

Fecha de recepción: 15 noviembre 2020
Fecha de aceptación: 21 abril 2021
Fecha de publicación: 8 febrero 2022
URL: <https://oceanide.es/index.php/o12020/article/view/91>
Océanide número 15, ISSN 1989-6328
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37668/oceanide.v15i.91>

Carmen María Fernández Rodríguez
Escuela Oficial de Idiomas, A Coruña, España

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5165-6083>

Slaves of Affection in Maria Edgeworth's "Belinda" (1801) and Jane Austen's "Emma" (1817)

≈ Abstract

One of the reasons to associate Maria Edgeworth with Jane Austen is the importance of the former as a main source of inspiration for Austen's domestic plots. Interestingly, both colonialism and gender studies have turned their eyes to Edgeworth's and Austen's approach to slavery. Nevertheless, the specific connection between *Belinda* and *Emma* in this regard has been overlooked while, indeed, there are many reasons to relate both works since both deal with women's submission and emotional dependence from others in many ways. This article analyses two secondary characters in Edgeworth's *Belinda* and Austen's *Emma*. After examining the similarities of the status of blacks and women in late eighteenth-century England, I maintain that these works can be seen as two studies of gratitude and that they offer a new version of Edgeworth's familiar theme of the grateful negro, though in this case it applies to woman's surrogate social position. The ideas of Homi K. Bhabha on colonial discourse help to examine the relationship between gender and race in *Belinda* and *Emma*, as well as the lack of a fixed identity and unfulfilled desire of independence that was common to blacks and women. It is precisely this feature that adds some darkness and social critique to Edgeworth's and Austen's otherwise rather predictable plots.

Keywords:

Maria Edgeworth; Jane Austen; nineteenth-century studies; gender studies; Anglo-Irish literature

≈ Resumen

Una de las razones para asociar a Maria Edgeworth con Jane Austen es la importancia de la primera como fuente principal de inspiración para las tramas domésticas de Austen. Curiosamente, tanto el colonialismo como los estudios de género han vuelto sus ojos hacia cómo Edgeworth y Austen enfocaron la esclavitud. Sin embargo, la conexión específica entre *Belinda* y *Emma* a este respecto ha sido pasada por alto, aunque en realidad hay muchas razones para relacionar ambas obras, ya que ambas tratan de la aculturación, la sumisión y la dependencia emocional de los demás de muchas maneras. Este artículo analiza a dos personajes secundarios en *Belinda* de Edgeworth y *Emma* de Austen. Después de examinar las similitudes entre el estatus de los negros y las mujeres en la Inglaterra de finales del siglo XVIII, mantengo que estas obras pueden entenderse como dos estudios de gratitud y que presentan una nueva versión del tema familiar de Edgeworth del negro agradecido, aunque esta vez se aplica al papel secundario de la mujer en la sociedad. Las ideas de Homi K. Bhabha sobre el discurso colonial también ayudan a examinar la relación entre el género y la raza en *Belinda* y *Emma*, así como la falta de identidad fija y el deseo incumplido de independencia que era común a los negros y las mujeres. Es precisamente esta característica la que añade cierta oscuridad y crítica social a las tramas de Edgeworth y Austen, por lo demás bastante predecibles.

Palabras clave:

Maria Edgeworth; Jane Austen; estudios del siglo XIX; estudios de género; literatura angloirlandesa

The field of Austen studies expanded in the 1980s with the birth of interest in Austen's approach to colonialism. In a short article about the slave trade in *Emma*, Mary Deforest (1987) mentioned Austen's admiration for the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson concluding that Austen attacked slavery in a subtle yet devastating way. Later researchers like Thorell Porter Tsomondo (1999) also turned their eyes to Austen's stance suggesting that Austen was well aware of the existence of slavery and took sides in the debate about it. Tsomondo traced echoes of Cowper's "Negro Complaint" in Austen: "in Cowper's poem, the speaker, the slave, lauds as a means of resistance the very faculty that Jane sees as the potential agency of her subjection" (Tsomondo 1999, 195) and saw that Austen's manipulation of temporal and social markers presents the reader with a critical discourse that transcends the insularity of Highbury, Emma's country village.

A remarkable line of research links up Austen's colonial views with feminism. Thus, Kuldip Kaur Kawara (2004) follows Deforest's main idea that Austen subtly denounced exploitation in more novels than in *Mansfield Park* (1814). For Kawara, Austen explores themes like subjugation, slavery and woman's helplessness and she makes an ironic comment on power and powerlessness. Kawara centres on Jane Fairfax in *Emma* and argues that, though Austen related the Woman Question to Enlightenment Feminism, she refused to go further (2004). Fairfax is associated with the slave trade due to her dependent position – she has to provide for herself –, and she is related to the "governess-trade", a term that evokes the slave trade, as a noble job that she seems destined to have. Despite Kawara's inspiring analysis, this researcher only focuses on Fairfax's submission, leaving apart other forms of dependence in the novel.

Other aspects such as the connection between Austen's colonialist views and her contemporaries have been neglected so far. A valuable comparison with Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) is missing and the latter is of particular interest because she does not only associate dependence and slavery with the Irish but also with women. In doing this, Edgeworth follows a tradition in nineteenth-century British and French fiction that placed women and blacks as objects of sympathy who populated sentimental and autobiographical narratives and vindicated the humanity of black people (Fernández Rodríguez 2017; 2018). In fact, one of Edgeworth's most popular stories in *Popular Tales* (1804), "The Grateful Negro", presents a recurrent image in her oeuvre, the individual who feels indebted to another and finds it impossible to break that bondage (Fernández Rodríguez 2016). Edgeworth's "studies of gratitude" are other stances of her Anglo-Irish views and show Edgeworth's reliance on social order and the importance of education. Together with absenteeism, gratefulness is probably the most important topic in Edgeworth's canon and she elaborates on it in different ways in her oeuvre. Another reason to study the parallel between Austen and Edgeworth is that researchers like Julia Donovan (2019) have recently insisted on Austen's Irish references in *Emma*, which reveal Austen's devotion for Edgeworth and the fact that she was deeply influenced by Edgeworth's works.

This article continues the previous line of research (Fernández Rodríguez 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018) on the connection and mutual influence of three writers who admired and followed each other and exerted a great influence on women's literature in English: Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen. It hinges on the similarities that can be traced between the social position of

some female characters in Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and Austen's *Emma* and the status of many black slaves in England at that time. I bear in mind the fact that in Edgeworth's fiction submission and dependence are applied to both gender and race and that these features were inherited by Austen, one of whose favourite writers was Edgeworth, as Austen's recurrent references show. In *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Austen includes *Belinda* as one of her favourite works when one lady says that she only reads novels if

[i]t is only Cecilia, or Camilla or Belinda, or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. (Austen 1990, 22)

Such scholars as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1984), Moira Ferguson (1992) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985), to name just a few, already related colonialism and personal relationships. In order to connect women and race in this article, I draw on Homi K. Bhabha's ideas (1994) since he places hybridity and colonial dominance at the core of his studies. This scholar's theory makes it possible to draw parallels between colonial and patriarchal authority in Edgeworth's and Austen's texts. After a proper contextualization of the association of women with black slaves in eighteenth-century England, my argument in this article is that two secondary characters in *Belinda* and *Emma*, Virginia Saint Pierre and Harriet Smith respectively, help Edgeworth and Austen to explore the concept of gratitude and share some common features: both have an obscure origin, they provide the opportunity to criticize women's education and the cult of sensibility and both undergo a love trial involving a process of self-discovery that is not limited to themselves.

Though I use class, gender and race dependence to identify women with black slaves in these novels, the fact cannot be ignored that not all blacks living in Britain at the time were slaves. Likewise, not all black women lived as white people's dependants. However, both the surrogate state of women in eighteenth-century patriarchal society and the fact that black women were doubly marginalized in most cases allow me to study these secondary characters as if they were black women. Also, when *Belinda* and *Emma* were written, women's participation in the public sphere was much more limited than men's, so in most cases they could not express their ideological views as freely as men. Finally, I shall also deal with the relationship between the protagonists and secondary characters in the specific context of the early nineteenth century, foregrounding the mentality of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy we find in Edgeworth and that of the English gentry in Austen. Equality did not exist in either of them. Social and class differences accounted for the bridge between landlords and servants just like in the colonial context masters and slaves were symbiotically related.

Blackness and Women

Placing women at the same level as blacks in my analysis involves considering some points about the situation of both groups in eighteenth-century England. Firstly, despite the humanitarian current supported by philosophers and politicians like Lord Mansfield (Lester and Dussart 2014; Poser 2013; Brown 

2006), and the views disseminated in sentimental literature which introduced an idealized image of the loyal slave (Festa 2006; Carey 2005), it is undeniable that black people were the victims of oppression and, in this regard, they can be compared with those English women who had no freedom within patriarchal society. Thus, many women could not choose their husband, dispose of their property or be economically rewarded by their work since it belonged to either their husband or their father, as Katherine Rogers (1982), Mary Poovey (1984) and Nancy Armstrong (1987), among others, have shown. Historical criticism has already explored the status of blacks in Britain (Gerzina 1995; Myers 1996), but, for the purposes of this article, I have to consider that, in many cases, a black person was mainly a property coming from the West Indies or Africa. English masters considered slaves part of their home, as if they were pieces of furniture, and they featured so in works like *Burlington Gate (1731)* or *The Rakes's Progress (1732)* by the painter William Hogarth, for example. It was usual to treat them like beasts and ridicule their appearance in the press and pamphlets (Nussbaum 2003, 137). A black person had no intellect, and, if they were ever considered, it was simply in terms of their visibility, which was neither socially nor legally acknowledged.

Secondly, both abolitionism and feminism gained strength at the turn of the nineteenth century when the fate of women and black people were related. Postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha examines the existence of a double vision or double cultural discourse for which he coins the term *productive ambivalence*, which I believe may be applied in Edgeworth's and Austen's novels in that both Virginia and Harriet are pampered and flattered but not really respected. For Bhabha, productive ambivalence refers to an "otherness" which is at once the object of desire and derision, "an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" (Bhabha 1994, 67). Productive ambivalence can be related to sex and blackness, which acquired a double social meaning. As a consequence, there was an exotic vision of the black woman as a seducing dark Other that dated back to the Middle Ages. Sue Niebrzydowski's article (2006) examines the construction of the "fantastic other" and its evolution in medieval England, when the hag was associated with the black woman that greatly departed from conventional white beauty. Later on, in Renaissance Europe, black women were depicted as overcome by animal lust (Korhonen 2005, 103). Yet, in real life, the status of black women could not be compared with the status of any British woman: it was lower than that of a white immigrant from any nation. Most black women were seen as servants and prostitutes (Myers 1996, 127). For instance, the story of Dido Elizabeth Belle was quite unusual. She was born to an African slave from the West Indies and Sir John Lindsay, a British naval officer who took her to England, where she was raised by the Murrays (Diu 2016). Londa L. Schiebinger states that, in opposition to the view of middle-class women as modest, in Europe black women embodied sexual promiscuity and exoticism: "This European fantasy of the sexual and fecund African woman was reinforced by colonial relations where European male planters commonly took black and mulatto women as concubines or sold them as prostitutes" (2004, 160), which fits the double standard pointed out by Bhabha.

Thirdly, many women writers denounced the oppression of blacks and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, in particular, dwelled on the comparison between women and slaves in *Vindication*

of the Rights of Woman (1792). As Claire Midgley explains, Wollstonecraft "argued that women should develop a rational humanity founded on knowledge, rather than be 'slaves' to their senses [...]. She considered the currently fashionable feminine sensibility to be unstable and unreliable because it was based on emotion rather than reason" (1992, 27). Wollstonecraft drew a parallel between the marginalization of white women in England and blacks: both were seen as in need of supervision and as unable to conduct themselves at a time when they were actually fighting for emancipation, as Edgeworth and Austen show in their works.

In a revealing blog about black women in Britain, Montaz Marche (2019) comments on a remarkable gender difference between black men and black women. While the former were socially integrated, black women simply assimilated, since they did not embrace cultural norms which could place them in a scandalous position that would otherwise endanger them: "Black women, as social chameleons, uniquely adopted the desired characteristics of British civility, thus becoming undistinguishable from their neighbours and successfully assimilating into communities in Britain, their home" (Marche 2019, par. 6). Their anxiety to become invisible and avoid ostracism was not very different from British women's anxious desire to become the perfect virtuous partner. The only point of departure was that blacks were not regarded as human beings – though they strove to be heard – and it was assumed that both needed the figure of a master, an authority who would guide them. Black people had to earn their living in a country where few people would see them as equal to whites. Ironically, eighteenth-century English ladies were confined to the domestic milieu and were metaphorically saved by a convenient marriage which supposedly would make them happy. In my analysis, skin corresponds with female virtue in that Bhabha considers the former a signifier of discrimination that must be produced or processed as visible (1994, 79), just like female virtue. Skin, and more particularly white skin, was so important in domestic literature that it became a fetish similar to female virtue, which marked and determined one's social value.

Constructing Identity

No matter from which perspective they are examined, both *Belinda* and *Emma* are novels about female dependence and, in earlier versions, Edgeworth included an interracial marriage which was finally suppressed following her father's advice (Fernández Rodríguez 2016). Edgeworth's *Belinda* was published just a few months after Edgeworth's best-seller *Castle Rackrent* (1800) and it tells the story of Belinda Portman, who helps Lady Delacour to reform her ways, giving up a life of unrespectable behaviour and frivolity for domesticity. Along the way, Belinda is courted by Mr. Augustus Vincent and, before her happy marriage to Mr. Clarence Hervey, she faces some difficulties since she hears rumours that Hervey keeps a mistress and even sees him drop the lock of a woman's hair from his pocket. In fact, Hervey has been looking after a girl called Virginia trying to tutor her in order to turn her into the perfect wife.

Emma features a similar character and was Austen's last work to be published before her death. The novel was harshly received by critics and other writers attacked Emma as a character. Sir Walter Scott wrote a very negative review in *The Edinburgh Review* (Southam 1979, 71) and Edgeworth herself sent Austen a derogatory note commenting that:

[...] there was no story in it, except that Miss Emma found that the man whom she designed for Harriet's lover was an admirer of her own – & he was affronted at being refused by Emma & Harriet wore the willow – and *smooth, thin water-gruel* is according to Emma's father's opinion a very good thing & it is very difficult to make a cook understand what you mean by *smooth, thin water-gruel*!! (quoted in Todd 2006, 94)

Technically experimental, *Emma* revolves around a village with the suggestive name of Highbury and an uncommon heroine who is snobbish, eager to manage others and fallible. Austen meant to introduce an unconventional heroine purposefully and wrote “I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like” (quoted in Austen-Leigh 1882, 157). The novel focuses on a stylish young lady who takes it upon herself to find an eligible match for her new friend, Harriet Smith, whose parentage is unknown. Convinced that Harriet deserves to be a gentleman's wife, Emma persuades Harriet to reject the proposal of Robert Martin, a well-to-do farmer, and considers Mr. Elton a more eligible partner. However, the latter is actually in love with Emma and leaves Highbury after being spurned by Emma and offended by her insinuation that Harriet is his equal. A new visitor, Frank Churchill, arrives in Highbury and Emma imagines him as a match for Harriet, who is humiliated by Mr. Elton and his new wife. Then Harriet confesses to Emma that she has fallen in love with a man above her social station and Emma believes that Frank is the object of Harriet's affection.

Just as blacks were given a name by their English owners, so English women's surnames changed as they got married. In fact, one common feature of blacks and the women in this study is that they have no fixed identity. Name changing suggests how the individual was perceived – by society, their husbands or masters – and, in Edgeworth's novel, the lady known as Virginia is not only modelled on what people expect from her, but she is also based on two sources: J. H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's abolitionist novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788) and a real life source. In *Paul et Virginie* the protagonists are two inexperienced children who become lovers and go to Mauritius where they do not make any class distinctions despite being aristocrats. The book depicts an egalitarian society and mixes Romanticism and exoticism. *Paul et Virginie* became very popular in England, where it was versioned and parodied (Fludernik and Nandi 2014), but also admired by thinkers like Thomas Carlyle. As for the other model, it seems that the writer Thomas Day (who was one of Richard Lovell's friends and, paradoxically, an abolitionist) decided to imitate Pygmalion in his search of perfection and raised a girl called Sabrina Sidney as his future wife. The experiment was disastrous. Day aimed to mould a wife who would be clever enough to discuss philosophy, astronomy and literature, while at the same time being entirely devoted to him and compliant to his wishes. Day picked up two girls at the Shrewsbury orphanage and gave them some lessons on physics, geography and astronomy. Because one of the girls could not achieve Day's requirements, he rejected her and focused on the other one. Sabrina Bicknell – better known as Sabrina Sidney – was trained to endure cold, hunger and terror in appalling experiments. Again, the girl did not meet Day's expectations, so Day discarded her to a boarding school (Moore 2013).

The fact that Virginia is given a false name has to be related to her innocence, but also to the name of an American colony and to the fact of being attributed a unfixed identity which changes depending on circumstances, as it happened to many black slaves. Virginia's story is told twice and has all the ingredients of a romance or a Gothic novel. The daughter of a girl who died of a broken heart after being the victim of a fortune-hunter, Virginia is secluded from society by Clarence Hervey, Belinda's suitor. Virginia's father, Mr. Hartley, met Virginia's mother, who was addicted to novels, while he was serving at Court and then abandoned her after their secret marriage. Mr. Hartley – whose name evokes the man with the hardest heart or who has no heart (heart-less) – later married a rich widow in Jamaica and economically benefited from her death, just as colonizers took advantage of the new territories. As soon as he comes back to England, Mr. Hartley starts suffering from mental problems and, when Virginia meets him, he is just a rich man in love with painting, that is, a form of artistic expression that imitates life and, as such, not real life itself. The inability to see beyond appearances blinds also many characters in *Belinda* and *Emma*.

Another feature that assimilates Virginia to a slave is her simplicity and resistance to fit stereotypes. Virginia is not frivolous but a child of nature. Social appearances are not important to her and she is not obsessed with social éclat. In a way she represents another version of Helena, Lady Delacour's daughter. She cherishes a bullfinch and, like the bird, lacks an autonomous personality. Additionally, she prefers roses to diamonds which were “[...] as useless to her as guineas were to Robinson Crusoe on his desert island” (Edgeworth 1994, 372). Virginia rejects “finery, competition” (Edgeworth 1994, 372) or opportunities to exhibit jewels, which places her far from a whimsical lady.

A difference between *Emma* and *Belinda* is that the former carries significant homoerotic overtones while the latter focuses exclusively on heterosexual attraction. However, should a colonial studies framework be applied to the study of these novels, both Hervey and Emma emerge as colonizers with an aim. The relationship between Emma and Harriet is very close to the standard relationship between characters in Gothic novels (Harriet's continuous praise of Emma is especially significant in this regard). Like in Virginia's case, Emma is introduced to seventeen-year-old Harriet Smith indirectly, through Mrs. Goddard, and immediately sees her training as a selfish challenge that would make her shine brighter in Highbury:

She was not struck by any thing [sic] remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging – not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk – and yet so far from pushing, shewing [sic] so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of every thing [sic] in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense, and deserve encouragement. Encouragement should be given [...] She would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers. (Austen 1841, I, 18)

Emma is not aware of the risks all this has for Harriet, who is definitely more unprovided for than Jane Fairfax, as Harriet lacks the social connections, refinement and talents which most people, even Mrs. Elton, would require in a governess. Should her mysterious benefactor cease to provide for her, Harriet would be reduced to domestic service, perhaps as a parlour or nursery maid. In Virginia's case, the girl would be similarly degraded and become a man's mistress.

Youth and beauty make both Virginia and Harriet exquisitely attractive. Good looks suggest exoticism in *Belinda* and Virginia becomes a sexual commodity as if she were a black woman whose masters could proudly exhibit and exploit. Besides, her beauty is always considered as foreign. It is described through a painting inspired by St. Pierre's Virginia and her indolence – which is usually associated with women from the tropic – handicaps Virginia's education. Harriet is also very beautiful, though her origin is obscure; for Janet Todd, “the ladylike Harriet is a product of social isolation” (2006, 99). Interestingly, Emma creates a portrait of Harriet before Mr. Elton. In that scene, and like in Virginia's case, Harriet's exposure to the male gaze has sexual connotations. The artistic element appears then since Emma must make Harriet an elegant woman. In the drawing, Harriet and Jane merge and the former turns into a version of the latter with Jane's height, figure, as well as Jane's eyebrows and eyelashes (Todd 2006, 15). Portrait painting reflects Bhabha's *metonymy of presence*. Harriet resembles Jane Fairfax, but she differs from her by displaying her in part, metonymically (Bhabha 1994, 90). Harriet also stands for a threat and Austen is here questioning the authorization of colonial representation and pointing to a historical crisis in the conceptuality of the colonial man – woman, in this case – as the subject of racial, cultural and national representations.

Structurally, *Belinda* and *Emma* are similar in that they show the members of the upper classes' moral competition to impose themselves on others. In Edgeworth's novel, Hervey wants an ideal partner and hopes to get a sexual reward:

‘Sensibility,’ said he to himself, ‘is the parent of great talents and great virtues; and evidently she possesses natural feeling in an uncommon degree: it shall be developed with skill, patience, and delicacy; and I will deserve before I claim my reward’. (Edgeworth 1994, 368)

It can be argued that in *Emma* two ladies, Mrs. Elton and Emma, engage in a competition to show whose dependant is best, Jane Fairfax or Harriet, like Mr. Edwards and Mr. Jefferies in Edgeworth's “The Grateful Negro”, which leads us to consider two opposing points. In *Emma*, the upper classes decide women's fate, so both Emma and Knightley think that Harriet would be a better wife for Mr. Elton than Augusta. It is true that both Mrs. Elton and Emma have no mother figure; both are very domineering; and both are related to Mr. Elton, who married his wife after being rejected by Emma. Yet, the dynamics of the binominal Mrs. Elton-Jane Fairfax is not the same as that of Emma-Harriet. Mrs. Elton, née Augusta Hawkins, is a nouveau riche; Emma is an aristocrat by birth and not vulgar. Emma is simply a young matchmaker, like Mrs. Stanhope in *Belinda*, whose pride and snobbery make it impossible for her to realize that she is manipulating Harriet. Too blind to see that Mrs. Elton's treatment of Jane is an exaggeration

of her own treatment of Harriet, Emma looks down on Harriet as inferior to her and detaches from her while her attitude to Jane is much more complex, including mixed jealousy and admiration.

If in *Belinda* education handicaps Virginia, in *Emma* class is the obsession consuming most people and this shows in Harriet's social alienation. Bhabha's concept of ambivalence envisions culture as made up of opposing perceptions so that, in a colonial context, the colonized may develop hybrid identities fusing both their own and their colonizers'. This allows me to transpose colonial theory to *Belinda* and *Emma*. All characters in *Emma* are extremely class-conscious, and this accounts for Mr. Elton's refusal to dance with Harriet at the ball when only Mr. Knightley is courteous (Austen 1841, III, 292). Emma slowly instills her snobbery in Harriet. For example, she crushes Harriet's democratic aspirations to place Emma at the same level as Jane when Harriet says they both play very well (Austen 1841, II, 205). Blind to the consequences of her paradoxical attitude, Emma allows no social levelling at all, just as racial equality was not even considered in English society at the time. The truth is that, without Emma's patronage, Harriet would be as marginalized as if she were a black woman or a mulatto until her background as the daughter of a rich tradesman is discovered. In that regard, slavery in *Emma* transcends Jane's comment about the “governess-trade” (Austen 1841, II, 160) as a noble job which would satisfy her. Real “slave trade” involved physical suffering and abuse and it was definitely grimmer than the “governess-trade” alluded to in *Emma*, which does not involve hunger. Nevertheless, in both novels there is a social clash between the wealthy protagonists and the women who had to struggle to find a place in society as governesses or servants. Metaphorically Emma comes to be Harriet's master and Emma is as concerned about Harriet's marrying well as people are afraid of miscegenation or races mixing together in *Belinda*. Emma represents oligarchical, patriarchal power and at one point she celebrates that Harriet's blood does not contaminate a gentleman's family:

It was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman: but what a connexion had she been preparing for Mr. Knightley – or for the Churchills – or even for Mr. Elton! – The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed. (Austen 1841, II, 257)

Independence

Many readers may consider Virginia a better heroine for *Belinda* than rational Belinda herself. Like in a Gothic or sentimental novel, Virginia is easy prey of men and she is defended by other women who, even from the grave, caution men not to spoil women's innocence. One of Virginia's supporters is Mrs. Ormond, a critical voice in the novel whose behaviour, however, is not very consistent. This “duenna”, or chaperone, facilitates her sexualization by providing her with sentimental readings like *Paul et Virginie*, thus inserting the girl in patriarchal culture. Aware of the dangers of passion, Mrs. Ormond warns Hervey not to play with Virginia and not to leave her now that her reputation is the subject of gossip. Surprisingly, Mrs. Ormond enables Hervey's awakening by helping him notice that he needs a rational, not just a sensuous, wife since a wrong choice would put both his and Virginia's happiness at risk.

~ If Virginia is identified with purity and nature, Harriet is assimilated to a reader who cannot interpret what is going around. Unable to see that the charade is for her, Harriet spends her time collecting and transcribing riddles, that is, dealing with words whose meanings she cannot discern, like a foreign slave trying to grasp metropolitan ideas. Despite her efforts, Emma is not a good supervisor for Harriet: the girl lacks both diligence and patience and Harriet's continuous praising of Emma engages Emma's attention excessively. Mr. Knightley resembles Mrs. Ormond herself because he sees that Harriet will only acquire superficial knowledge and accomplishments and that she lacks a rational mind: "She will never submit to any thing [sic] requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding" (Austen 1841, I, 17). By "slavery of affection" I mean more than an economic relationship based on money. The secondary characters in this study find comfort, respect and build self-esteem when they take contact with Hervey and Emma. Once this bond is established, it is very difficult to become independent because neither Virginia nor Harriet has been taught to stand by themselves and become independent. According to Emmabel Orendain (2016), Harriet establishes herself as a figure of submission in her first encounter with Emma and her miseducation begins with her refusal of Robert Martin. She gradually begins to develop her own distorted self-perception and makes decisions that go beyond Emma's control until she develops confidence in her own misconceptions (Orendain 2016).

Similarly, Virginia's tutor in *Belinda* wants to create the perfect romance heroine and his perfect wife without examining his own shortcomings. Virginia becomes a fiction created by Hervey, who yearns to cultivate her understanding his own way, to rationally create her. Bluebeard Hervey egoistically decides that only Mrs. Ormond, Mr. Moreton and himself are allowed to visit Virginia and feels pleased with Virginia's lack of autonomy: she is not a "frivolous sophisticated slave of art" (Edgeworth 1994, 371) and Virginia's complaisant submission guarantees his control over her. The girl can quickly progress; she would do anything to please him; and Hervey asks Mrs. Ormond to keep his secret. Therefore, he invites her to partake in Virginia's alienation.

Many characters want to impose their will on others in *Emma*. Sarah Raff states that Austen distinguished between Pygmalionism and didacticism and applied the former to the relationship between the narrator and the reader (2014, 2–3). If applied to characters, there is another type of Pygmalionism in Austen's work. The heroine wants to improve Harriet, who becomes a useful doll in her hands and again a test for Emma, her colonizer: "Mrs. Weston was the object of a regard which had its basis in gratitude and esteem. Harriet would be loved as one to whom she could be useful. For Mrs. Weston there was nothing to be done; for Harriet everything" (Austen 1841, I, 12).

For Marilyn Butler, Virginia's education parodies Rousseau's philosophy because it does not prepare the individual to become an independent adult (1997, 490). Guilt and remorse join together when Virginia sees that Hervey does not look like her perfect hero. In colonial discourse, a slave has to express his/her gratitude. In Virginia's case this is artistically expressed in the pack of pictures of New Forest she has drawn by heart, so Virginia undergoes a particular love trial at the realization that she does not love Hervey as much as she should. Instead of shunning him, she wants to retire from the world, to come back to primeval Paradise and to avoid the practice of sexuality. Slave-like, she feels grateful to him and does not know how to please him. Her commitment

to Mr. Hervey has grown so strong that she admits having no identity without him: "Only let me always know your wishes, your sentiments, your feelings, and by them I will, as I ought, regulate mine" (Edgeworth 1994, 401).

Belinda is a book about the exhibition of women's private life and Virginia suffers even more as her erotic fantasy comes to light the moment Lady Delacour shows the picture of the man that Virginia loves. This moment exposes Virginia's inner self just as Lady Delacour has done at the beginning of *Belinda*. Luckily, the ghost that she loves turns up to be Captain Sutherland who once saved Mr. Hartley's life and who marries Virginia. Researchers have interpreted the ending of the novel in different ways. For Susan Greenfield, Sunderland's marriage to Virginia is to be seen in colonial terms:

it affirms that English male rights to reproduce on a virgin body and to possess a colonized land worked by slaves are parts of the same privilege. If Virginia can be read as the sundered land of a former colony, Sunderland, who has already proved his ability to contain rebellion in a remaining colony, enacts a myth of reclamation. (2002, 121)

By contrast, for Katherine Sobba Green, Virginia's rejection of Mr. Hervey signifies the impossibility of patriarchy to manipulate love (1991, 150).

The end of the novel confirms patriarchal selfishness. Hervey prefers *Belinda* to Virginia, and he envisions dark prospects for the latter. He plans to give her a suitable fortune and leave her under the care of Mrs. Ormond "till some method of establishing her in the world should occur" (Edgeworth 1994, 379). Virginia has been treated as if she were a slave whose master can easily get rid of her or as a prostitute, but Hervey quickly realizes that he does not want to be seen as a master or an ungrateful tyrant: "I blame no one but myself," cried Clarence; "I must abide by the consequences of my own folly. Unhappy! – she shall not be unhappy; she does not deserve to be so" (Edgeworth 1994, 402). Here Edgeworth's novel is technically more limited than Austen's. The Irish author puts the blame of Virginia's suffering on Hervey but she does not go deep into his mind, while Austen represents the heroine's awareness of her situation by using free indirect speech in *Emma*. Bruce Stovel (2007) registers the change in the protagonist when she believes it likely that Mr. Knightley has fallen in love with Harriet and wishes to marry her. Up to that moment, Emma has ignored her own contempt for the girl; she has clothed it in admiration for Harriet's simplicity and humility. Emma is now confronted by a new Harriet, a monster that she has created or a slave that rubs elbows with her and provokes revulsion. When Bhabha examines the imposing figure of the colonized subject, he argues that it produces "a loss or lack of truth that articulates an uncanny truth about colonialist cultural authority and its figurative space of the human. The infinite variety of man fades with insignificance when, in the moment of the discursive splitting, it oversignifies" (1994, 193), which is precisely what Emma feels.

Perhaps Emma just seeks love and the approval of others, as it happens to Victor Frankenstein in the homonymous novel by Mary Shelley, Wollstonecraft's daughter, published just one year after *Emma*. However, she is experiencing the traumatic moment of confronting Harriet now. The heroine regrets making Harriet suffer and blames herself. Harriet mortifies Emma by ~

reminding her of her gratitude: “You, who have been the best friend I ever had in my life! – Want gratitude to you! – Nobody is equal to you! I care for nobody as I do for you! Oh, Miss Woodhouse, how ungrateful I have been!” (Austen 1841, II, 238). If Virginia and Harriet are colonial subjects, their protest and rebellion have a psychic impact on their masters and fits in what Frantz Fanon calls *the return of the oppressed*: “the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire, in colonial texts” (Bhabha 1994, 72). Free indirect speech increases the irony to know that “clever” Emma hears the vacuous speech of Harriet, her colonized language, but she does not seem to recognize her for the fool she is, as Louise Flavin (1991) points out.

Emma ends with Harriet accepting Robert Martin’s second proposal and Emma marrying Mr. Knightley. The heroine discovers the suffering she has provoked. By making Harriet vain, Emma has risked her friend’s happiness on insufficient grounds. Not only has she not respected Harriet, but she has almost lost Mr. Knightley’s regard:

Common sense would have directed her to tell Harriet, that she must not allow herself to think of him, and that there were five hundred chances to one against his ever caring for her. – ‘But, with common sense,’ she added, ‘I am afraid I have had little to do.’ (Austen 1841, II, 214–5)

Conclusion

Bhabha’s theory has been used in this article to examine Edgeworth’s and Austen’s works in terms of gender, as novels portraying the submission of women in such a way that some parallels can be drawn with colonial fiction. This study has explored Austen as a social writer and placed her at the same level as Edgeworth, who was equally concerned with dignity and identity, the need to reform women’s education and social status. Virginia and Harriet may be seen as toys in their masters’ hands, but they are also mirrors of their metaphorical owners, Hervey and Emma respectively, and they reflect their master’s and mistress’s unfulfilled fantasies, sexual desire and envy. Besides, Edgeworth’s and Austen’s versions of female slavery in *Belinda* and *Emma* run parallel to self-centredness. Pygmalionism equals fetishization since both are inherently paternalistic, manipulative and aim to consolidate women’s babysm, as Janet Todd would say (1989, 201). Edgeworth’s work reveals the patriarchal strategies to make women feel happy as victims and this is why *Emma* is an uncomfortable novel and an exception in Austen’s canon.

Though traditionally regarded a parlour writer, Austen did not shun controversial topics in her fiction. In *Belinda* and *Emma* Edgeworth and Austen deal with the rejection of beauty, a paramount quality for a female in the nineteenth century, if it is not accompanied by rationality. Virginia and Harriet reproduce the cultural alienation of women who are imperfect readers of their environment. To a certain extent, Virginia and Harriet anticipate the trope of the woman in the attic, a part of the Self that is not only hidden, but also taken advantage of. In *Emma*, Austen brought to perfection the idea that, if one part of society is ignored or if identity and independent will are not respected, they will eventually lead to unhappiness and social ostracism. In that regard, not only do Virginia and Harriet enable the protagonists’

awakening, but they also show some ethical limits that cannot be ignored either in literature or real life.

Works Cited

- ARMSTRONG, Nancy. 1987. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political Study of the Novel*. New York: New York UP.
- AUSTEN, Jane. *Emma*. 1841. London: Richard Bentley.
- . 1990. *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons and Sanditon* [1805–18], ed. John Davie. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- AUSTEN-LEIGH, James Edward. 1882. *A Memoir of Jane Austen*. London: Richard Bentley & Sons.
- BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE, Jacques-Henri. 1788. *Paul et Virginie. Suivi de Morceaux Choisis de L’Arcadie et Des Etudes de la Nature*. Tours: Alfred Mame et Fils.
- BHABHA, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- BROWN, Christopher Leslie. 2006. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: The U. of North Carolina P.
- BUTLER, Marilyn. 1997. “The Purple Turban and the Flowering Aloe Tree: Signs of Distinction in the Early-Nineteenth-Century Novel.” *Modern Language Quarterly* 58 (4): 475–95.
- CAREY, Brychan. 2005. *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery 1760–1807*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- DEFORREST, Mary. 1987. “Mrs. Elton and the Slave Trade.” *Persuasions* 9: 11–2.
- DIU, Nisha Lilia. 2016. “Dido Belle: Britain’s First Black Aristocrat.” *The Telegraph*, 6 July. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2016/07/06/dido-belle-bitains-first-black-aristocrat/> (Last access: 17 August 2020).
- DONOVAN, Julia. 2019. “The Encroachment on Highbury: Ireland in Jane Austen’s *Emma*.” *New Hibernia Review* 23 (4): 13–29.
- EDGEWORTH, Maria. 1994 (1801). *Belinda*. Ed. Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- . 1800. *Castle Rackrent*. London: J. Johnson.
- FERGUSON, Moira. 1992. *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery 1670–1834*. London and New York: Routledge.
- FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, Carmen María. 2015. “‘Le nègre reconnaissant’ (1814): A Translemic Analysis of Maria Edgeworth’s *The Grateful Negro* into French.” *Babel* 24: 91–107.
- . 2016. “An Analysis of Octave Ségur’s Translation of Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) into French.” *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses (RAEI)* 29: 91–111.

- . 2017. “Enlightened Deception: An Analysis of Slavery in Maria Edgeworth’s *Whim for Whim* (1798).” *Studi Irlandesi* 7: 243–60.
- . 2018. “Blackness and Identity in Sarah Harriet Burney’s *Geraldine Fauconberg* (1808) and *Traits of Nature* (1812).” *ES: Revista de Filología Inglesa* 39: 97–115.
- FESTA, Lynn. 2006. *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP.
- FLAVIN, Louise. 1991. “Free Indirect Discourse and the Clever Heroine of *Emma*.” *Persuasions* 13: 1–7. <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number13/flavin.htm> (Last access: 17 August 2020).
- FLUDERNIK, Monika and Miriam Nandi. 2014. *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- GERZINA, Gretchen Holbrook. 1995. *Black London: Life Before Emancipation*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Library.
- GILBERT, Sandra and Susan Gubar. 1984. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP.
- GREEN, Katherine Sobba. 1991. *The Courtship Novel 1740–1820: A Feminized Genre*. Lexington: The UP of Kentucky.
- GREENFIELD, Susan C. 2002. *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance Frances Burney to Jane Austen*. Detroit: Wayne State UP.
- KAWARA, Kuldip Kaur. 2004. “Jane Austen’s *Emma* and Empire: A Postcolonial View.” *Persuasions Online* 25 (1). <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol25n01/kuwahara.html> (Last access: 15 May 2020).
- LESTER, Alan and Fae Dussart. 2014. *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- MARCHE, Montaz. 2019. “Uncovering Black Women in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain.” *UCL*, 23 October. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/news/2019/oct/uncovering-black-women-eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century-britain> (Last access: 19 August 2020).
- MIDGLEY, Clare. 1992. *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870*. London and New York: Routledge.
- MOORE, Wendy. 2013. *How to Create the Perfect Wife*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- MYERS, Norman. 1996. *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in England, c. 1780–1830*. Portland: Frank Cass.
- NIEBRZYDOWSKI, Sue. 2006. “The Sultana and Her Sisters: Black Women in the British Isles before 1530.” *Women’s History Review* 10 (2): 187–210. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09612020100200287> (Last access: 19 August 2020).
- NUSSBAUM, Felicity. 2003. *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- ORENDAIN, Emmabel. 2016. “The (Mis)Education of Harriet Smith: Confidence, Perception, and Character Development in *Emma*.” 2016 JASNA Essay Contest Third Place Winner Graduate Division. <http://www.jasna.org/publications/essay-contest-winning-entries/2016/the-miseducation-of-harriet-smith-confidence-perception-and-character-development-in-emma/> (Last access: 15 March 2020).
- POOVEY, Mary. 1984. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- POSER, Norman S. 2013. *Lord Mansfield: Justice in the Age of Reason*. Montreal: McGill-Queens’s UP.
- RAFF, Sarah. 2014. *Jane Austen’s Erotic Advice*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- ROGERS, Katherine. 1982. *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England*. Brighton: Harvester.
- SCHIEBINGER, Londa L. 2004. *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP.
- SOUTHAM, B. C. 1979. *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage. Vol. I (1811–1870)*. London and New York: Routledge.
- SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1985. “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1): 243–61.
- STOVEL, Bruce. 2007. “The new *Emma* in *Emma*.” *Persuasions Online* 28 (1). <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol28n01/stovel-b.htm> (Last access: 15 March 2020).
- TODD, Janet. 2006. *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- TSOMONDO, Thorell Porter. 1999. “Temporal, Spatial, and Linguistic Configurations and the Geopolitics of *Emma*.” *Persuasion* 21: 188–202.
- WOLLSTONECRAFT, Mary. 1792. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. London: J. Johnson.

Título:

Esclavas del afecto en *Belinda* (1801), de Maria Edgeworth, y *Emma* (1817), de Jane Austen

Contact:

c28fernandez@gmail.com