.

To my mother, Amina Fekih, the heart behind every step I have taken. Your love was never loud, yet it echoed in everything I achieved.

To my father, Nacer Eddine Lachehab, whose silent sacrifices built the path I walk on today. Your strength shaped mine, and your guidance continues to lead me forward.

To my friends, who turned ordinary days into unforgettable memories.

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To the soul who became light in my darkest hours and warmth in my coldest moments of doubt, this work stands as a quiet expression of gratitude for every unseen act of love and support. You were the reason I kept going.

This work is not only a collection of words and pages; it is a story that reflects all of you.



Dedication

With deep gratitude to Allah.

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Abstract

This study examines materialism as an ideological force in Jane Austen's *Emma* from a Marxist literary perspective. It investigates how material conditions, including wealth, property, family background, and social rank, shape social relationships, behaviour, and marriage expectations in the community of Highbury. The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach based on close reading of the novel. Particular attention is given to Emma Woodhouse's social position and her influence on Harriet Smith's desires, choices, and class aspirations. The analysis demonstrates that class hierarchy in the novel is reproduced through everyday social practices such as manners, visits, moral judgements, charity, matchmaking, and marriage. It also reveals that Emma's apparently benevolent actions often function as subtle forms of social and ideological control. The study concludes that although the novel exposes some contradictions within Highbury's class structure, its ending largely preserves the existing social order through socially acceptable marriages and the restoration of class stability.

Keywords: Marxism, materialism, ideology, class hierarchy, social control, marriage, *Emma*, Jane Austen.



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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Jane Austen's *Emma* presents Highbury as a social world governed by rank, propriety, wealth, and reputation. Although the novel appears to portray a harmonious community based on civility and moral order, its social relations are deeply structured by class distinctions. Friendship, marriage, and everyday interaction are not neutral activities; they are shaped by the material and social position of each character. Mammadova argues that characters of higher status are able to "initiate and control social relationships," while those of lower or uncertain status depend on the approval and recognition of the upper class (Mammadova, 2025, p. 125).

From a Marxist perspective, such social relations can be examined as ideological practices. Marx and Engels argue in *The German Ideology* that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas," suggesting that the dominant class maintains power not only through material control but also through the control of social values and beliefs (Marx & Engels, 1975, p. 64). In this sense, ideology makes class hierarchy appear natural, moral, and acceptable. Applied to *Emma*, this view allows the novel's manners, judgments, and marriage expectations to be read as mechanisms through which class order is reproduced.

Marriage is especially important in this ideological structure. In *Emma*, marriage is not presented merely as a private emotional choice; it is also connected to wealth, social rank, and public reputation. Krismawati and Putra argue that social class is closely related to marriage because marriage can improve one's position within the community (Krismawati & Putra, 2021, p. 112). Therefore, the present study examines *Emma* through a Marxist lens in order to show how material conditions and ideology

operate through everyday social behavior, especially in relation to class, desire, and marriage.

2.Statement of the problem

Jane Austen's *Emma* is usually read as a novel of manners, social harmony, and moral growth. At first sight, Highbury seems to be a peaceful community where relationships are guided by politeness, civility, and mutual respect. However, this surface harmony hides a more complex social structure. The characters do not interact as equal individuals; their relations are shaped by rank, wealth, family background, and social reputation. Mammadova points out that characters of higher status are able to "initiate and control social relationships," which shows that social power in the novel is unequally distributed (Mammadova, 2025, p. 125).

The problem addressed in this study is that the class ideology of *Emma* is not always direct or openly oppressive. It appears through ordinary practices such as visits, conversations, judgments, matchmaking, and marriage expectations. From a Marxist perspective, these practices can be read as ideological because they make social hierarchy seem natural and acceptable. Marx and Engels argue that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas," which means that dominant social values often reflect the interests of the dominant class (Marx & Engels, 1975, p. 64). Therefore, this study examines how material conditions and ideology work together in *Emma* to reproduce class hierarchy through everyday social behavior.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyze Jane Austen's *Emma* from a Marxist perspective by examining the relationship between material conditions, ideology, and class hierarchy.

More specifically, it seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how material conditions such as wealth, property, family background, and social rank shape relationships in *Emma*.
2. To investigate how everyday social practices, including manners, visits, conversations, and moral judgments, contribute to the reproduction of class hierarchy.
3. To analyze Emma Woodhouse's role as an agent of ideology, especially through her influence over Harriet Smith's desires, choices, and social expectations.
4. To explore the relationship between marriage, desire, and class reproduction in the novel.
5. To determine whether *Emma* challenges the existing social order or ultimately reinforces it through its representation of class, marriage, and morality.

4. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following main question:

1. To what extent does Marxist theory conceptualise materialism as an ideological force that reproduces class hierarchy through everyday social practices?
2. How do character interactions in *Emma* reflect class ideology, and does the novel reinforce or challenge it?

5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to read Jane Austen's *Emma* beyond its surface as a novel of manners, harmony, and moral development. By applying a

Marxist literary approach, the study focuses on the relationship between material conditions, ideology, and class hierarchy in the novel. It seeks to show that ordinary social practices in Highbury, such as politeness, visits, moral judgments, matchmaking, and marriage, are not merely personal or domestic actions, but may also function as mechanisms that reproduce social order.

This study is also important because it examines Emma Woodhouse not only as a central heroine, but as a figure who participates in shaping the desires and expectations of others, especially Harriet Smith. Through this focus, the research highlights how power in *Emma* may operate indirectly through kindness, advice, manners, and social approval rather than through open force. In this sense, the study contributes to understanding how ideology can be represented in literary texts through everyday behavior and social relationships.

Furthermore, the study may help readers reconsider the role of marriage in *Emma*. Marriage is not treated only as a romantic conclusion, but also as a social institution connected to class position, property, reputation, and social stability. Therefore, this research is significant because it connects the novel's domestic world to wider Marxist concerns such as class reproduction, dominant ideology, and the relationship between material life and social consciousness.

6.Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach based on close textual analysis. The primary and only literary text analysed in this study is Jane Austen's *Emma*. The novel is examined from a Marxist literary perspective, with particular attention to material conditions, class hierarchy, ideology, social relations, and false consciousness.

The Marxist approach was selected because it provides an appropriate theoretical framework for examining the relationship between wealth, property, social rank, family background, and class relations in the novel. It also makes it possible to analyse how material conditions influence the characters' relationships, desires, judgements, and marriage expectations.

The analysis follows three main steps. First, the study identifies selected passages, dialogues, and character interactions that reveal material interests, social hierarchy, and class-based judgements. Second, these textual examples are analysed through Marxist concepts such as ideology, material conditions, class distinction, and false consciousness. Third, the study examines whether the novel challenges the existing class order or ultimately contributes to its preservation.

Particular attention is given to the social world of Highbury, Emma Woodhouse's influence on Harriet Smith, and the role of marriage in reproducing or challenging class hierarchy. Through this method, the study aims to demonstrate how class power operates not only through wealth and property, but also through everyday social practices such as manners, visits, moral judgements, matchmaking, charity, and marriage.

7. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into the following parts:

- **General Introduction**

It presents the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, and the methodology.

- **Chapter One: Marxist Theory, Materialism, and Ideology**

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the study. It explains the main Marxist concepts used in the analysis, especially materialism, ideology, class hierarchy, and false consciousness.

- **Chapter Two: Everyday Life and Social Practices in *Emma***

This chapter examines how class hierarchy is reproduced through everyday social practices in the novel, such as manners, visits, conversations, moral judgments, and social expectations.

- **Chapter Three: Emma as an Agent of Ideology**

This chapter analyzes Emma Woodhouse's social position and her influence over others, especially Harriet Smith. It focuses on how Emma's kindness, advice, and matchmaking may function as subtle forms of social control.

- **Chapter Four: Marriage, Desire, and Class Reproduction**

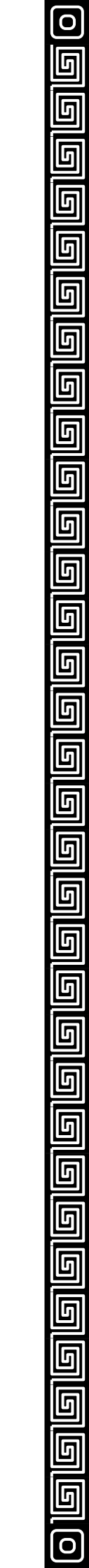
This chapter studies marriage as both a romantic relationship and a social institution. It examines how marriage in *Emma* is connected to wealth, property, reputation, and class stability.

- **General Conclusion**

The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the study, answers the research questions, and reflects on the relationship between materialism, ideology, and class hierarchy in *Emma*.



CHAPTER-I. Marxist Theory, Materialism, and Ideology



CHAPTER-I. Marxist Theory, Materialism, and Ideology

Introduction

1.1. Marxism and Literary Criticism

1.2. Material Conditions and Class Relations

1.3. Ideology and False Consciousness

1.4. Literature as a Site of Ideological Representation

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. Since the dissertation examines Jane Austen's *Emma* from a Marxist literary perspective, it is necessary to clarify the main concepts that will guide the analysis. These concepts include Marxism, materialism, class relations, ideology, and false consciousness. They are important because they help explain how social life in literature may be shaped by wealth, property, rank, and dominant social values.

Marxist literary criticism does not treat literature as an isolated artistic product. Rather, it views literary texts as cultural forms connected to the historical, social, and economic conditions of their time. From this perspective, a novel can be studied not only through its characters and plot, but also through the class relations and ideological assumptions that structure its fictional world (Kulkarni, 2024, p. 14).

This chapter does not provide a detailed analysis of *Emma*, since the close reading of the novel will be developed in the following chapters. Instead, it establishes the theoretical tools needed for that analysis. It first introduces Marxism as a literary approach, then explains the importance of material conditions and class relations. After that, it discusses ideology and false consciousness, before examining literature as a site where ideological meanings may be represented, reproduced, or questioned.

By presenting these concepts, the chapter prepares the ground for reading *Emma* as a novel in which social hierarchy is not only expressed through wealth and rank, but also through manners, moral judgments, marriage expectations, and everyday social interactions.

1.1. Marxism and Literary Criticism

Marxist literary criticism is a critical approach that studies literature in relation to the social, historical, and economic conditions in which it is produced. It does not consider a literary text as an isolated artistic object, separated from the realities of society. Rather, it argues that literature is connected to the material world and to the dominant values of a particular historical period. Therefore, the Marxist critic is interested not only in the beauty of language or the structure of the plot, but also in the way a text reflects class relations, social conflicts, and ideological assumptions (Kulkarni, 2024, p. 14).

One of the central ideas in Marxist criticism is the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. The economic base refers to the material organization of society, especially the modes of production and the relations between social classes. The superstructure includes political institutions, legal systems, religion, education, culture, and literature. From a Marxist perspective, literature belongs to the cultural superstructure because it is shaped by the material conditions of society and by the values of the class that holds social and economic power (Kulkarni, 2024, pp. 14–15). However, Marxist literary criticism should not be understood as a simple method that reduces literature to economics. Literature is not merely a direct copy of the economic base. Eagleton explains that literary works may be influenced by material conditions, but they can also reveal social contradictions and expose tensions within the dominant ideology (Eagleton, 2002, p. 17). In this sense, literature has a complex relationship with society. It may reproduce dominant values, but it may also question them indirectly through irony, contradiction, narrative gaps, or the representation of social inequality.

This approach is useful for the study of Jane Austen's *Emma* because the novel presents a society where social relations are strongly organized by wealth, rank, property, and marriage. Although the novel seems at first to focus on manners, romance, and personal relationships, these elements are not socially neutral. They are connected to the class structure of Highbury and to the values that regulate social acceptance and exclusion. A Marxist reading therefore allows the study to examine how everyday interactions in the novel may reflect deeper material and ideological structures.

Thus, Marxist literary criticism provides the theoretical basis for analyzing *Emma* beyond its surface as a novel of manners. It helps reveal how social harmony, politeness, and moral judgment may conceal relations of power and class privilege. Through this approach, the novel can be read as a literary space where ideology is represented, reproduced, and sometimes questioned.

1.2. Material Conditions and Class Relations

Material conditions represent one of the central foundations of Marxist thought. In contrast to idealist approaches, which give priority to ideas, values, or consciousness, Marxist materialism argues that human life is primarily shaped by concrete economic and social realities. This means that the way people live, think, behave, and relate to one another is strongly influenced by material factors such as property, wealth, labor, social position, and access to resources. From this perspective, society cannot be fully understood through moral values or abstract ideas alone; it must also be examined through the material structures that organize power and inequality (Munawar Ch. et al., 2023, p. 352).

Historical materialism explains that social life develops according to changes in material and economic conditions. The economic organization of society determines,

to a large extent, the relations between individuals and classes. Those who possess wealth, land, or productive resources usually occupy positions of authority, while those who lack such resources often depend on the dominant class for social recognition, employment, or survival. Therefore, class relations are not accidental; they are produced by the unequal distribution of material power. Marxist theory views this inequality as a central force behind social hierarchy and conflict (Kien, 2025, pp. 1–2).

In literary analysis, this idea is important because characters do not exist outside the social and economic structures of their fictional world. Their choices, ambitions, relationships, and moral judgments are often influenced by their class position and by the material conditions that surround them. A Marxist reading therefore examines how wealth and property shape character interactions, marriage possibilities, social respectability, and access to power. This does not mean that characters have no personal emotions or individual desires, but it suggests that these desires are often limited or directed by the class system in which they live.

Class relations are especially significant in societies where social rank is connected to property and inheritance. In such societies, wealth is not only an economic matter; it becomes a source of social identity and symbolic authority. Individuals who own land, possess a stable income, or belong to respected families are often treated as morally superior or socially more valuable. By contrast, those who lack economic independence may be judged as inferior, dependent, or unsuitable for certain forms of social participation. In this way, material inequality is transformed into social hierarchy.

This point is particularly useful for the study of Jane Austen's *Emma*. The novel presents a world in which social relations are carefully regulated by rank, fortune,

family background, and marriage expectations. Characters are not judged only by their personal qualities, but also by their economic position and social connections. Marriage, for example, is not merely a romantic matter; it is closely linked to property, status, and class preservation. A Marxist approach allows the study to examine how such material concerns operate beneath the surface of politeness and social harmony. Moreover, material conditions can influence the way individuals understand themselves and others. In a class-based society, people may internalize social distinctions and accept them as natural. The wealthy may view their privilege as deserved, while those in lower positions may accept dependence or exclusion as normal. This process shows that class relations are not maintained by economic power alone, but also by social habits, moral expectations, and cultural values. Thus, material conditions produce not only external inequality, but also forms of consciousness that help preserve that inequality.

Consequently, the study of material conditions and class relations provides an essential basis for understanding literature from a Marxist perspective. It enables the critic to move beyond the apparent individuality of characters and to examine the social forces that shape their behavior. In *Emma*, this means reading social visits, conversations, judgments, and marriage plots as part of a wider structure of class relations. Through this framework, the novel can be analyzed as a text in which material privilege and social hierarchy are reproduced through everyday life.

1.3. Ideology and False Consciousness

In Marxist theory, ideology refers to a system of ideas, beliefs, values, and representations that helps organize the way individuals understand society. It is not simply a set of personal opinions or abstract thoughts; rather, it is closely connected to the material structure of society and to the interests of the dominant class. Ideology

gives meaning to social relations, but it may also conceal the unequal material conditions that produce those relations. For this reason, Marxist criticism studies ideology as a mechanism through which class power is justified, normalized, and reproduced (Boswell et al., 1999, p. 361).

The power of ideology lies in its ability to make social inequality appear natural. In a class-based society, the values of the dominant class are often presented as universal values. Ideas such as respectability, morality, good manners, proper marriage, and social order may appear neutral, but they can serve to protect existing class relations. When these values are accepted by society as common sense, they hide the fact that they are historically and materially produced. Thus, ideology does not only express power; it helps maintain power by shaping the way people think and judge themselves and others.

False consciousness is closely related to ideology. It refers to a distorted understanding of social reality, in which individuals fail to recognize the material conditions that shape their lives. Instead of seeing inequality as the result of economic and social structures, people may interpret it as natural, moral, or deserved. In this sense, false consciousness prevents individuals from understanding the real sources of their subordination. Piyakulchaidech explains that, within the Marxist tradition, ideology can produce an inverted perception of reality, where ideas seem to determine life, while the material conditions behind those ideas remain hidden (Piyakulchaidech, 2021, pp. 39–41).

This distortion is important because it allows dominant social relations to continue without constant use of force. Ideology works most effectively when individuals believe that existing social arrangements are normal and acceptable. A person may accept class hierarchy not because they are directly forced to do so, but because society

teaches them to see hierarchy as proper, respectable, or even morally necessary. In this way, ideology enters ordinary life and becomes part of daily behavior, language, habits, and judgments (Volkov et al., 2015, p. 360).

The relationship between ideology and everyday life is especially significant for literary analysis. Literature often represents ideology not through direct political statements, but through ordinary social practices. Conversations, visits, marriage negotiations, judgments of character, and rules of politeness may all carry ideological meaning. These practices may appear simple or harmless, but they can reproduce social hierarchy by teaching individuals where they belong and how they should behave. Volkov et al. argue that ideology is closely connected with everyday life because it shapes the ordinary ways through which people interpret their social world (Volkov et al., 2015, pp. 361–362).

In Jane Austen's *Emma*, this theoretical concept is particularly useful. The novel presents a society in which class distinctions are rarely expressed through open conflict. Instead, they appear through manners, expectations, social visits, judgments of suitability, and marriage choices. Characters often accept social hierarchy as part of the natural order of their world. For example, the value given to family background, fortune, and social rank suggests that material privilege is transformed into moral and social authority. A Marxist reading can therefore examine how the ideology of class operates beneath the polite surface of Highbury society.

Moreover, false consciousness may be seen in the way characters mistake social values for personal truth. They may believe that their judgments are based only on morality, taste, or personal feeling, while these judgments are actually shaped by class assumptions. In such a world, social superiority may be confused with moral superiority, and economic privilege may be treated as a sign of personal worth. This

process shows how ideology conceals material relations by translating them into cultural and moral language.

Therefore, ideology and false consciousness are essential concepts for this dissertation. They allow the study to examine how *Emma* represents a society where class power is maintained not only through property and wealth, but also through ideas, manners, and social expectations. By applying these concepts, the analysis can move beyond the romantic and domestic surface of the novel and reveal the hidden ideological structures that organize its social world.

1.4. Literature as a Site of Ideological Representation

From a Marxist perspective, literature is not a neutral or isolated form of artistic expression. It is part of the cultural superstructure and is therefore connected to the social, historical, and economic conditions in which it is produced. Literary texts may appear to deal mainly with individual emotions, personal relationships, or moral choices, but these elements often reflect wider ideological structures. In this sense, literature becomes a space where the values, beliefs, and contradictions of a particular society are represented.

Marxist literary criticism argues that literature can reproduce dominant ideology by presenting existing social relations as natural or acceptable. A novel may represent class hierarchy, wealth, inheritance, marriage, and social status without openly criticizing them. When this happens, the literary text may help normalize the values of the dominant class. Bertens explains that Marxist criticism pays attention to the way literature is connected to ideology and to the social conditions that shape meaning (Bertens, 2001, pp. 81–82). Therefore, the critic must examine not only what the text says directly, but also what it assumes, hides, or presents as normal.

However, literature does not simply repeat ideology in a passive way. It may also reveal the contradictions within that ideology. A literary work can expose tensions between appearance and reality, morality and material interest, social harmony and class inequality. Even when a text seems to support the values of its society, it may contain moments that disturb or question those values. For this reason, Marxist critics often study the gaps, silences, contradictions, and tensions within literary works. These elements may show what the dominant ideology tries to conceal.

The form of literature is also important. Marxist criticism does not focus only on themes, but also on the way literary form itself can carry ideological meaning. For example, the novel of manners often presents society through polite conversations, domestic scenes, visits, marriages, and moral judgments. At the surface level, such a form may seem concerned only with personal behavior and social refinement. Yet, from a Marxist point of view, these social forms may reveal how class order is maintained through everyday practices. Barry notes that Marxist criticism is concerned with how literary texts are shaped by historical and ideological forces, rather than being treated as purely independent works of art (Barry, 2002, pp. 167–168).

This idea is particularly relevant to Jane Austen's *Emma*. The novel belongs to a social world in which class relations are rarely expressed through direct political language. Instead, they appear through manners, marriage choices, invitations, visits, reputation, and judgments of propriety. The social order of Highbury is not presented through open class struggle, but through ordinary interactions that determine who is respected, who is included, and who is excluded. Thus, the novel can be read as a site where ideology operates through the language of politeness and moral judgment.

At the same time, *Emma* may also reveal the limits and contradictions of this ideology. The apparent harmony of Highbury society depends on strict social distinctions.

Characters are evaluated according to their fortune, family background, marriage prospects, and social usefulness. These details show that the world of the novel is not simply moral or romantic; it is also material and ideological. The novel therefore offers an important field for examining how class hierarchy is represented beneath the surface of social elegance.

Consequently, literature functions as both a product and a representation of ideology. It may reproduce dominant values, but it may also make their contradictions visible. For the present study, this means that *Emma* should not be read only as a domestic or romantic novel. It should also be examined as a literary text that represents the ideological structure of its society. Through this perspective, the analysis can explore how Austen's narrative transforms material interests, class privilege, and social hierarchy into questions of manners, morality, and personal judgment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has established the theoretical framework necessary for the Marxist analysis of Jane Austen's *Emma*. It has shown that Marxist literary criticism does not treat literature as an isolated aesthetic object, but as a cultural form connected to social, historical, economic, and ideological conditions. Through this approach, literary texts can be examined in relation to class relations, material interests, and the dominant values that shape social life.

The chapter first explained the importance of Marxist literary criticism as a method that connects literature to the material organization of society. It then discussed material conditions and class relations, showing how wealth, property, rank, and economic power contribute to the formation of social hierarchy. These concepts are particularly important for the study of *Emma*, since the novel represents a social world

where marriage, reputation, family background, and social acceptance are closely linked to material status.

The chapter also examined ideology and false consciousness as central Marxist concepts. Ideology was presented as a system of values and representations that can make inequality appear natural, moral, or acceptable. False consciousness, in turn, explains how individuals may misunderstand the real material conditions that shape their lives. These ideas are useful for analyzing how social hierarchy in *Emma* is maintained not through open force, but through manners, moral judgments, social expectations, and everyday practices.

Finally, the chapter discussed literature as a site of ideological representation. It showed that literary texts may reproduce dominant ideology, but they may also reveal its contradictions and tensions. This is especially relevant to *Emma*, where the polite and domestic surface of the novel may conceal deeper structures of class power and material privilege. Therefore, the theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter prepare the ground for the following analysis of the novel.

The next chapter will move from theory to textual analysis. It will examine how the fictional world of Highbury represents class hierarchy and material values, and how the social interactions among the characters reveal the ideological structure of Austen's society.

CHAPTER-II. Everyday Life and Social Practices in Emma

CHAPTER-II. Everyday Life and Social Practices in Emma

Introduction

2.1. Highbury as a Social Space

2.2. Manners, Visits, and Social Distinction

2.3. Moral Judgment and Class Boundaries

2.4. The Ideology of Harmony and Civility

2.4. The Ideology of Harmony and Civility

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter moves from the theoretical framework of Marxism to its practical application in Jane Austen's *Emma*. While the novel is often read as a comedy of manners concerned with love, marriage, and social misunderstanding, a Marxist reading reveals that its everyday world is deeply shaped by class hierarchy, material privilege, and ideological control. The village of Highbury may seem peaceful and harmonious, yet its social order is carefully organized according to wealth, rank, family background, and accepted standards of gentility.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how ordinary social practices in *Emma* contribute to the reproduction of class relations. Activities such as visiting, observing manners, giving moral judgments, offering charity, and arranging marriages appear at first to be private or domestic matters. However, from a Marxist perspective, these practices are not neutral. They function as social mechanisms through which individuals are included, excluded, ranked, and controlled. In this sense, everyday life in Highbury becomes a space where ideology operates quietly and effectively.

The chapter first analyzes Highbury as a structured social space in which characters occupy different positions according to land, wealth, profession, and social origin. It then examines manners and visits as practices that reinforce social distinction. After that, it discusses moral judgment as a means of policing class boundaries, especially in relation to characters such as Harriet Smith, Robert Martin, Miss Bates, and Jane Fairfax. Finally, the chapter explores the ideology of harmony and civility, showing how Highbury's apparent peace conceals deep material inequalities.

Through this analysis, the chapter argues that class domination in *Emma* is not maintained through direct violence or open political conflict. Rather, it is reproduced

through subtle cultural practices that make hierarchy appear natural, polite, and morally justified. Thus, the everyday life of Highbury becomes central to understanding how material inequality is transformed into social order.

2.1. Highbury as a Social Space

Jane Austen's *Emma* presents Highbury not merely as a quiet village or a decorative setting, but as a carefully structured social space. Although the community appears harmonious and intimate on the surface, its internal organization is deeply shaped by class hierarchy, property, family background, and economic security. Every character occupies a recognizable social position, and this position determines the way he or she is treated, invited, judged, or excluded. From a Marxist perspective, Highbury can therefore be read as a small social world in which material conditions are transformed into social authority.

At the top of this social order stand the landed gentry, especially Emma Woodhouse of Hartfield and Mr. Knightley of Donwell Abbey. Their authority does not depend only on personal qualities, but also on inherited wealth, landownership, and recognized family status. Emma's social power, for example, is inseparable from her position as a wealthy young woman belonging to one of the most respected families in Highbury. Similarly, Mr. Knightley's influence is rooted in his ownership of Donwell Abbey and in the stability associated with landed property. Mammadova argues that Austen's representation of class in *Emma* reveals how social hierarchy is closely connected to wealth, property, and inherited status (Mammadova, 2025, p. 127).

Beneath the landed gentry, Highbury includes characters whose social position depends on profession, marriage, or newly acquired wealth. Mr. Weston represents this middle position. His former connection with trade does not completely exclude him from respectable society because he has succeeded in converting economic

success into social acceptance. His marriage and property allow him to enter the polite world of Highbury, showing that money can sometimes become a path toward social mobility. However, this mobility remains controlled by the values of the dominant class. A person may gain acceptance, but only when wealth is reshaped into the appearance of gentility and respectability.

Mr. Elton also occupies an intermediate position. As a clergyman, he is treated as a gentleman, yet his behavior reveals a strong desire for upward social movement. His interest in Emma is not purely romantic; it is also shaped by ambition and class calculation. By seeking marriage with a wealthy and socially superior woman, Mr. Elton attempts to strengthen his position within Highbury's hierarchy. His later marriage to Mrs. Elton further shows that marriage in the novel is not only a personal relationship, but also a social and material strategy.

The Coles represent another important example of social tension in Highbury. They possess wealth, but their money comes from trade, which makes their status different from that of the old landed families. Emma's hesitation about accepting their invitation reveals the limits of social inclusion. The Coles may be rich, but they are not automatically treated as equal to the established gentry. This shows that Highbury's class system is not based on money alone; it also depends on origin, manners, recognition, and the ability to conform to the codes of gentility. Koziar notes that manners and social connection play a central role in Austen's representation of class mobility and social distinction (Koziar, 2015, p. 8).

At the lower margins of this social space are characters such as Harriet Smith and the Bates family. Harriet's uncertain parentage makes her socially vulnerable, despite Emma's attempt to raise her status through friendship and influence. Her lack of known family background means that she has no secure position within Highbury's

hierarchy. Miss Bates and her mother represent a different form of vulnerability: genteel poverty. They possess respectable manners and social connections, but they lack economic power. Their position shows that gentility without money is fragile and dependent. Mammadova observes that Austen's treatment of such characters exposes the instability of social rank when it is not supported by material security (Mammadova, 2025, pp. 127–128).

This structure reveals that Highbury's apparent harmony depends on unequal relations of power. The wealthy characters have the ability to invite, visit, recommend, judge, and assist others. Those who lack wealth or secure status must depend on the goodwill of their social superiors. Charity and friendship may appear kind, but they also reinforce dependence. Emma's attention to Harriet, for example, gives her the power to reshape Harriet's expectations and to distance her from people considered socially inferior. In this way, social life in Highbury is controlled not through open force, but through influence, manners, invitations, and judgments.

Thus, Highbury functions as a miniature class society. Its everyday relations are organized by material privilege, while its inequalities are softened by the language of politeness and neighborly harmony. A Marxist reading reveals that the village is not simply a peaceful community; it is a social space where class boundaries are constantly produced and maintained. The next section will examine how manners and visits operate as practical tools in this process of social distinction.

2.2. Manners, Visits, and Social Distinction

In *Emma*, manners and social visits are not simple signs of politeness. They are important social practices through which Highbury defines rank, respectability, and belonging. The society of the novel depends heavily on codes of behavior: who may visit whom, who may be invited, how people speak to one another, and how they

perform gentility in public. These practices may seem ordinary, but they carry strong ideological meaning. From a Marxist perspective, manners and visits function as cultural tools that help preserve class hierarchy without the need for direct force.

Manners in Highbury are closely connected to social distinction. A character's way of speaking, behaving, and responding to others becomes a sign of class position. Those who master the accepted codes of politeness are treated as refined and respectable, while those who fail to perform them correctly are judged as vulgar, inferior, or socially unsuitable. Koziar explains that in Austen's fiction, manners are not limited to external etiquette; they are linked to character, social mobility, and class connection (Koziar, 2015, p. 2). This means that manners become a form of social capital. They allow certain characters to confirm their superiority, while exposing others to criticism and exclusion.

Emma Woodhouse occupies a privileged position within this system. Because of her wealth and family status, she is able to judge the manners of others from a position of social authority. Her opinions about people are rarely neutral; they are shaped by assumptions about class, breeding, and social suitability. When Emma evaluates other characters, she often presents her judgments as matters of taste or propriety, but these judgments usually reflect deeper class distinctions. Her social power allows her to decide who is worthy of attention, who should be encouraged, and who should remain outside her intimate circle.

The practice of visiting is one of the clearest examples of this social control. Visits in Highbury are not merely friendly acts; they are signs of recognition. To visit someone, or to accept an invitation, is to acknowledge a certain level of social connection. Emma's hesitation regarding the Coles illustrates this clearly. Although the Coles are wealthy, their money comes from trade, and this makes their position socially

uncertain. Emma's reluctance to visit them reveals that economic success alone is not enough to guarantee full acceptance into the world of the landed gentry. Social recognition must still be granted by those who already occupy a superior position.

This shows that the upper class controls the boundaries of social inclusion. The Coles may possess wealth, but Emma still feels that she has the right to decide whether their invitation deserves acceptance. Her hesitation is not based on personal dislike alone; it is based on a class-conscious evaluation of their social origin. Koziar notes that Austen's representation of visiting and social connection often reveals the tension between manners, mobility, and class hierarchy (Koziar, 2015, p. 8). In this sense, the ritual of visiting becomes a subtle means of regulating who may rise socially and who must remain marked by their economic background.

Emma's treatment of Harriet Smith offers another important example. By taking Harriet under her protection, Emma seems at first to act generously. However, this relationship also allows Emma to control Harriet's social imagination. She encourages Harriet to distance herself from Robert Martin, not because he lacks moral worth, but because his position as a farmer does not fit Emma's idea of gentility. Emma's rejection of Robert Martin is therefore not simply a personal preference; it is an act of class distinction. She teaches Harriet to desire a higher social position and to see a respectable agricultural life as beneath her.

Through this process, manners and social expectations become ideological. Emma does not openly say that material hierarchy must be preserved, but her actions reproduce that hierarchy. She frames class separation as refinement, good taste, and social improvement. This is precisely how ideology works in the novel: it transforms economic and social inequality into matters of manners and propriety. The rejection of

Robert Martin becomes, in Emma's mind, a question of Harriet's improvement rather than a reinforcement of class prejudice.

Mrs. Elton's arrival further exposes the ideological function of manners. She has wealth and social ambition, but she does not possess the subtle codes of behavior valued by Emma and the established gentry. Her directness, vanity, and inappropriate familiarity make her appear vulgar in Highbury's polite society. For example, her way of referring to Mr. Knightley without proper respect is treated as a sign of bad breeding. Yet the problem is not simply that Mrs. Elton behaves rudely. The deeper issue is that she tries to claim a position of authority without being fully accepted by the older social order.

The contrast between Emma and Mrs. Elton is significant. Both women use people as social objects and both attempt to organize the world around their own status. However, Emma's dominance is more acceptable because it is supported by inherited wealth, local authority, and polished manners. Mrs. Elton's ambition, by contrast, appears crude because it lacks the elegance and restraint associated with established gentility. Koziar observes that Austen often uses manners to distinguish between accepted and unacceptable forms of social ambition (Koziar, 2015, p. 7). This distinction reveals how class power is protected through style, tone, and performance. Therefore, manners in *Emma* are not innocent. They help determine who is respected, who is mocked, who is included, and who is excluded. Visits, invitations, speech, and social behavior operate as everyday practices through which Highbury maintains its hierarchy. The ruling class does not need to impose its power openly, because its values are already embedded in the customs of polite society. Through manners, class domination becomes graceful, ordinary, and socially acceptable.

Thus, this section shows that everyday civility in *Emma* functions as a mechanism of social distinction. Manners and visits create the appearance of harmony, but they also reinforce the unequal structure of Highbury. The next section will develop this point further by examining how moral judgment is used to defend class boundaries and to present social hierarchy as a matter of virtue, propriety, and good sense.

2.3. Moral Judgment and Class Boundaries

In *Emma*, moral judgment is closely connected to class boundaries. Characters are not judged only according to their personal qualities, but also according to their social rank, family background, economic position, and degree of respectability. From a Marxist perspective, this means that morality in Highbury is not completely neutral. It often works as an ideological language through which class distinctions are justified and protected. What appears to be a judgment of character may in fact be a judgment of class.

This is clearly shown in Emma's attitude toward Robert Martin. Robert Martin is presented as a respectable, hardworking, and sensible young farmer. He is not morally corrupt or socially dangerous. However, Emma refuses to see him as a suitable match for Harriet Smith because he belongs to a lower social position. Her objection is not based on his personal defects, but on his class identity. Because he is connected to agricultural labor and does not belong to the genteel world that Emma values, she interprets marriage to him as a form of social degradation for Harriet.

Emma's judgment therefore transforms a material distinction into a moral one. Robert Martin's class position becomes, in her imagination, evidence of unsuitability. She teaches Harriet to view him as socially inferior, even though his character is more stable and honest than many characters who occupy higher positions. This shows how

ideology operates in the novel: class prejudice is not expressed directly as economic domination, but as taste, propriety, refinement, and moral judgment. Mammadova argues that Austen's treatment of class in *Emma* reveals the subtle ways in which social hierarchy shapes the evaluation of character and worth (Mammadova, 2025, p. 129).

Harriet Smith's position makes this process even clearer. Harriet has no secure family background, no known fortune, and no independent social authority. Because of this, her identity becomes open to Emma's interpretation and manipulation. Emma imagines Harriet as someone who can be socially improved through association with herself. However, this improvement is based on a false idea of class elevation. Instead of helping Harriet understand her real social position, Emma encourages her to desire a rank that Highbury is unlikely to grant her. In this way, Emma's moral language of friendship and refinement hides an act of ideological control.

Mr. Knightley's response to Emma's interference is also important. He defends Robert Martin and criticizes Emma for misleading Harriet. At first, this seems to make Knightley a voice of moral justice against class prejudice. He recognizes Robert Martin's worth and sees that Harriet would benefit from a stable and respectable marriage. Yet Knightley does not reject the class system itself. His argument is that Harriet should not be artificially raised above her proper social position. Therefore, his judgment corrects Emma's mistake, but it still remains within the logic of hierarchy.

This means that Knightley's morality is more balanced than Emma's, but not radically egalitarian. He values Robert Martin because Martin is respectable within his own class. He also criticizes Emma because she disrupts the social order by encouraging Harriet to imagine herself above that class. In this sense, Knightley's judgment protects the stability of Highbury's hierarchy. His position suggests that people should be treated fairly, but also that they should remain within the limits of their social reality.

Mammadova notes that *Emma* presents class boundaries as subtle but powerful forces that shape relationships and expectations (Mammadova, 2025, pp. 129–130).

Moral judgment also appears in the treatment of Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax. Miss Bates belongs to a respectable family background, but she lacks money and social power. Her poverty makes her dependent on the kindness and patience of others. Although she is treated with politeness, this politeness often carries a hidden sense of superiority. Wealthier characters can appear charitable and kind by tolerating or helping her, but their kindness does not remove the unequal structure that places her in a vulnerable position. Thus, moral benevolence may reinforce dependence rather than challenge inequality.

Jane Fairfax represents another form of class vulnerability. She is educated, refined, and morally respectable, yet her lack of fortune limits her future. Unlike Emma, Jane cannot remain comfortably independent. Her social position pushes her toward work as a governess, a role that exposes the insecurity of women who possess gentility without wealth. Her situation shows that moral worth and personal refinement are not enough to guarantee freedom or security. Material conditions still determine the possibilities available to her.

The idea of charity in Highbury also reveals the ideological function of morality. Acts of kindness from the wealthy toward the poor appear generous, but they also confirm the superiority of the giver. Charity allows the upper class to present itself as morally responsible while preserving the social distance between donor and receiver. The poor are expected to respond with gratitude, not criticism. In this way, charity transforms inequality into a moral relationship rather than a structural problem. It makes dependence appear natural and acceptable.

This can be seen in the way Highbury treats characters who lack economic independence. They are not openly excluded from society, but their inclusion is conditional. They must remain polite, grateful, and aware of their lower position. Any attempt to cross class boundaries may provoke criticism or correction. Therefore, moral judgment functions as a silent form of discipline. It teaches individuals what they may desire, whom they may marry, and how far they may move within the social order.

Consequently, moral judgment in *Emma* is deeply ideological. It presents class hierarchy as a matter of good sense, propriety, and moral order. Characters such as Robert Martin, Harriet Smith, Miss Bates, and Jane Fairfax reveal that social worth in Highbury is never separated from material position. Through these examples, Austen's novel shows how class boundaries are defended not only by wealth and inheritance, but also by moral language. The next section will examine how the wider ideology of harmony and civility conceals these inequalities and makes Highbury appear more peaceful than it actually is.

2.4. The Ideology of Harmony and Civility

In *Emma*, Highbury is presented as a peaceful and civilized community. Its inhabitants visit one another, exchange polite conversations, follow social customs, and appear to live within a stable moral order. However, from a Marxist perspective, this apparent harmony should not be accepted as a sign of equality or justice. Rather, it can be understood as an ideological construction that hides the material inequalities and class boundaries that organize the community. The peace of Highbury depends not on the absence of hierarchy, but on the successful normalization of hierarchy.

Civility plays an important role in this process. The rules of polite behavior teach individuals how to speak, act, visit, judge, and respond to others according to their

social position. These rules seem neutral because they are presented as manners, refinement, and moral discipline. Yet they also help preserve class order. Those who belong to the upper classes are expected to show kindness and restraint, while those in lower or weaker positions are expected to show gratitude, humility, and dependence. In this way, civility becomes a social code that regulates inequality without making it appear violent or oppressive.

The case of Miss Bates is especially significant. She is poor and socially vulnerable, but because she belongs to a respectable background, Highbury does not openly reject her. Instead, she is included in society through pity, patience, and charitable politeness. This inclusion, however, remains unequal. Miss Bates is tolerated and assisted, but she does not possess real power. Her social survival depends on the goodwill of those who are wealthier and more influential than she is. Therefore, the civility shown toward her does not erase class inequality; it manages it.

The Box Hill incident reveals the limits of this polite harmony. When Emma mocks Miss Bates, the violence hidden beneath polite society becomes visible. Emma's insult is not merely a personal mistake; it exposes the power imbalance between a wealthy young woman and an impoverished gentlewoman. Mr. Knightley's rebuke is important because he reminds Emma that Miss Bates's poverty and social weakness make her especially vulnerable. His criticism shows that civility in Highbury depends on the upper class behaving with controlled benevolence toward those beneath them. However, Knightley's response does not challenge the class system itself. He does not question why Miss Bates is dependent or why her poverty places her in such a weak position. Instead, he insists that Emma should behave more kindly toward someone who is socially and economically inferior. This means that his morality remains paternalistic. It protects the vulnerable person, but it also preserves the hierarchy

between protector and protected. In this sense, the ideology of civility allows inequality to continue, provided that the powerful behave politely toward the powerless.

Charity functions in a similar way. Acts of charity in Highbury appear as signs of kindness and moral responsibility, but they also confirm the superiority of the giver. The wealthy characters are able to visit the poor, offer assistance, and present themselves as benevolent members of society. Yet these actions do not transform the material conditions that produce poverty and dependence. Instead, charity turns inequality into a moral relationship between generous donors and grateful receivers. Medalie argues that such charitable acts can emphasize the power and privilege of the donor rather than truly removing the class division itself (Medalie, n, p. 6).

This is why the harmony of Highbury must be read critically. The community appears stable because most characters accept their assigned positions. Those who are poor, dependent, or socially uncertain rarely challenge the structure that limits them. Their acceptance reflects the operation of ideology. Social inequality becomes familiar, and familiar things begin to appear natural. In this way, Highbury's civility produces a form of false consciousness: characters experience hierarchy not as a historical or material arrangement, but as common sense, propriety, or moral order.

Emma herself benefits from this ideological harmony. Her wealth and status allow her to imagine that she understands and organizes the social world around her. She interferes in Harriet's future, judges the Coles, mocks Miss Bates, and misreads Mr. Elton, all because her privileged position gives her confidence in her own social vision. Her mistakes are personal, but they are also ideological. They reveal how upper-class authority can misinterpret reality while still expecting others to accept its judgments.

The novel therefore shows that civility is not innocent. It creates the appearance of social peace while concealing the power relations that sustain that peace. Highbury's politeness depends on people knowing their place, accepting social distinctions, and performing the manners expected of their rank. When characters disturb these boundaries, as Harriet does through Emma's influence or Mrs. Elton does through her vulgar ambition, the social order reacts by correcting or ridiculing them.

Consequently, the ideology of harmony and civility in *Emma* serves to naturalize class hierarchy. It makes social inequality appear gentle, moral, and respectable. The village does not need open conflict because its rules are already internalized through manners, visits, charity, and moral judgment. Through this structure, Austen's novel presents a society in which domination is not always harsh or visible; it may also appear as kindness, politeness, and social harmony.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that the village of Highbury in Jane Austen's *Emma* is far from the simple, egalitarian community it superficially appears to be. Through a Marxist lens, the daily routines and social practices of its inhabitants are revealed as deeply ideological mechanisms designed to sustain class hierarchy and protect material wealth. By analyzing Highbury as a structured social space, it becomes clear that the landed gentry dictate the terms of social inclusion and exclusion. Seemingly innocent practices, such as paying visits and adhering to strict manners, function as a form of social currency that polices class boundaries without the need for explicit coercion. Furthermore, moral judgments and acts of charity are frequently weaponized by the elite to naturalize their dominance and ensure the continuous subordination of the lower classes. Ultimately, the celebrated harmony and civility of Highbury are the products of a pervasive false consciousness, wherein the unequal distribution of power is accepted as the natural order. Having established how this ideological environment operates on a collective level, the following chapter will narrow its focus to the novel's protagonist, Emma Woodhouse, examining her specific role as an active agent in reproducing and enforcing this dominant ideology.

CHAPTER-III. Emma as an Agent of Ideology

CHAPTER-III. Emma as an Agent of Ideology

Introduction

3.1. Emma's Social Position

3.2. Emma and Harriet Smith

3.3. Kindness as Social Control

3.4. Desire, Class Aspiration, and False Consciousness

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter examines Emma Woodhouse as an active agent of ideology in Jane Austen's *Emma*. While the previous chapter analyzed Highbury as a structured social space shaped by everyday practices, manners, visits, moral judgments, and civility, the present chapter narrows the focus to Emma herself. It argues that Emma does not merely belong to the dominant class of Highbury; she actively participates in reproducing its values, boundaries, and assumptions.

From a Marxist perspective, Emma's power is rooted in her material position. She is wealthy, socially respected, and placed at the center of Highbury's social life. Her authority is not official or political, yet it is highly effective because it operates through influence, taste, advice, friendship, and social judgment. Austen introduces Emma as a young woman who is "handsome, clever, and rich," a description that immediately connects her personal identity with privilege, comfort, and class security (Austen, 2009, vol. 1, chap. 1). This opening is important because it shows that Emma's confidence and freedom are inseparable from her wealth and social rank.

Emma's ideological role becomes especially clear in her relationship with Harriet Smith. Harriet's uncertain parentage and weak social position make her vulnerable to Emma's influence. Instead of treating Harriet as an equal friend, Emma turns her into a social project. She attempts to reshape Harriet's desires, manners, and marriage expectations according to the values of the landed gentry. In doing so, Emma does not simply make personal mistakes; she reproduces the class ideology of Highbury by teaching Harriet to reject a materially suitable match with Robert Martin and to aspire toward a higher social sphere.

This chapter therefore studies Emma's actions as forms of ideological practice. Her matchmaking, her judgments, her acts of kindness, and her attempts to guide others

are not neutral. They reveal how ruling-class ideology can operate through apparently benevolent behavior. Emma's power is subtle because it is disguised as friendship, refinement, and moral concern. However, beneath this surface, her interventions often reinforce class boundaries and produce false consciousness in those who depend on her guidance.

The chapter first discusses Emma's social position and shows how her wealth, family status, and lack of equals give her symbolic authority in Highbury. It then analyzes her relationship with Harriet Smith as a clear example of ideological domination. After that, it examines kindness as a form of social control, showing how benevolence may reproduce dependence rather than freedom. Finally, the chapter explores desire, class aspiration, and false consciousness, focusing on how Emma redirects Harriet's romantic imagination away from material reality and toward socially impossible ambitions.

Through this analysis, the chapter argues that Emma Woodhouse functions as one of the main agents through which Highbury's class ideology is reproduced. Her eventual self-correction does not erase the fact that, for much of the novel, she uses her privileged position to organize the desires and expectations of others. Thus, Emma becomes a key figure for understanding how class power in the novel operates not only through property and wealth, but also through influence, imagination, affection, and social authority.

3.1. Emma's Social Position

Jane Austen establishes Emma Woodhouse's social position from the opening sentence of the novel. Emma is introduced as "handsome, clever, and rich," a description that immediately connects her personal qualities with material privilege and social security (Austen, 2009, vol. 1, chap. 1). This opening is highly significant

from a Marxist perspective because it shows that Emma's identity is not formed outside class conditions. Her beauty and intelligence are presented alongside wealth, suggesting that her confidence, authority, and freedom are inseparable from her economic position. Emma does not struggle for survival, employment, marriage, or social recognition. Unlike many other female characters in the novel, she already possesses the material security that allows her to act, judge, and interfere in the lives of others.

Emma's privilege is also rooted in her domestic authority. Austen explains that, because of her mother's death and her father's weak and indulgent character, Emma has been "mistress of his house from a very early period" (Austen, 2009, vol. 1, chap. 1). This detail is not merely biographical; it is socially and ideologically important. Emma grows up without serious discipline or equal opposition. She is accustomed to managing Hartfield, influencing her father, directing domestic life, and receiving the admiration of those around her. Her household authority prepares her for wider social authority in Highbury. In other words, the private space of Hartfield becomes the first site where Emma learns to exercise power.

Her social superiority is further confirmed by the position of the Woodhouse family in Highbury. Austen states that the Woodhouses are "first in consequence" in the village and that they are looked up to by others (Austen, 2009, vol. 1, chap. 1). This phrase clearly places Emma at the top of the local hierarchy. She does not merely belong to Highbury; she occupies its symbolic center. Her class status gives her the right to judge, invite, advise, approve, and disapprove. From a Marxist viewpoint, this is an example of how material privilege becomes social and ideological authority. Wealth and inherited status are transformed into respect, influence, and moral confidence.

Emma's situation differs sharply from that of other women in the novel. Jane Fairfax, for example, is educated and refined, yet her lack of fortune makes her future insecure. Miss Bates belongs to a respectable background, but her poverty places her in dependence. Harriet Smith is socially vulnerable because of her uncertain parentage and lack of recognized family position. Emma, by contrast, is protected by wealth, family name, and social recognition. Mammadova argues that *Emma* exposes how social hierarchy is shaped by wealth, family background, and class position, even when these distinctions are presented through polite manners and personal relations (Mammadova, 2025, p. 129). Emma's superiority therefore cannot be separated from the material structure of Highbury.

This privileged position also explains Emma's unusual independence in relation to marriage. Unlike many women of her time, Emma does not need to marry for economic security. Her fortune allows her to imagine remaining single without facing poverty or social ruin. This makes her different from characters such as Jane Fairfax or Harriet Smith, whose futures depend much more directly on marriage, employment, or male protection. Emma's freedom is therefore not universal female freedom; it is class-based freedom. She can reject marriage as a necessity because her material conditions already protect her from the insecurity that threatens less wealthy women. However, Emma's independence produces a dangerous ideological effect. Because she is not forced to confront material anxiety, she often misunderstands the conditions of those who are socially beneath her. Her comfort allows her to treat other people's futures as matters of imagination, taste, and arrangement. She can turn Harriet's life into a project because she does not personally experience the risks attached to class insecurity. This is why Emma's mistakes are not merely psychological; they are social

and ideological. Her confidence comes from a privileged position that shields her from the consequences of her own judgments.

Emma's lack of social equals also strengthens her ideological authority. In Highbury, there are few people who can challenge her directly. Mr. Knightley is almost the only character capable of correcting her, precisely because he belongs to a comparable social rank. Others, such as Harriet, Miss Bates, or even Mr. Elton, are either socially dependent, inferior, or interested in gaining approval. This imbalance allows Emma to believe too strongly in her own judgment. Austen herself notes Emma's "power of having rather too much her own way" and her tendency to think "a little too well of herself" (Austen, 2009, vol. 1, chap. 1). These flaws are not isolated personal defects; they are produced by a social environment that constantly confirms Emma's superiority.

From a Marxist perspective, Emma's social position is therefore the foundation of her ideological role. She becomes an agent of ideology because her class position gives her the power to shape the expectations of others. Her judgments carry weight because they are supported by wealth, rank, and social prestige. When she advises Harriet, refuses Robert Martin, evaluates the Coles, or mocks Miss Bates, she speaks from the secure position of someone whose authority has already been naturalized by Highbury society. Her opinions appear as taste, wisdom, or refinement, but they are deeply connected to class power.

Thus, Emma's social position is not merely background information. It is the material base of her influence in the novel. Her wealth, domestic authority, family status, and social centrality enable her to intervene in the lives of others and to reproduce the values of the dominant class. Before analyzing her manipulation of Harriet Smith, it is therefore necessary to recognize that Emma's ideological power begins with her

material privilege. She is able to act as a social organizer because Highbury has already placed her at the top of its hierarchy.

3.2. Emma and Harriet Smith

The relationship between Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith is one of the clearest examples of Emma's role as an agent of ideology in the novel. At first sight, their relationship appears to be a simple friendship between a wealthy young woman and a socially inferior girl. However, from a Marxist perspective, this relationship is not equal. It is based on hierarchy, dependence, and ideological influence. Emma does not choose Harriet because she sees her as an intellectual or social equal; rather, she chooses her because Harriet is impressionable, grateful, and easy to guide. This makes Harriet an ideal object for Emma's social imagination.

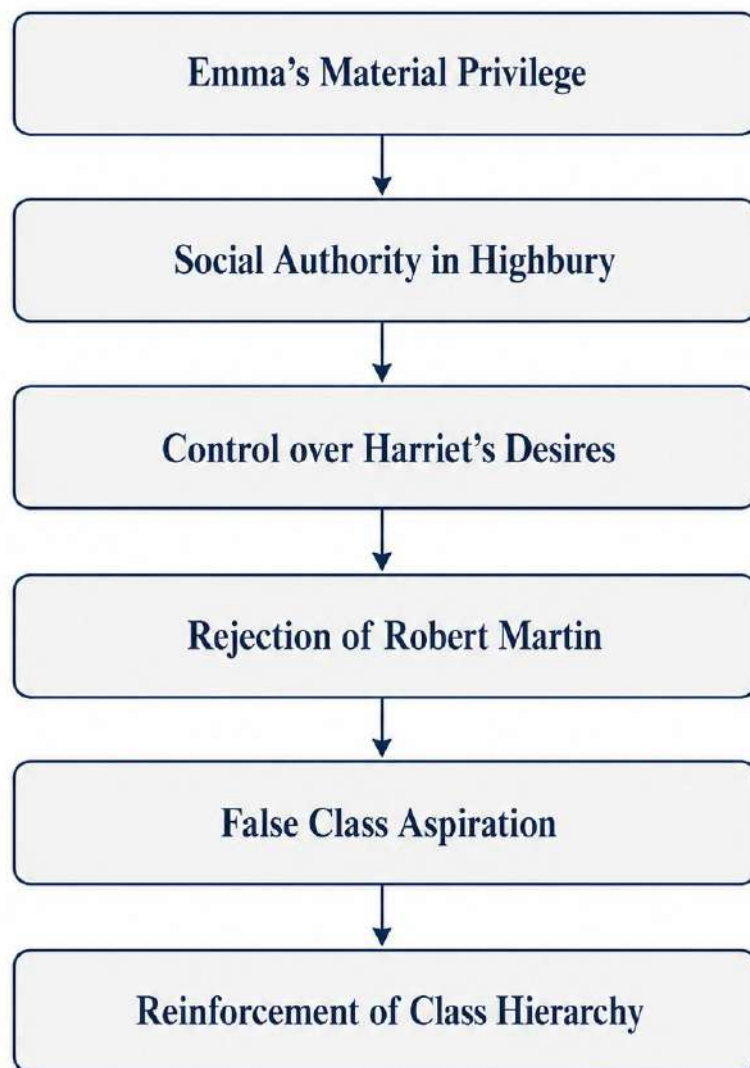
After Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston, Emma feels the absence of a companion. Harriet enters her life at this exact moment, and Emma quickly begins to treat her as someone who can be shaped and improved. Austen presents Harriet as pretty, pleasant, and humble, but also lacking firmness, education, and independent judgment. These qualities make her attractive to Emma because they allow Emma to exercise influence over her. Emma's friendship is therefore not innocent. It gives her the opportunity to act as a social instructor and to impose her own class values on Harriet.

Harriet's uncertain parentage is central to this dynamic. Because she does not know her family background, she occupies an unstable position in Highbury's social hierarchy. She is not clearly part of the lower class, but she is also not accepted as a member of the gentry. This ambiguity allows Emma to imagine a higher social future for her. Instead of accepting Harriet's material and social reality, Emma invents a more genteel identity for her. Mammadova argues that class in *Emma* is closely connected to family origin, wealth, and recognized social position, which explains why Harriet's

unknown parentage makes her especially vulnerable to social manipulation (Mammadova, 2025, p. 129).

At this point, the relationship between Emma and Harriet can be represented as a movement from material privilege to ideological influence. Emma's social superiority gives her the authority to guide Harriet, while Harriet's insecurity makes her receptive to this guidance. The following figure summarizes this ideological process.

Figure III.1: Emma's Ideological Influence on Harriet Smith



Source: Prepared by the student based on the Marxist analysis of Emma and Harriet's relationship in Austen's *Emma*.

Emma's treatment of Harriet shows how ruling-class ideology operates through personal relationships. She does not openly force Harriet to reject her original social connections. Rather, she gradually reshapes Harriet's desires by presenting certain choices as refined and others as degrading. This is clearly seen in Emma's reaction to Robert Martin. Robert Martin is respectable, hardworking, and materially stable. Yet Emma refuses to see him as a suitable match because he belongs to the farming class. Her objection is not moral but social. She views his class position as a barrier that cannot be overcome by personal merit.

When Harriet speaks positively about the Martin family, Emma responds with condescension. She treats the Martins as belonging to a lower social sphere and discourages Harriet from valuing them too highly. In doing so, Emma teaches Harriet to reinterpret her own feelings through the standards of the gentry. Harriet's affection for Robert Martin is not allowed to develop naturally because Emma intervenes and translates it into a class problem. The possibility of marrying Martin becomes, in Emma's language, a form of lowering oneself. This demonstrates how ideology works: it makes class prejudice appear as good advice and social refinement.

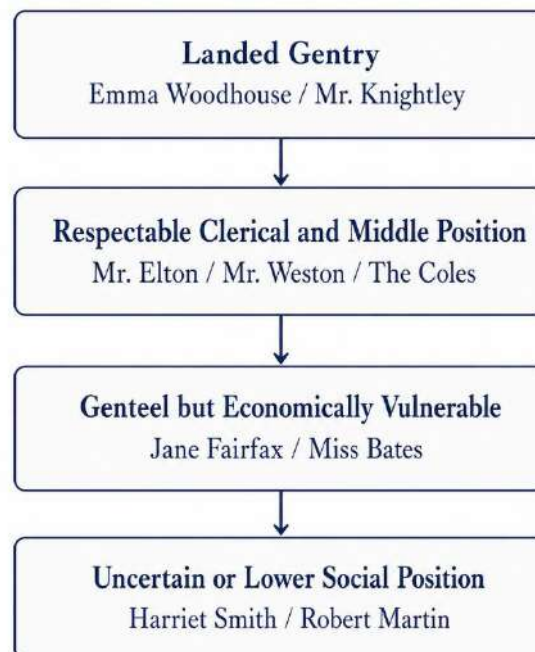
Emma's interference becomes most obvious when Robert Martin proposes to Harriet. Instead of allowing Harriet to make an independent decision, Emma indirectly guides her toward refusal. Emma avoids giving an explicit command, but her influence is so strong that Harriet understands what answer is expected. This indirect control is ideologically significant. Emma does not need to use force because Harriet has already internalized her authority. Harriet depends on Emma's approval and therefore begins to see herself through Emma's class perspective.

From a Marxist point of view, this moment reveals the production of false consciousness. Harriet is led to reject a materially suitable match because she begins

to believe in an imagined social elevation. She adopts Emma's assumptions about gentility, rank, and marriage, even though these assumptions do not correspond to her real social position. Abestano explains that false consciousness involves a distorted perception of reality in which individuals internalize ideas that work against their actual interests (Abestano, n.d., p. 1). Harriet's rejection of Robert Martin reflects precisely this kind of distortion: she turns away from security and affection in order to pursue an illusion created by upper-class ideology.

The class positions involved in this relationship must also be clarified. Emma belongs to the landed gentry, while Harriet occupies an uncertain and dependent position. Robert Martin, although materially stable, belongs to the farming class and is therefore treated by Emma as socially unsuitable. Mr. Elton, by contrast, occupies a more respectable clerical position, which makes Emma imagine him as a possible match for Harriet. The following figure shows the class hierarchy that shapes Emma's judgment.

Figure III.2: Class Positions in Emma's Matchmaking Scheme



Source: Prepared by the student based on the analysis of social hierarchy in Austen's *Emma*.

Emma's role in this process is not passive. She actively constructs Harriet's class aspiration. She suggests that Harriet may be connected to a gentleman, encourages her to imagine herself above the Martins, and later directs her attention toward Mr. Elton. In this way, Emma transforms Harriet from a socially vulnerable girl into a vehicle for her own class fantasy. Harriet's desires become less her own and more the product of Emma's imagination. This is why Emma's friendship is also a form of domination. It appears affectionate, but it controls Harriet's understanding of herself.

The case of Mr. Elton further exposes the class illusion Emma creates. Emma imagines that Mr. Elton, as a clergyman and gentleman, may be a suitable match for Harriet. However, Mr. Elton's actual interest is directed toward Emma herself, whose wealth and status make her a far more desirable partner. His rejection of Harriet reveals the harsh reality that Emma's fantasy had concealed. Harriet may be improved through Emma's company, but she cannot easily cross the material and social boundaries that define Highbury. Mr. Elton's response therefore functions as a material correction to Emma's ideological illusion.

This relationship also shows the danger of upper-class imagination when it is supported by social power. Emma can afford to imagine because her own position is secure. Harriet cannot. For Emma, matchmaking is a form of entertainment and self-expression; for Harriet, it affects her future security, reputation, and emotional life. This difference is crucial. Emma's class privilege protects her from the consequences of her mistakes, while Harriet suffers directly from them. Thus, the relationship between Emma and Harriet reveals the unequal effects of ideology: the dominant class produces illusions, but the subordinate class pays the price.

Therefore, Emma's friendship with Harriet must be read as a central ideological relationship in the novel. Through Harriet, Emma exercises the power to define social

value, redirect desire, and police class boundaries. Her influence teaches Harriet to misrecognize her own interests and to aspire toward a class position that Highbury will not truly grant her. In this sense, Emma becomes not only a mistaken friend, but an active agent of ruling-class ideology. Her treatment of Harriet shows how class domination can operate through affection, advice, and social improvement rather than through direct coercion.

3.3. Kindness as Social Control

In *Emma*, kindness is not always a neutral moral virtue. It often functions as a subtle form of social control, especially when it is practiced by characters who possess wealth, authority, and social prestige. From a Marxist perspective, benevolence may become ideological when it hides unequal relations of power beneath the language of care, friendship, and moral responsibility. Emma Woodhouse's treatment of Harriet Smith is the clearest example of this process. Emma appears to act as Harriet's friend and guide, but her kindness also allows her to direct Harriet's desires, reshape her expectations, and detach her from her actual social position.

Emma's kindness toward Harriet begins after the marriage of Miss Taylor, when Emma feels the need for a new companion. Harriet's simplicity, admiration, and gratitude make her highly attractive to Emma because they give Emma the pleasure of influence. This relationship is therefore unequal from the beginning. Emma gives advice, interprets social situations, evaluates possible marriages, and defines what Harriet should or should not desire. Harriet, on the other hand, receives this guidance with dependence and admiration. Thus, Emma's kindness creates a hierarchy between the one who guides and the one who is guided.

This kind of benevolence is ideologically powerful because it does not appear oppressive. Emma does not openly dominate Harriet. She does not use force or direct

command. Instead, she exercises control through suggestion, encouragement, correction, and emotional closeness. Her authority is accepted because it is presented as friendship. Harriet believes that Emma wants what is best for her, and this belief makes her more willing to adopt Emma's judgments as her own. In this sense, kindness becomes more effective than coercion, because it works through trust and affection.

The rejection of Robert Martin demonstrates this clearly. Emma presents her interference as a form of protection. She suggests that Harriet deserves better and that accepting Robert Martin would lower her social possibilities. Yet this advice does not truly serve Harriet's material interests. Robert Martin offers affection, stability, and a respectable future. Emma's refusal to recognize him as suitable is based mainly on class prejudice. Her kindness therefore leads Harriet away from a secure match and toward uncertain aspirations. What appears to be benevolent counsel becomes a mechanism for producing false class consciousness.

Emma's actions also show how the dominant class can shape the imagination of those beneath it. By constantly suggesting that Harriet may have higher prospects, Emma encourages her to think of herself as someone who belongs closer to the genteel world. This imagined elevation separates Harriet from her real social connections, especially the Martins. As a result, Harriet begins to internalize Emma's standards of gentility and to misunderstand her own position. Mammadova argues that class relations in *Emma* are shaped by subtle forms of social evaluation, where characters' worth is measured through wealth, origin, and social recognition (Mammadova, 2025, p. 129). Emma's kindness participates in this process by translating class prejudice into friendly advice.

The ideological nature of kindness is also visible in the way Emma treats social improvement. She imagines Harriet as a project to be refined, elevated, and redirected.

This reveals that Emma's benevolence is not based on equality. She does not seek to understand Harriet's own desires as independent and valid. Instead, she assumes the right to improve Harriet according to her own upper-class standards. This is important because social improvement in the novel often means conformity to the values of the dominant class. Harriet is encouraged to become more genteel, but this process also makes her more dependent on Emma's approval.

From this perspective, Emma's kindness is linked to symbolic power. She has the ability to name what is respectable, what is degrading, what is suitable, and what is improper. Harriet lacks the social authority to resist these definitions. Therefore, Emma's benevolence becomes a way of organizing Harriet's consciousness. Abestano explains that false consciousness occurs when individuals internalize ideas that prevent them from recognizing their actual conditions and interests (Abestano, n.d., p. 1). Harriet's acceptance of Emma's guidance illustrates this mechanism, because she comes to desire a class position that does not correspond to her material reality.

The same logic can be extended to Emma's wider practice of charity. In Highbury, acts of kindness toward poorer or dependent characters often confirm the superiority of the giver. The wealthy can visit the poor, offer assistance, and display moral responsibility, but these actions rarely challenge the structure that produces poverty or dependence. Instead, charity maintains a social relationship in which the upper class appears generous and the lower or vulnerable class remains grateful. Medalie argues that charitable action in *Emma* may emphasize the power and privilege of the donor rather than erase inequality (Medalie, n.d., p. 6). This observation is especially useful for understanding the ideological function of Emma's benevolence.

Miss Bates provides an important example of this unequal kindness. She is included in Highbury society, but her inclusion is marked by pity, patience, and dependence.

Wealthier characters are expected to treat her kindly because of her poverty and vulnerability. However, this kindness does not give her real social power. It only manages her marginal position. When Emma mocks Miss Bates at Box Hill, the violence hidden beneath polite kindness becomes visible. The incident shows that benevolence can easily turn into humiliation when the powerful forget the vulnerability of those beneath them.

Mr. Knightley's rebuke after Box Hill exposes the moral limits of Emma's class privilege. He reminds Emma that Miss Bates is poor, socially declining, and deserving of compassion. Yet even this correction remains within a paternalistic framework. Knightley does not challenge the class hierarchy that makes Miss Bates dependent. He only insists that the wealthy must behave responsibly toward the vulnerable. This means that kindness remains part of the social order: it softens inequality without abolishing it.

Thus, kindness in *Emma* works as a form of soft social control. It creates emotional bonds that appear generous but often reproduce dependence. Emma's friendship with Harriet, her charitable role in Highbury, and her treatment of vulnerable characters all show how benevolence can become ideological. It allows the dominant class to maintain authority while appearing moral and refined. Instead of using direct force, Emma exercises power through advice, sympathy, improvement, and social judgment. Consequently, Emma's kindness must be read critically. It is not simply a sign of good character, nor is it only a personal weakness when misapplied. It is part of the wider ideological structure of Highbury, where class power is reproduced through polite and affectionate forms. By presenting domination as care, the novel reveals how social hierarchy can be maintained in ways that appear humane, civilized, and morally acceptable.

3.4. Desire, Class Aspiration, and False Consciousness

The relationship between desire and class aspiration is central to understanding Emma Woodhouse's ideological influence over Harriet Smith. In *Emma*, desire is not presented as a purely private or natural feeling. Rather, it is shaped by social expectations, class values, and material possibilities. From a Marxist perspective, romantic desire can become ideological when individuals are encouraged to want what does not correspond to their real social and economic position. This is precisely what happens to Harriet under Emma's influence. Harriet's desires are redirected away from Robert Martin, a materially suitable and affectionate match, toward gentlemen whose social position is far above her own.

False consciousness appears when Harriet begins to see herself through Emma's class imagination rather than through her actual material reality. At the beginning, Harriet's affection for Robert Martin is sincere and socially reasonable. Robert Martin belongs to the farming class, but he is respectable, hardworking, economically stable, and genuinely attached to Harriet. Their relationship would offer Harriet emotional affection and material security. However, Emma teaches Harriet to reinterpret this suitable attachment as socially degrading. As a result, Harriet's own desire is replaced by a borrowed desire produced by upper-class ideology.

Emma's manipulation works because Harriet lacks a secure class identity. Her unknown parentage makes her socially uncertain, and this uncertainty creates a space for Emma's imagination. Emma suggests that Harriet may be connected to a gentleman, even though there is no evidence to support this belief. This imagined gentility becomes the foundation of Harriet's false aspiration. Instead of understanding her position realistically, Harriet begins to imagine herself as suitable for men of higher

rank. Mammadova argues that class and character in *Emma* are deeply connected to origin, fortune, and social recognition, which explains why Harriet's uncertain background makes her vulnerable to ideological misdirection (Mammadova, 2025, p. 129).

This process is not simply a personal error in judgment. It is ideological because it teaches Harriet to misunderstand the material conditions that shape her life. Abestano explains that false consciousness involves a distorted awareness of reality, where individuals adopt beliefs that prevent them from recognizing their real interests (Abestano, n.d., p. 1). Harriet's rejection of Robert Martin is therefore not an act of true freedom. It is the result of Emma's influence, which makes Harriet believe that social elevation is possible through desire alone. In reality, Highbury's class system does not allow such movement easily.

Mr. Elton's proposal to Emma exposes the illusion that Emma has created. Emma imagines that Mr. Elton is interested in Harriet, but his actual desire is directed toward Emma herself. His behavior reveals that he is fully aware of class and fortune. He does not see Harriet as a suitable wife because she lacks wealth, family status, and recognized social position. This moment is important because it brings Harriet's false consciousness into contact with material reality. The world of Highbury does not accept Emma's fantasy. It reasserts the importance of class, property, and rank.

Harriet's humiliation after Mr. Elton's rejection shows the cost of ideological manipulation. Emma's class imagination produces real emotional suffering for Harriet. For Emma, the mistake is embarrassing and morally troubling; for Harriet, it is deeply painful because it affects her sense of self-worth and future expectation. This difference shows the unequal consequences of class ideology. Emma can recover from

her errors because her social position remains secure. Harriet, however, suffers because her hopes were built on an illusion that society itself refuses to validate.

The same pattern appears later when Harriet develops feelings for Mr. Knightley. This is the most extreme form of false class aspiration in the novel. Mr. Knightley represents the height of local landed authority, while Harriet remains a girl of uncertain origin and limited social power. The possibility of such a match threatens the very hierarchy that Emma has helped to reinforce. When Emma realizes that Harriet may aspire to Mr. Knightley, she finally understands the danger of the ideas she planted. Harriet's desire has moved beyond Emma's control and now threatens Emma's own social and emotional position.

This moment reveals the contradiction within Emma's ideology. Emma wanted to elevate Harriet, but only within limits controlled by Emma herself. She encouraged Harriet to reject Robert Martin and to imagine a more genteel future, but she did not intend Harriet to claim equality with the highest figures of Highbury. Therefore, Harriet's aspiration to Mr. Knightley exposes the instability of ideological manipulation. Once false consciousness is created, it may produce desires that disturb the very order it was supposed to preserve.

Emma's shock at Harriet's feelings for Mr. Knightley is therefore not only romantic jealousy. It is also a class shock. Emma suddenly recognizes the full consequences of encouraging Harriet to think too highly of herself. The problem is not simply that Harriet loves the wrong man; it is that Harriet has imagined herself entering a social sphere that Emma instinctively understands as closed to her. In this sense, Emma's reaction reveals the limits of her own supposed generosity. She may guide Harriet upward, but she does not truly accept Harriet as an equal.

The revelation of Harriet's parentage later reinforces the novel's material logic. When Harriet is discovered to be the daughter of a tradesman, the fantasy of hidden gentility collapses. Her social position becomes clearer, and her eventual marriage to Robert Martin is presented as appropriate. This ending corrects Harriet's false consciousness by returning her to a match that corresponds to her material and social reality. Mammadova notes that the novel's treatment of class relations often restores characters to positions that fit the wider social order (Mammadova, 2025, p. 130).

From a Marxist perspective, this resolution is ideologically significant. Harriet's return to Robert Martin may appear happy and reasonable, but it also confirms the principle that social stability depends on individuals accepting their "proper" class position. The novel does not imagine a radical transformation of hierarchy. Instead, it resolves disorder by realigning desire with class structure. Harriet becomes happy only when her aspirations are corrected and redirected toward a socially acceptable match.

Emma's role in this process demonstrates how dominant ideology controls not only institutions, but also imagination and desire. She does not merely tell Harriet what to do; she teaches her what to want. This is a deeper form of power because it shapes the internal world of the subordinate subject. Harriet's false consciousness shows that class domination becomes most effective when individuals begin to desire according to the values of the dominant class, even when those desires harm their real interests. Therefore, desire in *Emma* is inseparable from class. Romantic feeling is filtered through rank, fortune, family background, and social recognition. Harriet's changing attachments reveal how ideology can transform personal emotion into a mechanism of class reproduction. Through Emma's influence, Harriet learns to desire upward mobility, but the social world of Highbury ultimately corrects and limits that desire. In this way, the novel shows that false consciousness is not merely a theoretical concept;

it operates through friendship, admiration, romantic hope, and the internalization of class values.

Consequently, Emma's ideological agency reaches its strongest expression in her production of Harriet's false class aspiration. By redirecting Harriet's desire away from Robert Martin and toward socially superior men, Emma reproduces the values of the landed gentry while disguising them as friendship and improvement. Harriet's eventual return to Robert Martin restores social order, but it also exposes the ideological violence of Emma's earlier influence. The episode demonstrates that class power in *Emma* functions not only through wealth and rank, but also through the shaping of consciousness, desire, and self-perception.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has examined Emma Woodhouse as an active agent of ideology in Jane Austen's *Emma*. The analysis has shown that Emma's influence does not come only from her intelligence, personality, or personal confidence, but from her privileged material and social position. Her wealth, family name, domestic authority, and central place in Highbury give her the symbolic power to judge others, direct relationships, and shape social expectations. Austen's opening description of Emma as "handsome, clever, and rich" therefore becomes more than a simple introduction to the heroine; it establishes the material foundation of her authority (Austen, 2009, vol. 1, chap. 1).

The chapter first demonstrated that Emma's social position places her at the top of Highbury's hierarchy. As a wealthy young woman of Hartfield, she is free from the economic anxieties that affect characters such as Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax, and Miss Bates. This freedom allows her to act with confidence and to treat other people's lives as objects of arrangement. Her independence, however, is not a universal form of

female freedom; it is a class-based privilege produced by inherited wealth and social recognition.

The chapter then analyzed Emma's relationship with Harriet Smith as a central example of ideological domination. Harriet's uncertain parentage and weak social position make her vulnerable to Emma's influence. Emma presents her guidance as friendship, but this friendship is unequal. Through advice, encouragement, and social correction, Emma teaches Harriet to misread her own position and to aspire toward a higher class sphere. Her rejection of Robert Martin is therefore not simply a romantic decision; it is the result of Emma's ideological intervention.

Furthermore, the chapter showed that kindness in the novel can operate as a form of social control. Emma's benevolence toward Harriet appears generous, but it also creates dependence. By claiming to improve Harriet, Emma imposes upper-class values on her and detaches her from a materially suitable future. The same logic appears in Highbury's wider practices of charity and politeness, where the wealthy preserve their moral authority while the vulnerable remain dependent and grateful.

Finally, the chapter examined desire, class aspiration, and false consciousness. Emma's greatest ideological power lies in her ability to shape what Harriet wants. Harriet is led to reject Robert Martin and to imagine herself as suitable for men above her actual social position, first Mr. Elton and later Mr. Knightley. These aspirations expose the effects of false consciousness, because Harriet begins to desire according to Emma's class imagination rather than her own material reality. The eventual return of Harriet to Robert Martin restores social order, but it also confirms the power of class ideology in determining acceptable desire and marriage.

Therefore, Emma's role in the novel is not limited to that of a mistaken heroine who learns self-knowledge. From a Marxist perspective, she functions as a vehicle through

which ruling-class values are reproduced. Her matchmaking, kindness, judgments, and imagination all participate in maintaining the hierarchy of Highbury. Even when she corrects her mistakes, the social order itself remains largely intact. This chapter has thus shown that Emma's personal development cannot be separated from her ideological function within the novel. The following chapter will extend this analysis by examining marriage as the major institution through which desire, property, and class reproduction are finally organized and stabilized.

Chapter IV: Marriage, Desire, and Class Reproduction

Chapter IV: Marriage, Desire, and Class Reproduction

Introduction

4.1. Marriage as a Social and Economic Institution

4.2. Property, Wealth, and Class Expectations

4.3. Acceptable and Unacceptable Matches

4.4. The Ending and the Preservation of Social Order

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter examines marriage in Jane Austen's *Emma* as a social and economic institution rather than as a purely romantic conclusion. While the novel is often read as a domestic narrative centered on love, misunderstanding, and emotional education, a Marxist reading shows that marriage is closely connected to property, wealth, class expectations, and social reproduction. In the world of Highbury, marriage does not only unite individuals; it also organizes social positions, preserves class boundaries, and stabilizes the material order of the community.

The previous chapter analyzed Emma Woodhouse as an agent of ideology, focusing on how her social authority shapes Harriet Smith's desires and class aspirations. This final chapter extends that analysis by examining the institution through which desire is finally regulated: marriage. In *Emma*, romantic feeling is never completely free from social and economic considerations. Characters are evaluated not only according to affection or personal compatibility, but also according to fortune, family origin, inheritance, social respectability, and class suitability.

From a Marxist perspective, marriage functions as part of the cultural superstructure that reflects and protects the economic base. It transforms material interests into moral, emotional, and social language. A match may be described as proper, suitable, imprudent, unequal, or degrading, but these judgments often depend on the class and economic position of the individuals involved. Thus, the novel's marriage plot becomes a key site for understanding how Highbury reproduces its hierarchy.

This chapter first discusses marriage as a social and economic institution in Austen's world, especially in relation to women's dependence, property, and legal restrictions. It then analyzes the role of wealth and class expectations in shaping marriage choices. After that, it examines acceptable and unacceptable matches in the novel, focusing on

Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, Mr. Elton and Augusta Hawkins, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, and Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley. Finally, the chapter studies the ending of the novel as a conservative restoration of social order, where characters are returned to positions that correspond to their material and class realities. The central argument of this chapter is that marriage in *Emma* operates as a mechanism of class reproduction. Even when the novel celebrates emotional harmony and personal happiness, its resolution depends on the correction of misplaced desires and the re-establishment of proper social boundaries. Harriet returns to Robert Martin, Emma marries Mr. Knightley, and the social structure of Highbury remains intact. Therefore, the ending does not radically challenge class hierarchy; rather, it restores and legitimizes it through the language of love, propriety, and domestic happiness.

4.1. Marriage as a Social and Economic Institution

In Jane Austen's *Emma*, marriage is not presented as a purely romantic or emotional union. Although the novel ends with marriages that appear to bring happiness and social harmony, these unions are deeply connected to class position, wealth, property, and social security. From a Marxist perspective, marriage functions as a social and economic institution through which the existing class order is preserved and reproduced. It is not simply a private relationship between two individuals; it is also a public arrangement that affects family status, inheritance, respectability, and material stability.

In the society represented in *Emma*, marriage is especially important because it determines a person's future position within the social hierarchy. A suitable marriage can confirm social rank, secure economic comfort, and protect family reputation. An unsuitable marriage, however, may threaten social order by crossing class boundaries or by joining individuals whose material conditions are considered unequal. This is

why the language used around marriage in the novel often includes judgments such as “proper,” “imprudent,” “unequal,” or “degrading.” These terms may seem moral or emotional, but they are often based on economic and class considerations.

For women in Austen’s world, marriage has an even stronger material significance. Many women have limited access to independent wealth, professional opportunities, or legal autonomy. As a result, marriage becomes one of the few socially accepted ways to obtain financial security and social protection. Emma Woodhouse is exceptional because her fortune allows her to imagine remaining single without fear of poverty. However, this independence is not shared by most women in the novel. Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates, and Harriet Smith all show, in different ways, how women without secure wealth are exposed to dependence, uncertainty, and social vulnerability.

Austen’s own awareness of women’s economic insecurity appears clearly in her famous statement that “single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor” (Austen, 1995, March 13, 1817). This observation is important because it shows that marriage in Austen’s social world cannot be separated from material necessity. A woman’s future depends not only on love or personal virtue, but also on fortune, family background, and the possibility of obtaining economic protection through marriage. Therefore, marriage becomes part of the material structure that organizes women’s lives.

The legal and social context of marriage also strengthens this interpretation. Under the doctrine of coverture, a married woman’s legal identity was largely absorbed into that of her husband. Blackstone explains that, in marriage, husband and wife were considered “one person in law,” meaning that the woman’s independent legal existence was restricted after marriage (Blackstone, 1765, p. 442). This legal framework

demonstrates that marriage was not merely a sentimental institution; it was also a mechanism of property control and patriarchal authority. Women entered marriage not only as romantic partners, but also as subjects of a legal and economic system that limited their autonomy.

Property laws further reinforced marriage as a class institution. In aristocratic and landed families, inheritance practices such as primogeniture and entail helped preserve estates by preventing the fragmentation of land and wealth across generations. Cecil explains that primogeniture served to keep family property concentrated within a line of descent, especially through the eldest son (Cecil, 1895, p. 44). Similarly, Neate shows that entail and settlement were legal mechanisms used to control the transmission of property and secure family estates (Neate, 1865, p. 18). These practices reveal how marriage, inheritance, and property were closely connected in the preservation of class power.

In *Emma*, this background helps explain why marriage is treated with such seriousness. A match is never only a matter of affection; it also has consequences for social rank and material stability. Emma's attitude toward Harriet and Robert Martin illustrates this point. Robert Martin may be kind, hardworking, and economically stable, but Emma sees him as socially unsuitable because he belongs to the farming class. Her rejection of the match is not based on his moral failure, but on the belief that Harriet should aspire to a higher social position. This shows how marriage becomes a field where class ideology is enforced.

The same logic appears in Mr. Elton's behavior. Mr. Elton does not desire Harriet because she lacks fortune, recognized birth, and social consequence. Instead, he aims at Emma, whose wealth and status would greatly elevate him. When he later marries Augusta Hawkins, her independent fortune makes the match materially acceptable.

This demonstrates that romantic language in the novel often hides economic calculation. Marriage becomes a way to secure or improve social position, not merely a result of affection.

Emma's own position is different because she does not need marriage for survival. Her wealth allows her to claim independence, and she initially believes that she has no intention of marrying. However, this freedom is itself a product of class privilege. Emma can refuse marriage because she already possesses the economic security that marriage usually provides for women. Her situation therefore confirms rather than challenges the class structure of the novel. She is free because she is rich, not because the society around her grants women general independence.

From a Marxist point of view, marriage in *Emma* belongs to the cultural superstructure because it translates economic interests into social and moral values. The community does not openly speak of marriage as a market, yet its judgments clearly depend on fortune, status, and class compatibility. A "good" match is one that preserves or strengthens the social order. A "bad" match is one that threatens to disturb the hierarchy. Thus, marriage becomes one of the main institutions through which Highbury protects its class boundaries.

At this stage of the analysis, the economic logic of marriage can be summarized in the following figure.

Figure IV.1: Marriage as a Mechanism of Class Reproduction in *Emma*

Source: Prepared by the student based on the Marxist analysis of marriage, property, and class reproduction in Austen's *Emma*.

This figure shows that marriage in the novel does not function independently from material conditions. Property and wealth determine social rank, social rank shapes marriage expectations, and marriage expectations define which unions are acceptable or unacceptable. Through this process, the class hierarchy of Highbury is preserved.

Therefore, marriage in *Emma* must be understood as both a personal and ideological institution. On the surface, it appears to organize love, companionship, and domestic happiness. Beneath that surface, however, it regulates wealth, gender dependence, social mobility, and class reproduction. Austen's marriage plot may end in harmony, but that harmony is achieved by aligning desire with property, rank, and social expectation. In this sense, marriage becomes one of the strongest mechanisms through which the novel restores and legitimizes the existing social order.

4.2. Property, Wealth, and Class Expectations

Property and wealth play a central role in shaping the marriage expectations of Jane Austen's *Emma*. In Highbury, social value is not determined by affection alone, nor even by personal virtue alone. It is strongly connected to fortune, family background, land, profession, and the ability to maintain a respectable social position. From a Marxist perspective, this means that marriage is governed by material conditions. Characters may speak in the language of love, prudence, propriety, or suitability, but beneath this language lies a clear concern with class preservation and economic security.

Emma Woodhouse's own position illustrates the power of wealth in determining freedom and social authority. Because she is rich and socially secure, she is not pressured to marry for survival. Her fortune allows her to imagine herself as independent, unlike many women around her. This independence, however, should not be read as general female autonomy. It is a privilege produced by class. Emma can delay or reject marriage because her material position already gives her what marriage usually provides for women: security, respectability, and social protection. Chowdhury et al. argue that *Emma* presents class, gender, and intellectual independence as deeply connected to social and economic privilege (Chowdhury et al., 2024, p. 1136).

This class-based freedom becomes clearer when Emma is compared to Jane Fairfax. Jane is refined, educated, talented, and morally respectable, yet she lacks fortune. Her lack of property places her future under pressure. Without marriage or financial support, she faces the possibility of becoming a governess, a position that would place her in an uncomfortable space between gentility and employment. Jane's situation reveals that personal merit is not enough to guarantee security in Austen's world.

Material conditions determine the range of choices available to a woman. Therefore, Jane's refinement does not free her from dependence; only wealth or a suitable marriage can do that.

Harriet Smith's case also demonstrates how class expectations are governed by property and origin. Harriet's unknown parentage makes her socially uncertain, and her lack of fortune limits her marriage prospects. Emma tries to imagine Harriet as someone who may belong to a higher sphere, but Highbury's social order does not accept imagination as a substitute for material evidence. Harriet's position remains unstable because she lacks the recognized family background and property that would support genteel status. This is why her marriage possibilities are constantly judged in relation to class suitability.

Robert Martin is important in this context because he possesses a form of material stability that Emma undervalues. As a farmer, he is not part of the landed gentry, but he is economically respectable and capable of offering Harriet security. His position shows that material worth does not always translate into genteel recognition. Emma rejects him not because he is poor or immoral, but because his class identity does not fit her idea of Harriet's imagined elevation. Her judgment reveals how class expectations are not based on money alone; they also depend on the social meaning attached to different forms of property and labor.

The distinction between land, trade, and professional income is also important in *Emma*. Landed wealth, represented by Hartfield and Donwell Abbey, carries the highest symbolic authority. It is old, stable, and socially respected. Trade wealth, by contrast, may provide money but not always immediate gentility. This explains the uncertain position of characters such as the Coles, whose wealth from trade makes them socially visible but not automatically equal to the old families of Highbury. The

novel therefore presents a society in which wealth must be socially legitimized before it becomes full status.

Mr. Weston's social mobility further confirms this point. His movement from trade into respectable society suggests that money can support upward mobility, but only when it is converted into acceptable forms of gentility through property, marriage, and manners. His position shows that Highbury's class system is not entirely closed, but it is carefully regulated. Social mobility is possible, yet it must pass through the approval of dominant social values. In this sense, class expectation works as an ideological filter: it decides which forms of wealth are respectable and which remain suspicious.

Mr. Elton's marriage to Augusta Hawkins provides another example of the economic logic of marriage. Mr. Elton's rejection of Harriet is not surprising when examined through class expectations. Harriet lacks fortune, family name, and social consequence, while Augusta Hawkins possesses an independent fortune. Her money gives her immediate marriage value, even if her manners later appear vulgar to Emma. This shows that wealth has the power to compensate for certain social weaknesses. In the marriage market of the novel, fortune can convert a woman into a more acceptable match.

At the same time, Austen does not present money as the only factor. Class expectations combine wealth with manners, family background, and social recognition. Augusta Hawkins has money, but she lacks the subtle manners associated with established gentility. This is why Emma looks down on her despite her fortune. The case of Mrs. Elton therefore reveals a tension within the class system: new wealth can buy entrance into polite society, but it cannot always produce the cultural refinement expected by old social elites. This distinction is important because it shows how ideology protects

the prestige of the landed gentry. It presents their authority as a matter of breeding and taste rather than mere possession of money.

Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax also reveal the pressure of property and class expectations. Frank's dependence on his wealthy aunt affects his ability to marry openly. His secret engagement to Jane becomes problematic because their union cannot be publicly secured until the economic obstacle is removed. Jane's poverty makes her vulnerable, while Frank's dependence on inheritance restricts his freedom. Their relationship shows that even romantic attachment must wait for material permission. Desire remains subordinate to property and family power.

Emma and Mr. Knightley's eventual marriage represents the most secure form of class compatibility. Both belong to the upper level of Highbury society. Both are connected to landed property, social authority, and recognized respectability. Their union does not threaten the hierarchy; it confirms it. Unlike Harriet's imagined aspirations or Elton's social ambition, the marriage between Emma and Knightley is acceptable because it joins equals. It preserves property, rank, and symbolic authority within the same social sphere.

This logic confirms that marriage in *Emma* functions as a mechanism for regulating social boundaries. A match is acceptable when it aligns personal desire with class expectation. It is unacceptable when it threatens to disturb the hierarchy. Harriet and Robert Martin are eventually approved because their union corresponds to Harriet's real social position. Emma and Knightley are approved because they are social equals. Frank and Jane become acceptable only when the material obstacle is removed. Mr. Elton's marriage to Augusta Hawkins is acceptable because her fortune satisfies his ambition and secures his position.

Chowdhury et al. note that *Emma* represents social class and gender roles through the limitations placed on women's independence and marriage choices (Chowdhury et al., 2024, pp. 1135–1138). This observation supports the Marxist reading of the novel because it shows that personal relationships are not isolated from material structures. Women's choices are especially shaped by wealth, inheritance, and social expectation. The ability to marry freely is not equal for all characters; it depends on the economic base that supports or restricts them.

Therefore, property and wealth in *Emma* are not background details. They are active forces that organize desire, marriage, and social recognition. The novel's marriage plot depends on a system in which people are evaluated according to what they possess, where they come from, and how well they fit the expectations of their class. Romantic happiness becomes possible only when it does not contradict the material order of Highbury. In this sense, marriage becomes the point where private desire and public class structure meet.

Thus, the analysis of property, wealth, and class expectations reveals that Highbury's social order is reproduced through marriage. Characters may speak of love, judgment, or propriety, but their choices are shaped by fortune, inheritance, social background, and economic security. This prepares the ground for the next section, which will examine how the novel distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable matches according to the logic of class preservation.

4.3. Acceptable and Unacceptable Matches

In *Emma*, marriage is evaluated through a clear social and economic logic. A match is considered acceptable when it respects class expectations, protects material stability, and does not threaten the existing hierarchy of Highbury. By contrast, a match becomes unacceptable when it crosses class boundaries too sharply, exposes economic

weakness, or produces social imbalance. From a Marxist perspective, the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable matches reveals how marriage functions as a mechanism of class regulation. It determines who may rise, who must remain in place, and which desires are allowed to become socially legitimate.

The first major example of an unacceptable match is the imagined union between Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton. Emma believes that Mr. Elton may be suitable for Harriet because he is a clergyman and a gentleman. However, this belief is based more on Emma's imagination than on material reality. Harriet lacks fortune, family name, and recognized social origin, while Mr. Elton is socially ambitious and concerned with status. His later behavior makes clear that he never sees Harriet as a serious possibility. Instead, he aims at Emma, whose wealth and social rank would offer him a far more advantageous marriage.

Mr. Elton's rejection of Harriet exposes the economic logic hidden beneath polite manners and romantic misunderstanding. His interest in Emma is not purely emotional; it is also shaped by class calculation. Emma's wealth, position at Hartfield, and social consequence make her a desirable match. Harriet, by contrast, has neither fortune nor family standing. Therefore, Mr. Elton's response functions as a correction to Emma's fantasy. It shows that social elevation cannot be achieved simply through Emma's patronage or Harriet's imagined gentility. Marriage remains governed by material conditions.

This episode is important because it reveals the limits of Emma's ideological power. Emma can influence Harriet's desires, but she cannot force Highbury's class structure to accept Harriet as equal to the genteel sphere. Harriet's aspiration toward Mr. Elton is therefore unacceptable because it lacks the economic and social foundation required by the marriage market. Mammadova argues that class in *Emma* is constantly shaped

by fortune, status, and social recognition, which explains why Harriet's uncertain origin becomes a major obstacle to her imagined elevation (Mammadova, 2025, p. 133).

A second significant example is the relationship between Harriet Smith and Robert Martin. At first, Emma treats this match as unacceptable. She believes that Robert Martin is beneath Harriet, not because he lacks moral worth, but because he belongs to the farming class. Emma's judgment is ideological: she reads class position as a sign of personal suitability. Robert Martin is hardworking, respectable, and economically stable, yet Emma reduces him to his social category. In her view, marriage to him would prevent Harriet from entering a more genteel sphere.

However, the novel eventually reverses Emma's judgment. Harriet's marriage to Robert Martin becomes acceptable because it corresponds to her actual social and material position. Once Harriet's false aspirations collapse, Robert Martin appears not as a degrading match, but as a suitable and stable one. This shift is highly significant. It shows that the problem was not Robert Martin himself, but Emma's distorted class imagination. The match becomes acceptable when Harriet is returned to the class position that Highbury considers proper for her.

From a Marxist perspective, this resolution does not challenge the class system. It restores it. Harriet's final union with Robert Martin is presented as happy and appropriate, but it also confirms that social harmony depends on individuals accepting their "proper" place. Harriet's earlier desires for Mr. Elton and Mr. Knightley are corrected, and her marriage to Martin re-establishes the boundary between the landed gentry and the lower or farming classes. Thus, the acceptable match is the one that repairs the disorder created by false class aspiration.

The possible match between Harriet and Mr. Knightley represents the most socially unacceptable union in the novel. Mr. Knightley belongs to the highest level of Highbury's hierarchy. He is the owner of Donwell Abbey, a respected gentleman, and one of the central figures of local authority. Harriet, by contrast, remains socially uncertain and materially dependent. When Emma realizes that Harriet may have developed feelings for Mr. Knightley, she experiences not only jealousy, but also a profound class shock. The idea of Harriet marrying Knightley threatens the symbolic order of Highbury.

Emma's reaction reveals the hidden limits of her supposed generosity. She had encouraged Harriet to aspire above Robert Martin, but she never truly intended Harriet to become equal to the highest members of the gentry. Harriet's desire for Mr. Knightley exposes the contradiction in Emma's influence. Emma wants to elevate Harriet only within boundaries that she herself controls. Once Harriet's aspiration reaches Mr. Knightley, the fantasy becomes socially dangerous. The match is unacceptable because it would represent a massive elevation for Harriet and a debasement, in class terms, for Knightley.

This moment is crucial because it shows how class ideology regulates desire. Romantic feeling alone is not enough to make a match legitimate. The social system evaluates desire according to rank, property, and origin. Harriet may admire Knightley, but the material structure of Highbury makes such a union almost impossible. Emma's shock therefore reveals the deep connection between emotional life and class order. Desire becomes acceptable only when it respects the hierarchy.

Mr. Elton's marriage to Augusta Hawkins offers another important case. Unlike Harriet, Augusta possesses an independent fortune. Her money makes her socially useful to Mr. Elton, who seeks advancement and security. Although Emma later

criticizes Mrs. Elton's manners and vulgarity, the marriage itself is economically acceptable because it satisfies Mr. Elton's ambition and gives him material advantage. This case demonstrates that fortune can compensate for certain weaknesses in refinement. In Highbury's marriage market, money carries powerful social value.

At the same time, the Elton marriage reveals the difference between economic acceptability and cultural refinement. Augusta Hawkins has wealth, but she lacks the manners and subtle social taste associated with old gentility. Emma dislikes her because she appears vulgar, self-important, and socially intrusive. This contrast shows that acceptable marriage in the novel depends not only on money, but also on the social performance of gentility. Wealth may secure entrance into polite society, but it does not automatically produce full symbolic legitimacy.

The secret engagement between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax is more complex. On the level of personal affection, their match appears genuine. Jane is intelligent, educated, refined, and morally serious. However, she lacks fortune, and Frank depends heavily on the approval and wealth of his aunt. Their engagement must remain secret because it is not materially secure. The match cannot become openly acceptable until the economic obstacle is removed. This shows that even love must wait for property and inheritance to permit it.

Jane Fairfax's situation is especially revealing because she possesses the manners and education of gentility without the economic support that would make her secure. Her possible future as a governess represents the precarious condition of women who have refinement but no fortune. Marriage to Frank rescues her from this vulnerability, but only after Frank's financial dependence is resolved. Therefore, the match becomes acceptable not simply because the lovers are sincere, but because the material conditions finally allow the union to be recognized.

The marriage between Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley represents the most acceptable match in the novel. It unites two characters of similar social rank, moral authority, and material security. Emma belongs to Hartfield, while Knightley belongs to Donwell Abbey. Their marriage does not threaten Highbury's hierarchy; it strengthens it. It joins two central figures of the local gentry and preserves authority within the same class sphere. In this sense, their union functions as the ideal form of class reproduction.

Emma and Knightley's marriage is also presented as emotionally and morally satisfying. However, its social acceptability depends on the fact that it aligns desire with class equality. Unlike Harriet's imagined attachment to Knightley, Emma's love for him does not disturb the hierarchy because she is already his social equal. The difference between Emma's acceptable desire and Harriet's unacceptable desire reveals the class logic of the novel. The same man can be a proper match for one woman and an impossible match for another, depending on rank, fortune, and social position.

Chowdhury et al. argue that *Emma* represents social class and gender roles through marriage choices and the restrictions placed on women's independence (Chowdhury et al., 2024, p. 1138). This supports the Marxist reading of the novel because the marriage plot does not operate outside material conditions. Each union is judged according to whether it preserves or disturbs the class order. Love may exist, but it becomes socially valid only when it is compatible with property, fortune, and rank.

Table IV.1: Acceptable and Unacceptable Matches in *Emma*

Match	Social/Economic Position	Initial Status	Final Meaning
Harriet Smith / Mr. Elton	Harriet lacks fortune and origin; Elton seeks status	Unacceptable	Exposes Emma's class illusion
Harriet Smith / Robert Martin	Harriet is socially uncertain; Martin is a respectable farmer	Rejected by Emma, later accepted	Restores Harriet to a suitable class position
Harriet Smith / Mr. Knightley	Harriet is socially inferior; Knightley is landed gentry	Unacceptable	Reveals the limits of Emma's social imagination
Mr. Elton / Augusta Hawkins	Elton is ambitious; Augusta has fortune	Acceptable materially	Shows the power of money in marriage
Frank Churchill / Jane Fairfax	Jane lacks fortune; Frank depends on inheritance	Temporarily insecure	Becomes acceptable after economic obstacles are removed
Emma Woodhouse / Mr. Knightley	Both belong to the landed gentry	Fully acceptable	Consolidates class equality and social order

Source: Prepared by the student based on the Marxist analysis of marriage and class hierarchy in Austen's *Emma*.

This table clarifies that the novel does not judge marriages only by affection. Each match is measured by its relation to class stability. Harriet's unacceptable aspirations must be corrected; Mr. Elton's ambition must be materially satisfied; Frank and Jane's love must wait for economic permission; and Emma and Knightley's union is celebrated because it joins equals without disturbing the hierarchy.

Therefore, the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable matches in *Emma* reveals the ideological function of marriage. A match becomes legitimate when it supports the existing social order. It becomes problematic when it threatens to cross class boundaries or expose material instability. In this way, marriage operates as a

mechanism that disciplines desire, corrects false aspiration, and reproduces class hierarchy. The next section will examine how the novel's ending completes this process by restoring social harmony and preserving the structure of Highbury.

4.4. The Ending and the Preservation of Social Order

The ending of *Emma* is often read as a happy and harmonious conclusion in which misunderstandings are corrected, romantic attachments are clarified, and the main characters achieve emotional satisfaction. However, from a Marxist perspective, the ending does more than resolve personal relationships. It restores the social order of Highbury by ensuring that desire is finally aligned with class position, property, and material expectation. The novel's conclusion does not radically challenge hierarchy; rather, it reorganizes disturbed relationships so that each character returns to a socially acceptable place.

The marriage between Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley represents the most important union in the novel's resolution. On the emotional level, it brings Emma to self-knowledge and corrects her earlier misjudgments. On the social level, however, it unites two of the most powerful figures in Highbury. Emma belongs to Hartfield, while Mr. Knightley belongs to Donwell Abbey. Their marriage is therefore not a socially disruptive union, but a consolidation of landed authority. It preserves power within the same class and confirms the dominance of the local gentry.

This marriage is acceptable because Emma and Knightley are equals in rank, fortune, and social authority. Unlike Harriet's imagined attachment to Knightley, Emma's love does not threaten the hierarchy. The same man who would be socially impossible for Harriet becomes perfectly suitable for Emma because she already belongs to his class. This contrast reveals the class logic of the ending. Desire is approved when it remains within the boundaries of social equality. Therefore, Emma's marriage to Knightley

restores order not only because it fulfills romantic feeling, but because it confirms class compatibility.

Harriet Smith's marriage to Robert Martin is equally important for the preservation of social order. Earlier in the novel, Emma encourages Harriet to reject Robert Martin because she imagines Harriet as suitable for a higher social sphere. This creates false aspiration and emotional confusion. By the end, however, Harriet returns to Robert Martin, and this return is presented as correct, happy, and socially appropriate. The marriage repairs the disorder caused by Emma's ideological interference. Harriet is no longer imagined as a possible member of the gentry; she is restored to a position that corresponds to her actual material and social reality.

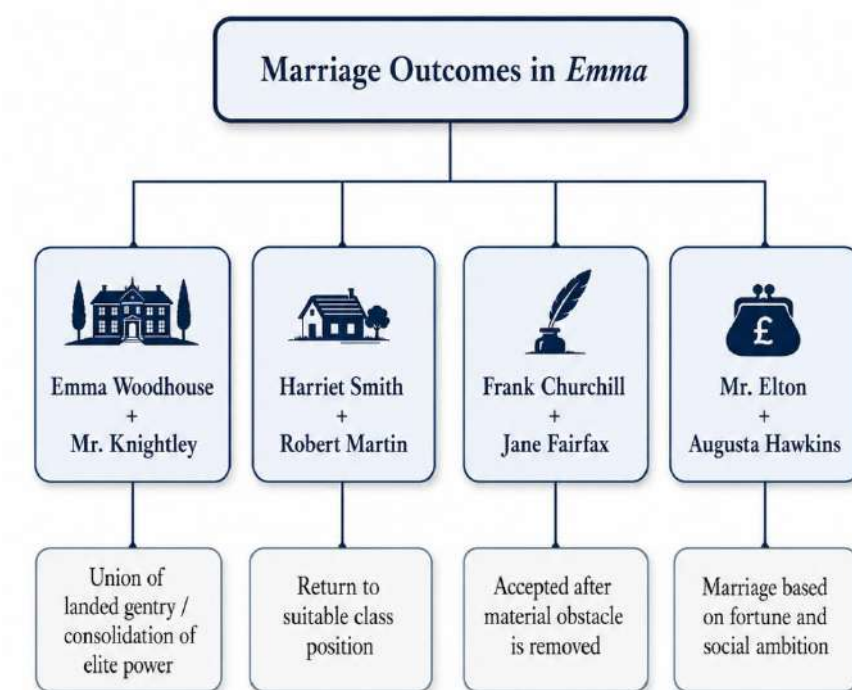
The revelation of Harriet's parentage further strengthens this restoration. Once Harriet is discovered to be the daughter of a tradesman, the fantasy of hidden gentility collapses. Her marriage to Robert Martin becomes not a fall, but a proper settlement. From a Marxist viewpoint, this resolution is ideologically significant because it corrects Harriet's false consciousness. She is guided back from unrealistic class aspiration to a materially suitable and socially acceptable match. Mammadova argues that the novel's class structure depends on the recognition of social boundaries and the restoration of characters to positions that fit their class identity (Mammadova, 2025, p. 133).

Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax also demonstrate how the ending transforms an insecure relationship into an acceptable one. Their secret engagement is problematic because it lacks open material security. Frank depends on his aunt, while Jane lacks fortune and faces the possibility of becoming a governess. Their relationship cannot be publicly accepted until the economic obstacle is removed. Once Frank becomes free from his aunt's control, the match becomes socially possible. This shows again that

love alone is not enough; romantic attachment requires material permission before it can be recognized.

Jane Fairfax's final position is therefore ambiguous. On one hand, her marriage rescues her from the insecurity of governess work and gives her social protection. On the other hand, this rescue confirms the limited options available to women without fortune. Jane's intelligence, education, and refinement are not sufficient to secure her future independently. She must still be saved through marriage. In this sense, the ending does not challenge the economic vulnerability of women; it resolves Jane's case individually while leaving the broader structure intact.

Mr. Elton's marriage to Augusta Hawkins also contributes to the social logic of the conclusion. His earlier desire for Emma exposes his ambition, while his rejection of Harriet reveals his class calculation. By marrying Augusta, who possesses an independent fortune, Mr. Elton secures a materially advantageous union. Although Mrs. Elton lacks the refinement valued by Emma and the old gentry, her fortune makes the marriage socially functional. This match reveals that money remains a powerful force in determining marital acceptability, even when manners and taste remain contested.

Figure IV.2: Marriage Outcomes and the Restoration of Social Order in *Emma*

Source: Prepared by the student based on the Marxist analysis of marriage outcomes and class restoration in Austen's *Emma*.

This figure shows that the ending of the novel is not random. Each marriage performs a specific ideological function. Emma and Knightley consolidate the authority of the landed gentry. Harriet and Robert Martin restore the boundary between the gentry and the lower farming class. Frank and Jane become acceptable only when material insecurity is resolved. Elton and Augusta demonstrate the role of fortune in social advancement. Together, these outcomes produce the appearance of harmony while confirming the logic of class reproduction.

The ending also changes Emma's personal understanding, but it does not transform Highbury's social structure. Emma recognizes her mistakes, especially her misjudgment of Harriet's prospects and her misunderstanding of her own feelings for Knightley. Yet her correction remains personal and moral rather than social or political. She learns to judge better, but the hierarchy she belongs to remains

untouched. The novel therefore resolves Emma's errors without questioning the material privileges that made those errors possible.

This is why the final harmony of the novel must be read critically. The conclusion presents marriages, reconciliation, and domestic happiness as signs of social peace. However, this peace is achieved by correcting misplaced desires and returning characters to appropriate social positions. Harriet's upward aspiration is abandoned; Jane's insecurity is solved through marriage; Emma's authority is stabilized through union with Knightley. The social system survives because every disruptive possibility is absorbed, corrected, or neutralized.

From a Marxist perspective, the ending of *Emma* therefore represents the preservation of social order. It transforms conflict into harmony without changing the economic and class relations that produced the conflict. The marriage plot functions as a mechanism of ideological closure: it makes the restoration of hierarchy appear natural, happy, and morally satisfying. The reader is invited to celebrate the marriages, but a Marxist reading reveals that these marriages also secure the continuity of class power.

Consequently, the final chapter shows that marriage in *Emma* is the institution through which desire, property, and class reproduction are finally organized. The novel's ending does not imagine a new social order. Instead, it confirms the old one by aligning each character with a suitable marital and class position. Highbury's harmony is restored because its hierarchy is preserved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that the institution of marriage in *Emma* transcends its romantic dimensions to function as a fundamental socio-economic superstructure designed to preserve property and reproduce class hierarchy. The

analysis reveals that material wealth and class expectations form the actual base upon which "acceptable" unions are constructed, while any relationship that threatens the stability of the landed gentry is ideologically marginalized. Ultimately, the novel's resolution represents a definitive triumph for conservative ideology, as social harmony is restored only through the return of characters to their appropriate material stations. The unions of the protagonists, particularly the consolidation of Hartfield and Donwell Abbey through the marriage of Emma and Mr. Knightley, fortify the economic and symbolic power of the elite, ensuring that the rigid structures of Highbury society remain stable and undisturbed.

General conclusion

General Conclusion

This research has examined Jane Austen's *Emma* from a Marxist literary perspective in order to explore the relationship between material conditions, ideology, and class hierarchy in the social world of Highbury. Moving beyond a purely romantic or moral interpretation of the novel, the study has shown that wealth, property, family background, social rank, and marriage expectations play an important role in shaping the characters' relationships, judgements, desires, and opportunities.

The first chapter established the theoretical framework of the study by presenting the main concepts of Marxist literary criticism, including material conditions, class relations, ideology, and false consciousness. It demonstrated that literature is not isolated from its historical and social context, but may represent, reproduce, or question the dominant values of society. These concepts provided the necessary basis for analysing the apparently peaceful and polite world of Highbury as a society structured by material inequality and class distinction.

The second chapter examined Highbury as a socially organised space in which wealth, property, profession, family origin, and reputation determine each character's position. The analysis showed that everyday practices such as visits, manners, conversations, charity, and moral judgements are not entirely neutral. They contribute to the inclusion, exclusion, classification, and regulation of individuals within the community. Highbury's civility therefore helps conceal social inequality by presenting hierarchy as natural, respectable, and morally acceptable.

The third chapter focused on Emma Woodhouse as an agent of class ideology. Emma's wealth, family status, and social authority allow her to influence the decisions and expectations of others, particularly Harriet Smith. Her relationship with Harriet reveals how ideological power may operate through friendship, kindness, advice, and social

approval rather than through direct force. By encouraging Harriet to reject Robert Martin and aspire to a higher social position, Emma causes her to adopt values that do not correspond to her actual material circumstances. Harriet's experience can therefore be understood as an example of false consciousness, since her desires are shaped by class assumptions that work against her own interests.

The fourth chapter analysed marriage as both a personal relationship and a social and economic institution. The study found that marriage in *Emma* is closely connected to property, wealth, reputation, family background, and class stability. The characters' marriage possibilities are influenced not only by affection but also by material and social considerations. The ending of the novel resolves its conflicts through socially acceptable marriages and restores order within Highbury. Although Austen exposes arrogance, snobbery, dependence, and unequal social relations, the final resolution does not fundamentally transform the class structure of the community.

Regarding the first research question, the study concludes that Marxist theory conceptualises materialism as an ideological force because material conditions influence both social position and human consciousness. Wealth, property, family origin, and rank shape the way characters understand themselves and judge others. In *Emma*, class hierarchy is reproduced through ordinary practices such as manners, visits, charity, moral judgement, matchmaking, and marriage. These practices transform material inequality into accepted social values and make class distinctions appear natural and legitimate.

Regarding the second research question, the interactions among the characters clearly reflect class ideology. Emma's treatment of Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, the social vulnerability of Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax, and the community's attitudes toward marriage and reputation demonstrate that personal relationships are deeply

influenced by social and economic position. The novel reveals some of the contradictions and injustices of the class system, especially through Emma's mistakes and the vulnerability of less privileged characters. However, it does not completely challenge that system. Its conclusion largely preserves the existing social order by restoring characters to socially acceptable positions and maintaining the stability of Highbury's hierarchy.

Ultimately, this study confirms that a Marxist reading of *Emma* provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between material life, ideology, and social behaviour. The novel demonstrates that class power does not operate only through wealth and property, but also through language, manners, moral values, personal influence, and marriage expectations. Therefore, the domestic and social world of Highbury can be understood as a space in which class hierarchy is continuously reproduced through everyday life. While Austen reveals important tensions within this social order, the novel's final resolution ultimately favours social stability rather than a radical transformation of the existing class structure.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Marxist Terms for the Study of Emma

This glossary provides the theoretical definitions of the Marxist terminology applied throughout the research to analyze the socio-economic landscape of Highbury.

- **Base (The Economic Foundation):** The underlying mode of production and property relations, specifically the landed gentry's ownership of estates like Hartfield and Donwell Abbey.
- **Superstructure:** The legal, social, and cultural manifestations—including manners, marriage laws, and "civility"—that emerge from and reinforce the economic base.
- **False Consciousness:** A state in which characters, such as Harriet Smith, adopt the ideologies of the ruling class that are contrary to their own material reality and interests.
- **Hegemony:** The social and cultural leadership exercised by the gentry (e.g., Emma Woodhouse) to maintain order through social norms and "soft power" rather than direct force.
- **Commodification:** The process of treating human relationships and qualities as economic transactions or "social currency".

Appendix B: The Social Hierarchy of Highbury

This table categorizes the key characters according to the rigid social strata defined in the Regency era, as examined in the thesis.

Social Class	Representative Characters	Source of Power and Wealth
Landed Gentry (The Apex)	Emma Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley	Traditional lineage, inherited land, and large family estates.
Emerging/Middle Class	Mr. Weston, The Coles, Mr. Elton	Professional careers (Clergy), trade, or wealth acquisition through marriage.
Impoverished Gentlewomen	Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax	Born into the genteel class but lacking the capital or inheritance to maintain it.
The Yeomanry (Farmers)	Robert Martin	Agricultural labor and land tenancy; financially stable but socially inferior.
Lower/Laboring Classes	Servants, Tradespeople	Direct physical labor and economic dependence on the higher classes.

Appendix C: Summary of Marital Alliances and Economic Outcomes

A comparative overview of the marriages in Emma and their role in preserving the social and material order.

Marriage Match	Classification	Primary Socio-Economic Outcome
Emma & Mr. Knightley	Acceptable / Elite	Consolidates the two most powerful estates; reinforces ruling-class dominance.
Harriet & Robert Martin	Acceptable / Corrective	Returns Harriet to her "proper sphere" as a tradesman's daughter; restores social equilibrium.
Jane Fairfax & Frank Churchill	Acceptable / Parity	Achieves class parity after the death of the controlling aunt; avoids Jane's "degradation" into a governess.
Mr. Elton & Augusta Hawkins	Acceptable / Mercenary	Validates the priority of wealth over refinement; involves an independent fortune of £10,000.