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Self-Deception and Superiority Complex: Derangement of Hierarchy in Jane Austen's *Emma*

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Self-Deception and Superiority Complex: Derangement of Hierarchy in Jane Austen's *Emma* Shinobu Minma In Jane Austen's novels we frequently encounter characters who disguise their real motives and intentions. In many cases the disguise is an unconscious one; unconsciously they replace unpalatable motives with palatable ones, and thus justify to themselves their own unpalatable acts. General Tilney is an absolute despot, but he usually exercises control over others covertly. In the scene of the conducted tour, he first takes Catherine outdoors, saying he "yields" to her wishes as if it were "against his own inclination";¹ in fact,

it is the General himself who wishes to go out, for it is his usual hour for a walk. It is indeed customary for the General to impose his will upon others under the cover of some specious pretexts. This sort of dissimulation is also discernible in Darcy in his act of separating Bingley from Jane. In his letter to Elizabeth he asserts that he did it solely for Bingley's sake. The reasons he adduces for disapproving of the union are convincing; but it is certainly not Bingley's advantage alone that actuates Darcy to force him to give up Jane. Priding himself on his abilities, he loves to dictate to others; this motivation is hidden, however, from himself as well as from others under the plausible pretext of saving Bingley. A further and yet more impressive instance of rationalization is found in Sir Thomas Bertram. Sir Thomas is a man in 1 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 177. References to Jane Austen's works are to *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, 5 vols, 3rd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1932-34). References to Austen's novels other than *Emma* are indicated by their initial letters. EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION, Volume 14, Number 1, October 2001 150 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION whom a strong moral sense and worldly ambitions coexist, and on occasions—especially on occasions of importance—his moral sense is temporarily suspended. After the departure of Maria and Julia, Henry Crawford's courtship of Fanny becomes the main focus of the story, and the part Sir Thomas plays in this episode is very important, though by no means conspicuous. After noticing Crawford's particular attention to his niece, Sir Thomas, "though infinitely above scheming or contriving" (MP, p. 238), encourages the intercourse with the Parsonage, holds the ball at his house, and, in providing favourable opportunities for the young man, paves the way for his proposal. His object in these exercises is of course to realize the "advantageous" union (MP, p. 238); Fanny is an instrument for extending his family's "respectable alliances" (MP, p. 20). But all the while he continues to disguise this motivation from himself. At first he will not even admit to himself that he is "scheming or contriving"; he persuades himself that the ball is held to gratify "William's desire of seeing Fanny dance" (MP, p. 252). Then, obliged to acknowledge his intent, he deludes himself into believing that it is for Fanny's sake. When he communicates Crawford's proposal to Fanny, he imagines that "he must be gratifying her far more than himself (MP, p. 314); and when confronted with her refusal, he flings quite unreasonable accusations at her. General Tilney, Darcy, and Sir Thomas—the repeated portrayal of subtle self-justification in these characters indicates Jane Austen's deep interest in this behaviour pattern, and to the list of those self-deceiving characters, we can add yet another name, Emma Woodhouse. Emma was written immediately after *Mansfield Park*, and this time the heroine herself exhibits that tendency to dissemble her real motives, the most notable instance of which is found in her attempt at match-making. In her officious efforts to make a match between Harriet and Elton, Emma persuades herself into believing that she is acting for Harriet's sake. On their first meeting Emma decides to "notice" this girl, and hatches the scheme then, as she later admits, of match-making for her as "a very kind undertaking" (p. 24). Then, to carry out this "friendly arrangement of her own" (p. 31), she tactfully leads Harriet into refusing Robert Martin's proposal. Indeed, her belief in her own...

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