



"Difference" as Mode of Resistance in Jane Austen's *Emma***Aziz ur Rehman**

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noorswabiann@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper explores "difference" as locus for changing power relations in Jane Austen's major novel *Emma*. While Austen's pre-occupation with courtships has been under scholarly investigations, it has not been properly considered as tool of resistance: one that strives to displace power from physical force to a discursive one. This displacement is a strategic struggle of middle-class ascendancy over aristocracy in a changing English milieu. The study examines courtships within two Foucauldian frameworks. The first one is disciplinary that aims to regulate sexual practices like panopticon---an apparatus of power, producing normative/heterosexual identity through surveillance. Embedded in the first is the second approach that examines the very assumptions of the panoptic discourse through 'micro techniques of power'. It is the ability of her characters (especially the female) to reject not only undesirable sexual advances but desirable proposals as well that transform their otherwise passive and docile bodies into subjects to be reckoned with. In doing so, Austen does transform signs of class and rank into forms of expression as pre-requisite for any exchange. This paper is an attempt to look into the power dynamics in the novel from a different angle---the angle of difference impacted by power/knowledge and discourse. Two sites of contestation are analyzed: the first played between Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightly, and the second between Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax. This transformation can explicitly be viewed in her novel *Emma*. Foucauldian insights are certainly innovative to a well-read Austen.

Keywords: difference, discourse, panopticon, power/knowledge**Introduction**



Where Austen's critics tend to take her subject matter at face value and read her novels primarily about courtship and marriage, we argue that in doing so she is saying something very important about the foundation of modern political economy namely who may be included and who must be kept out or be marginalized in order for its fabric to endure. In fact, the very subject matter allows Austen to make women's right of refusal that is to say "no" into an important form of socio-economic power. Similarly, while Austen's scholars have debated whether Austen is progressive or traditional, her understanding on these abstract phenomena in everyday life shows that she is a cultural critic that ironically scrutinizes cultural norms, revealing them as products of discourse rather than of truth, while also investigating the tools the characters use to substantiate or challenge these conventions. In this way, she tries to imagine new techniques of resistance to social norms by privileging some characters over others. In Austen's estimation of her characters' decisions and choices of finding happiness, she rejects some uses of power as abusive and esteems others in their ability to resist and follow norms that will bring a sense of happiness to characters.

The impact of power seen in the 'truth' of the marriage myth in *Pride and Prejudice* can be equally identified in the definition and construction of identity in Austen's novel *Emma*. This novel offers a striking model of the ways in which characters shape and reshape identities in hierarchy of relations that privilege and empower them in opposition to others. In Austen's *Emma*, from the title character down to the Bateses and the Coles, there is a war for power or resistance to the dominant and powerful ones. This struggle for shaping identities and power is not strictly in class or gender terms as there are cases where individuals from the same gender and class are at war (Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley in terms of gender, Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax in terms of class). Regardless of class and gender, however, the strategies for dominance and resistance are diverse and varied. The strategies themselves are often resistant to the understanding of Austen's casual readers.

Austen's predecessors like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson only provide sketches of subjectivity and do not articulate its full potentials that mark the novels of Austen and the Bronte sisters. Women novelists do their best in asserting that woman can attain 'desire', can achieve the position of subject in discourse and can construct herself. Even in the works of



women, the forces of culture and patriarchy can be seen which locate women merely an object and not a desiring subject. They are pictured as ‘the other’ as object of discourse and not ‘the other’ as agent in discourse. However, within the given space they do succeed in examining the power and significance of the individual expression. They identify the moral threat women face at the behest of cultural forces viewing them as passive and submissive. The female protagonists symbolize the emergence of middle-class sensibility, which is detrimental to aristocratic power. Placing class struggle in sexual terms appears politically convenient, as Armstrong believes, “novels rewarding self-assertion on part of those in inferior position undoubtedly provided the middle-class readership with a fable for their own emergence” (50). The reflection of middle-class desire is not specifically physical and sexual but political and economic as well.

Emma demonstrates the truth of self as a powerful discursive moment, one which locates itself as norm in the discourse of marriage and propriety. Despite holding that truth as secret for a long time, Austen finally has Emma urged to divulge it as natural truth, one that is reflective of her subjectivity. Foucault argues that a discourse is continually under contention from competing discourses, wherein domination and resistance are constantly playing in local relations of power, and authority is finally shaped by resistance to it (*History* 94). We argue that the novel is a demonstration of this Foucauldian premise in two ways: first the inner truth (sex) seems resistant to classical knowledge which relies on visible manifestations. The romantic discourses, symbolizing transition on the other hand, is dark and mysterious. Foucault contrasts classicism to modernism that starts at the beginning of nineteenth century which of course is the onset of English romanticism. In *Emma*, the protagonist uses Harriet as vehicle for her sexual drive and at the end shifts it back to be told from her own body. Austen seems to locate sex as something to be known as truth of middle-class value. Second, in the novel, characters are using discourse for the construction of identities. This twofold reclamation of power is explored to know whether Austen questions normative values through an analysis of power and its truth.

Theoretical Framework

Difference in Western thinking implies a lack of value and defiance to norms. Michel Foucault's histories specifically illustrate this lack as characterizing those who appear different.



This difference entails a threat to those unattached to fixed hierarchies (Boyne, 1990). Difference thus is a potential threat as it lies outside the prescribed knowledge domain that controls subjects under its gaze. Derrida's analysis of presence looks at hierarchy as a delusion upheld by power. It is delusional in that it excludes the possibility that other fictional structures may not engender. Foucault is applicable to the emergence of resistance as he provokes the inevitability of power at all levels of social life. Derrida's position against the undue privilege of presence, against the illusory belief that representation is inferior and as such unneeded, can be seen as a critique of all unqualified oppositions in Western thoughts. Binaries such as reason and emotion, visible and invisible, good and bad, truth and falsehood, nature and culture, speech and writing, man and woman, are to Derrida not just substitutions, but a privileging of one of the binary over the other as original, authentic and the other as insignificant and unoriginal. Derrida puts it "One of the two terms governs the other...To deconstruct the opposition...is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment" (*Positions* 42). Derrida's deconstruction recommends a reversal of the binaries, and a privilege to the unprivileged. Foucault's theory of power/knowledge and discourse also attempts something like deconstructing fixity and truth.

Foucault's power is not something possessed by an individual or groups; nor can it be taken for something to be distributed among them. Foucault covertly challenges the idea of men's control of power over women. For Foucault, there is nothing outside power from where it can be decided as to who should have it. Thus knowledge too cannot be impartial in the sense of remaining external to the sphere of power. This model of power reinforces Foucault's multiplicity. It is because power 'comes from everywhere' is apt to qualify that "where there is power there is resistance" (*History* 95). This is an implicit endorsement of Derrida's deconstruction. Power is a matter of difference as it does not walk a single route, but is viewed as capillary, spreading through discourses, bodies and relationships, in the metaphor of a network (*Power/Knowledge* 22). There are multiple knowledges, and politics is played for grasping these knowledges. This implies that there is no single truth but many. This plurality for Foucault signifies that truth be seen as a thing produced and not revealed. Keeping plurality in mind, this study attempts to read *Emma* as a novel rich in power relations with the possibility of opposition and difference. This difference can be interpreted as indifference as well as deferral. Emma's



difference from tradition and customs generates counter values that stand against the established order—patriarchy.

Analysis

In *Emma*, Austen scrutinizes the prevailing power and its myths such as the truth of patriarchy and the powerlessness of the female – upheld by the reigning discourses. In her angst to excavate the unspoken truth of women, she takes on the very thing Foucault stresses new-historians to do—the revelation of the other history that runs under the prevalent historiography (*After Foucault*, 121-2). Traditional history cannot be accurately understood without the particular history of women. This history can be reexamined in the traditional practices of marriage which Austen seems to revisit. While marriage as norm is traditional and historical, in Austen, this affords a political and counter-reading. Austen's novel does not represent forms of subjectivity that already exist as such. By providing a readership's access to the inner workings of subjectivity and how an individual learns to regulate his/her emotions and read the emotions of others, the novel produces a form of subjectivity, or self, that literate populations came to regard as their own. How a discourse construes the difference between males and females determines marriage rules, distribution of property, those governing the organization of the household (what women can wear, where they can go, whether they can be subjected to corporal punishment, their authority over children, and education). However, the investigation of desire *per se* is not the intended subject of analysis here. Conversely, this paper explores the very politics of dominance and subversion played in the name of sexuality. Nancy Armstrong aptly puts this dimension in arguing "Foucault alone shifts the investigation of sexuality away from the nature of desire to its political uses" (*Desire* 9).

Foucault doesn't try to explain the biological difference between male and female but is rather interested in how that difference is interpreted and used for purposes of political organization. His notion of sexuality makes desire by definition resistant to the status quo. The game of power is played in marriage which is a minor component of sexuality. As identified, power is not without contestation or resistance. In Austen, resistance means indifference, or turning away. As pointed, resistance is more creative when it is not simply oppositional in relation to authority—when, that is, it surprises by doing something else, and something not



forbidden but not exactly authorized either. There is no one better than Austen at turning rebellion into an error in understanding (e.g., Harriett Smith), which the heroine aids and abets, only to realize that she has committed a gross misreading of character and caused a social kerfuffle because she is intellectually vain. *Emma* is read as a conflict between different discourses of individual and society, invisible and visible, female self and masculine network embodied variously by Emma Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley, Mrs. Elton, Frank, Jane, and others. The discourse between Emma and Mr. Knightley is explored first as a tension between self and society through insights from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (hereafter *Discipline*). This work explores the effect of knowledge and power on the characters of Emma and Knightley; likewise, it expands this effect through strategies of discipline as a form of power. In the second part, strategies of dominance and resistance are explored in the characters of Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax.

In his influential text, *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that an historical era is characterized by a system of knowledge that regulates thoughts within that period. The writers of a given era are governed by the same knowledge and they employ "the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories" (xi). Foucault talks of three broad historical systems of thoughts: the renaissance, the classical, and the modern. Jane Austen appears to be writing in the transition from classical to the modern period which is equated by critics to the Romantic period. A shift for Foucault signifies a reformation of knowledge and the methods by which an era knows itself and how it constitutes the very meaning of things. Foucault's *Discipline* explores the political implication of such organization of knowledge. *Discipline* likewise studies the intimate relation between knowledge and power: the way a historical period looks at the world as an object of knowledge also signifies how that world is controlled, sustained, and manipulated. In a sense, knowledge and power are closely connected to each other, or to say, epistemology and politics are inextricably linked. This is manifested by the intrinsic dispositions of various characters in the novel as analyzed below.

Knightly, Emma's ideological adversary, as Foucauldian panoptic is placed in a position from where he can see every body. The tower in the panopticon (prison house) is located in the center from where to see without being seen. Even if the controlling authority is absent, the



inmates in the prison cells internalize the discipline. The game episode in the novel locates Knightley in the very position where the panoptic device is placed. The disciplinary gaze is installed through some inventions in the design, "...an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them" (*Discipline* 172). Austen very well describes his position, "By acting uninterested, Knightley would appear disinterested as well. But his surreptitious behavior undermines the notion of disinterested reading. Seeing without appearing to observe, reading without appearing to read, Knightley at once admits and suppresses this duplicity" (428). His objection to Frank stems somewhat from fear that the latter may seize the role of master reader. Knightley alone wants to reserve this right "...to read every body's character" to be "...so placed as to see them all" (*Emma* 124, 287).

The question arises as why there is a tension in Austen's novels between order and individualism or between reason and passion. The balance between these oppositions is quite strange in her novels. Harding argues that Austen follows the humor traditions in portraying minor characters like Allan and Mrs. Elton, characters who cannot act without revealing dominant passion ("Regulated Hatred" 83-105). Passion is usually displayed but it assumes special significance in Austen's novels when remains hidden. Austen is believed to be without much passion which seems less accurate. In Austen's world, passion is the most significant fact to be seen in characters' behavior. However, locating it requires efforts since it lies hidden within the self and is quite resistant to both expression and sight. Mariana's cry that "...if I could but know his heart everything would become easy" (*Sense and Sensibility* 345), shows the significance of passion. Her characters must know the heart which is not an easy task. Hence, while the end of Austen's novels seems to reinstate a classical order, the overall execution of plot validates a romantic type interpretation in search of depth and meaning. Her novels present a constant tension between truth and surface for any extra dependence on classical interpretation because her heroines' experiences defy a complete classical approach.

As stated, Foucault postulates a thorough agreement between a mode of knowledge and its object of study. In Austen, romantic depths create an essential challenge to classical knowledge, a challenge that is difficult for Austen to overlook. A connoisseur of the art of



judging feelings, she fails to know the secret of Frank and Jane. She admits her failure to know Frank by the end of the novel. The failure to know oneself has been portrayed as a moral decline by the author. Attainment of thorough knowledge between two selves---“that full and perfect confidence which her disposition was more ready to welcome” leads the novel to a happy culmination (*Emma* 435). Though ideal, *Emma* does not afford such openness during the course of the plot. Many truths are lying hidden even from the protagonist. The novel keeps the secret of Frank's engagement till the end. The same observation with slight difference has been made by Miller as well: “...if all her characters behaved according to Mr. Knightley's principle---as, morally Jane Austen thinks they should have---there would be no source of narratability” (*Narrative* 40). More clearly, the novel exists so long there is mystery, and ceases when it is dispelled. The novel still might have been a classical piece but not a perfect one where the revelation of individual subject is concerned. *Emma* thus seems a romantic novel with tenacity to attain full knowledge of the characters. The self's own passion must be recognized for a full self-knowledge and discovery. The submission of Knightley to passion's concealments signifies Austen's regard for the ways of the heart. It is because exteriors for her never reflect full truth. This very fact has been emphatically described by Austen's narrator:

Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material---Mr. Knightley could not impute to Emma a more relenting heart than she possessed, or a heart more disposed to accept of his. (*Emma* 432)

This is perfectly in line with Foucault's fundamental idea: the constitution of the subject comes about in the postclassical mode of knowledge. Foucault's notion of subject and object makes his argument clear. For Foucault, a subject of knowledge defines its object of knowledge. Thus while science as subject has its object the study of natural phenomena, this study and its object varies from era to era. Similarly, once the truth of a person is located, then its subsequent analysis and critique becomes easy. Foucault considers man as an object of knowledge of a vast range of subjects. He himself becomes a subject in so far studying himself, his inner life. Likewise, he becomes an object when he is investigated by others with knowledge. His self



becomes a mystery or point of knowledge and Austen's placement of complex characters at that level becomes the source of interest for the readers. Insight becomes the key to sight in searching the hidden truth in Austen's novels, specifically *Emma*.

As mentioned, Foucault's *Discipline* explores knowledge's pursuits of characters with depths. Knowledge is supposed to discipline the disorderly passion, to make the unruly subject come under the control of power. The modern human sciences like psychology, anthropology, and psychiatry guarantee public access to the most private and intimate thoughts and feelings. Foucault traces these developments at length in his *History* as well. The identification of feelings and emotions as the significant locus of knowledge generates a new field where power aims to intervene. In the classical episteme, power does not bother to intervene in people's intimate lives as they are not considered significant. The private arena is not taken to be a zone of reality. Only an individual's public and social position is scrutinized by power for knowing and maintaining reality. Austen upholds classical commitment in her depiction of certain imperfect characters (like Mr. Woodhouse) because of their known place in society. She presents them in gentle and affectionate ways because of their recognized order in the narrative by a classical standard.

In opposing a gender role materially and psychologically, Emma, the heroine, disrupts the "configuration of power [which] constructs the subject and the Other, that binary relation between 'men' and 'women,' and the internal stability of those terms" (Butler, p. viii). Emma's transgression is not solely reflected in her action and personal interaction against her normative society. Her interactions with the would-be suitors like Knightley, Elton, and Churchill reveal her gross miscalculation of their perceptions of her. It is this romantic mode of existence that serves a defiance to be assessed clearly by Knightley. Her difference is also seen in the sense of deferral as she delays her marriage to Knightley. This deferral is resistance in that it creates its own sense of value against the terms of subjectivity defined by patriarchy. While the power dynamics are seen in her continual defiance of sexual negotiation with Knightley, the discussion ahead analyzes a woman's tacit resistance to another woman's discursive power.

According to Foucault's view of identity, there is not fixed principle that governs the positions of different sexes; identities are fluid. It is not mandatory that patriarchy shall always be propagated by men and vice versa. There is an equally valid possibility that the same role may



be performed by any subject irrespective of his or her gender. While some of Austen’s scholars look at her works from postcolonial perspective, restructuring the argument through Foucault’s knowledge/power dynamic shows the ways in which Austen anticipates the creation of truth and identity. In so doing, she also demonstrates the influence and techniques of power’s productive experiences. Foucault’s relevance to general theory is vast and to postcolonial is significantly vaster. Edward Said, a celebrated postcolonialist, owes much to Foucault in framing his arguments in his *Orientalism*. Said recognizes Foucault’s influence in his article “Foucault: A Critical Reader. Similarly, Said’s “Jane Austen and Empire” helps scholars to reconsider Austen’s impact on English culture specifically in its colonial undertakings. Whereas Said’s analysis is based on Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, it can be accurately applied to *Emma* as well. There are characters and scenes where discourse plays its role in establishing hegemony. While the preceding discussion involves the relationship of power between Emma and Mr. Knightley, this analysis looks at the characters of Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax. Mrs. Elton constantly tries to authorize and maintain her self-identity through dictatorial speech, reflecting the colonial scheme through the appropriation of an “other,” which in this case is Jane Fairfax. The panoptic role played by Knightley is played here by Mrs. Elton. Mrs. Elton’s panoptic gaze is directed towards Jane Fairfax in disciplining her in ways that are imposing and in this term colonial. As apposed, Jane Fairfax does not seem to accept that hegemony of the dominant. Through her effective communicative strategies she resists Mrs. Elton. Thus she responds to power in her own ways although not pronounced but not compliant either. Jane’s secret correspondence and engagement to Frank Churchill upsets Mrs. Elton’s discursive power. Parallel to the counter-discourse slave narratives, Jane’s letters, finally shown only through Frank’s letter to Emma, affords her a practice for resisting Mrs. Elton to script her identity.

Foucault’s “arts of existence” is one way of countering normative schemes of creating and assigning subjectivity. Jeffrey Nealon’s interpretation of Foucault’s “arts of existence” is that they “not only allow us to become self-determining agents, but also provide the grounds for us to challenge and resist power structures” (8). Specific acts essential for existence promote an individual’s sense of self. Jane’s communication in the form of writing corresponds to Foucault’s “arts of existence”. Since “power is everywhere” across power relations, Austen encourages



writing as tool to resist or counter speech acts in shaping one's social identity. It offers the difference not in binary sense but as difference in its own right. She attempts to claim her indifference through writing much like Derrida's binary of writing vs. speech. Pickett argues, "Through practical engagement it is possible to work upon the self, and to create more space for self-creation apart from the political world" (Foucault 460). As a system of communication, writing in the form of letters, facilitates self-expression when speaking is rude and unbearable. Jane letters communicate her tacit resistance. Jane Fairfax concerns with letters as mode of communication turn substantial as Mrs. Elton's speaking power intensifies. In their rendering dominance and resistance, Austen seems to fictionalize an existence that is unbalanced. This instability has been explored, contested and being restored. Similarly, there are political and class conventions as well. There are several challenging social conventions characterized within Austen's fictions, specifically in *Emma*. Thus, Austen's investigation of Mrs. Elton's social identity through "otherizing" Jane Fairfax is reflected in the latter's counterdiscourse through writing.

As Foucault states: "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is ... it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (*Power/Knowledge* 119). By dint of her discursive social position to talk masterfully about Jane, Mrs. Elton tries to construct social knowledge of Jane, perceived as truth about Jane's identity. While Jane has been constructed as such, she is neither timid nor silent, only discourse makes her so. She is an object of Mrs. Elton's superior knowledge. Jane is not timid but is silent taken as timidity. She is a product of her surveillance and is too courteous to challenge Mrs. Elton openly in exchange. This further emboldens Mrs. Elton to build her identity. This is the point where Mrs. Elton's self-authorization is clearly located. Mrs. Elton's account of Jane has very little truth; instead, Mrs. Elton creates an illusory person lower than herself in prestige and position. In describing Jane, Mrs. Elton is projecting a self-constructed version of confidence, knowledge, and social relations. Said writes: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (*Orientalism* 3). By pointing who Orientals are Europe virtually engages in defining itself which in reality it is not. This exemplifies Foucauldian discourse Mrs. Elton uses in her depiction of Jane Fairfax. "I know



you, I know you" declares Mrs. Elton to Jane Fairfax, implying that she alone has knowledge, and thereby power, of Jane (*Emma* 243). Mrs. Elton clearly works in classical episteme where reality is represented by surface and visible. This power to represent is oblivious to truth and secret resistance as such.

Mrs. Elton's language increases her self-importance: as she uses "I" repeatedly and subordinates Jane as an object of her actions. Mrs. Elton's narrative is imposing in posing herself the doer and Jane as the receiver. Instead of turning her to subject, she continually objectifies her through language and discourse. She declares her intentions publicly to appear gentle and helpful. In reality, she is concerned only in using her the way she is suited—Jane is not asked the least. This objectification is validated in Mrs. Elton's discussions that do not reflect agency and interiority of others, but rather discipline and hegemonize. Upon learning that Jane goes to post office she cries, "You sad girl, how could you do such a thing?—It is a sign I was not there to take care of you" (*Emma* 238). The language used empowers Mrs. Elton and reduces Jane, altering her from woman into child. When Mrs. Elton says "Oh! She shall not do such a thing again," it is with a power and conviction to which "Jane looked as if she did not mean to be conquered" (*Emma* 238-39). Here again Mrs. Elton objectifies her under surveillance as she wants to argue but cannot under polite panopticon. While in Foucault's surveillance, the subjects cannot resist openly, they cannot be expected to comply as well. The above lines indicate Jane is not unmindful and may resist Mrs. Elton's empowering stunts in private. This scene hints at the letters which indicate that there is an expressive being to Jane Fairfax than appears to Mrs. Elton.

The secret letters exchanged between Jane and Frank prevent Jane from reacting orally to Mrs. Elton's abusive behavior. Thinking herself above discipline, Mrs. Elton disregards the power of refinement and utterly affirms her judgment. This she does to appear more powerful and controlling. As Mr. Knightly points out: "Mrs. Elton does not talk to Miss Fairfax as she speaks of her" (*Emma* 232). The post office episode is a key illustration of Mrs. Elton's discourse of Jane, as Mrs. Elton always uses "she," rather than "you," in speaking to Jane. While the two share the same room, Mrs. Elton does not directly refer to Jane but instead makes a show of her power through tactical speech. Mrs. Elton would not engage in dialogue as she takes her an object for deploying knowledge and power. McMaster emphasizes the significance of Mrs.



Elton's speech as a sign of her character: "For Mrs. Elton the exchange is all about power. And within the bounds of supposedly polite exchange, she nevertheless bristles and snarls and snatches any advantage she can" (*Emma* 74). Mrs. Elton, in so doing, models her image of social control and power. In belittling Jane, she raises her own importance—a kind of speech act embedded in colonial discourse.

Mrs. Elton's repeated investigations expose the tension in their outlooks to identity-formation. Mrs. Elton nonstop inquiries about the role of governess indicate that Jane is powerless and dominated. Thus she projects her power at the level of discourse at least. Gabrielle White is apt to say that Mrs. Elton is not a friend to Jane because she does exactly what Jane has explicitly asked her "friends" not to do (57). White contends: "there is the opportunity to consider that just as Mrs. Elton is not much of a friend to Jane Fairfax so Mr. Suckling may not be much of a friend to the abolition" (52). White here refers to Mrs. Elton's observation about the slave trade in scene where Jane Fairfax says, "There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something—Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect" (*Emma* 242). Feeling herself the target, Mrs. Elton responds "Oh! My dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition" (*Emma* 242). Nevertheless, the comparison of governesses and slavery is fairly disgusting, given the social position in which it is spoken, a picnic. Being out of context, this is a sign of pushback by Jane against Mrs. Elton's assertion of authority. While Mrs. Elton always refers to her sister and Mr. Suckling, the link between Mrs. Elton and the slave trade gets closer. Jane Fairfax's allusion to the "sale of human flesh" is a clever insult of Mrs. Elton. It also uncovers Jane's knowledge of poetry, slavery, as well as of Mrs. Elton's undue claims to social influences and contributions. She critiques Mrs. Elton's claims of charity by challenging the value of her actions. Jane's comment may also be referring to how Mrs. Elton is, herself, commodifying and trading Jane in ways that are not friendly, but commercial (McMaster 79).

As illustrated already, Mrs. Elton's speech objectifies Jane as an object signifying Mrs. Elton's power rather than actualizing with her own thoughts and desires. While to Jane, Mrs. Elton is an oppressive authoritarian exerting undesirable force claiming to be a friend that must



be resisted despite imbalanced power dynamics between the two. Commenting upon this complementarity of power and resistance in Foucault, Pickett observes, "there is always at least some resistance to the imposition of any particular form of subjectivity, and thus resistance is concomitant with the process of subjectification" (*Foucault*, p. 458). Mrs. Weston and Knightley observe: "Miss Fairfax is as capable as any of us of forming a just opinion of Mrs. Elton. Could she have chosen with whom to associate, she would not have chosen her" (*Emma* 231). The problem of choice gets obvious in examining the uneven dynamics between Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax. Jane's social circles are restricted specifically for movement and transportation despite social limits. Indeed, her immobility highlights her reliance even if she tries to compensate this sense of powerlessness with individual actions. She seems to have been localized by the social panopticon. Foucault's "discipline" is significant here as the master gaze helps to promote actions that are more or less sanctioned. In this perspective, Nealon argues, "discipline works on individuals precisely through the more efficient means of targeting their potential actions, their capacities: literally what they can—and can't—do" (31). Thus as a woman of scarce but refined household, Jane's actions and movements are restricted by social expectations. Conversely, Mrs. Elton exists as an epitome of the power in regulating movements as done by Foucault's surveillance model. Mrs. Elton literally tries to stop Jane from going to the post office. However, discipline is maintained by almost the whole community as is exerted on Jane in controlling her movement. While her society is pretty disciplinary, Jane misses no chance to redraft her identity in following social prospects only when required. Foucault states, "To resist, it must be like power. As inventive, as mobile and as productive as power. Like power, it must organize itself, coagulate and cement itself. Like power, it must come from below and distribute itself strategically (267). Mrs. Elton's endeavors to write her identity by making Jane Fairfax as the "other" are mocked and satirized. By the end of the novel, Mrs. Elton is portrayed as egotistical, ineffective, and twofaced. Nevertheless, Mrs. Elton is not a single case within the novel; her approach symbolizes an infinite social practice of misrepresentation and control which, as Said reveals, is a part of the colonial project. The same cultural practices have been prevalent in almost all literary texts as a product of power/knowledge. In *Emma* the readers are left to assume that Mrs. Elton is not incorporated into community, as she gets the details of Emma and



Knightley from her husband—she, herself, does not actually attend the wedding (*Emma* 381). But Austen is not at ease simply to pen down the repercussions of such hegemonic behavior; instead, she goes beyond that to chart the avenues where individuals can resist, rewrite, and remake their identities in opposition to power---be that patriarchal or otherwise.

Conclusion

The difference identified in the characters of Emma Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley, Mrs. Elton, Jane Fairfax, and Frank Churchill appears to be implicitly incorporated by the relational power dynamics in the flow of the plot. It is pertinent to clarify that this difference is basically the poststructuralist form of resistance, advocated by Michel Foucault as, “We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (*Politics* 123). As analyzed in this paper, the strategy as difference---the refusal and passivity on the part of characters---is what the theory of surveillance implicitly propagates. The same strategy of resistance as Pickett sees it, “Something always eludes the diffusion of power and expresses itself as indocility and resistance” (*Foucault* 458). From a poststructuralist feminist perspective, this work analyzed how the proposed characters stand up to the norms established by the historical flow of tradition. The classical norm of worshipping the obvious---the empirical objectivity of things observed---is beautifully contested by the characters’ implicit defiance to conformity. In the concept of panopticism, it has always been challenging to trace the reverse impact of subjects upon the source of surveillance---the center of discourse; yet, the characters’ rigidity to actively engage in traditional obligations, such as marriage, demonstrates that their worldview exercises a counter influence on the center of meaning. In this regard, it can aptly be connected with Foucault’s view that “where there is power, there is resistance” (*History*, 95).

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