

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SICK PERSON IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVEL *EMMA*

\*Miguel Ángel Jordán

Department of English Studies of Universidad de Valencia (Spain) Vice President of Jane Austen Society of Spain

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Received in revised form

20<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Accepted 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Published online 30<sup>th</sup> July 2019

#### ABSTRACT

The sick person, both real and imaginary, has been present in literature since its inception and has been approached from different perspectives. In Jane Austen's novels, we find frequent references to diseases and discomforts, which pervade them with realism. Austen often resorts to hypochondria to characterize some of her characters in several of her novels. One of the most representative cases is Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's father. By means of this character, health and illness have an almost constant presence in the story and, for this reason, several articles have been published that revolve around Mr. Woodhouse as a hypochondriac. In the present article we will approach this question from a different perspective of great relevance: the attitude of the different characters towards the sick person and how this attitude entails a greater knowledge of each character on the part of the readers. Austen's books are novels of characters, in which the main thing is the study of the personality of all those who appear in the plot. By introducing a sick person into a leading role, Austen provides contrasts that allow readers to discover personality traits of the protagonists that otherwise would have gone hidden. In this novel, therefore, the patient can be considered as a resource to show the truth of each character, a "Magic Mirror" as we find in the novel *The Neverending Story*, which shows not only the exterior, but also the interior of each person, confronting them with their true personality. In this article, we offer an analysis of the attitude of the various characters towards Mr. Woodhouse, we also explain how this attitude provides new information about his personality. In addition, we assess the consequences of each attitude and, finally, we offer some reflections on how the attitude towards a sick person can lead to self-knowledge.

**Key Words:** Literature and medicine, study of characters, literary analysis, disease and character, personality study.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen's books can be defined as novels of characters, since their central issue is the analysis of the personality, not only of the protagonists, but also of the rest of the characters. In her novels, Austen shows the attitude of people from different ages and social classes, using personal conflicts, social rules and customs, etc., to delve into their emotions and behaviours. For this reason, in Austen's novels we find a deep analysis of different personalities and character traits, which reveal the author's subtle capacity for observation (Lambdin 2000). One of the topics present in Austen's works is hypochondria, which characterizes various characters such as Mrs. Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*), Mary Musgrove (*Persuasion*), or Mr. Woodhouse (*Emma*). However, in each case, the treatment that Austen gives to this circumstance is different. As pointed out by Nelson (2014), Austen is often critical and severe with characters who complain about imaginary diseases, but her attitude varies in the case of Mr. Woodhouse, which we will discuss in this article. Many authors along the time have included the sick person, both real and imaginary, among their characters, analysing their situation from different perspectives (Bury 2001). These books offer a psychological approach to the sick person, which can enrich the readers and influence their attitude. However, in the present study, we will not focus on the figure of the patient, but on the effect that this person causes on those around him. The aim of this article is to put into evidence how Austen uses disease as a literary resource to reveal characters' authentic personality.

\*Corresponding author: Miguel Ángel Jordán

In order to achieve this objective, we will provide a brief theoretical framework that contextualizes the analysis we will carry out in point 5.

#### Jane Austen and hypochondria

Austen focus especially on the characters, not on the events. For this reason, although during her lifetime events of great relevance took place both in England and in Europe, we hardly find any references to them. However, this does not prevent Austen's novels from being marked by historical realism. Austen, as she herself indicates in one of her letters (172), spoke of those subjects she knew, since only thus could she accurately describe them. Therefore we can affirm that Austen decided to describe several of her characters as hypochondriacs because hypochondria was a known in her time, both for her and for her readers. By the time Austen was born, centuries of discussion of hypochondria and hysteria had already taken place. For a very long time, medicine had been aware of the persistence of a constellation of symptoms that differ from ordinary illness. The symptoms are varied, hanging, and, of course, physical; even if the disease is imagined and feared, as in what has lately come to be called hypochondria, the worries are manifested in physical terms such as headache, fatigue, upset stomach, fainting, screaming, or loss of appetite; how does a human being react, if not through the body? (Gorman 100). Although Austen's and her contemporaries' medical knowledge was not extensive, and they even ignored the medical term to define hypochondria, its symptoms were sufficiently common and frequent to be recognized and used within a novel. Hypochondria was known for centuries and had

been the subject of study and debate in medicine, however, no treatment was published until 1777, that is, two years after birth by Jane Austen. Probably not until the publication of William Cullen's *First Lines of the Practice of Physick* in 1777, do we find a description of hypochondria as we now know it: "As it is the nature of men to indulge every present emotion, so the hypochondriac cherishes his fears, and, attentive to every feeling, finds in trifles, light as air, a strong confirmation of his apprehensions" (Mullan 215-16). Cullen recommends that the physician try "diverting the attention of the person being treated to other objects than his own feelings," using a placebo if necessary (Mullan 216), a prescription with which Austen would no doubt concur, and a prescription she turns inside out for her readers (Gorman 101). As a coincidence we would like to highlight that William Cullen's study was published by John Murray, creator of the John Murray Publishing House, who years later published several of Austen's works, although this task corresponded to John Murray II, son of the founder of the publishing house. As it has been said, Austen seems to know these indications, since she does not hesitate to apply them in her works to calm the excited mood of Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's father, therefore this circumstance encouraged the author to use hypochondria as a literary tool to achieve various effects in her novels. Later we will analyse the repercussion that Mr. Woodhouse's attitude has on the characters that surround him, but first we will briefly comment on the literary effect produced by the other examples of hypochondriac behaviour cited in the introduction.

The first example we referred to is Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth Bennet's mother, in *Pride and Prejudice*. Throughout the work, this character makes continuous references to her nervous discomfort ("my poor nerves"), but the narrator is responsible for revealing the inconsistency of this alleged disease. The effect that Austen achieves when adding hypochondria to the other characteristics of Mrs. Bennet is to confer an even more histrionic personality to Mrs. Bennet, which already is exaggerated and grotesque.

The second example is that of Mary Musgrove, Anne Elliot's sister, in *Persuasion*. Mary complains continuously of various discomforts, which can range from headaches to exhaustion, with other variations depending on her interests. Through this hypochondriac attitude, we delve into Anne Elliot's family situation. She is the victim of a vain and frivolous father, and two selfish sisters who treat her with disdain, in the case of Elizabeth, the eldest of the family, or as a nurse and maid, as Mary always does.

Therefore, Austen's image of hypochondriacs in both cases is pejorative. A means to characterize in a negatively a character that will weigh down the life of the protagonist and other people around her. Perhaps to individualize themselves, Austen's famous hypochondriacs have perpetuated the notion of being ill, for only then can they earn the attention they believe rightly belongs to them. Unfortunately, in the process of exerting their egotism, as they retreat further from reality as Walton Lutz suggests (160), they can do harm to others (Beard 3). The aforementioned characters, and Mr. Woodhouse, who we will discuss in the next section, share the eagerness to get the attention of those around them and seek for their care, and at the same time they cause them suffering or, at least, serious discomfort. In Austen's personal letters we find several situations in which she refers to her mother's. This has led

various critics and readers to hypothesize that Mr. Woodhouse's character might be inspired by Mrs. Austen. However, as Nelson explains in his research on hypochondria in Austen (2014), this does not seem likely, since the author shared her writings with her family, so, in the case that Mrs. Austen was a hypochondriac, it would not have been overlooked by their loved ones, causing a logical discomfort from which no reference has come. In addition, as Nelson also explains, citing Austen's first biography, the English writer was more likely to create than to copy.

### Mr. Woodhouse

In this section we will offer a description of Mr. Woodhouse which will allow us to understand in more depth the analysis that will be carried out in point 5. Austen's narrator usually offers a brief presentation of every character before they appear on the scene. This presentation, which can be completed later, contains the fundamental features of their character and, especially, those that are of more relevance for the role they will play in the plot. In the first chapter of *Emma*, when speaking of Mr. Woodhouse, the narrator makes the following description:

The evil of the actual disparity in their ages (and Mr. Woodhouse had not married early) was much increased by his constitution and habits; for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have recommended him at any time (...). His spirits required support. He was a nervous man, easily depressed; fond of everybody that he was used to, and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind (3). An elderly man, who appears to be even older due to his habits and his nervous state of depressive tendency, which limits his physical activity and leads him to be excessively aware of his health and wary of any change. However, despite the fact that this makes him a melancholic companion, difficult to live with, and requires almost constant attention, he is not entirely depicted negatively as in the cases we discussed in the previous section. His gentlemanlike and delicate manners, and the goodness of his character, together with his high social position, justify that no one at Highbury questions his illnesses or laughs at his obsessions (Vickers 2008).

Mr. Woodhouse's concern for his own health makes this matter the central theme of his conversations. The medical advice he receives is exposed as authority arguments, to which he often adds his own opinions, discouraging or recommending various practices based on his opinion. In a world where medicines were usually ineffective and causes of illness generally unknown, Mr. Woodhouse sees cause-and-effect relationships in the most unusual phenomena, issues proclamations about the value of one procedure or another, and recommends certain behaviors to all who will or will not listen. (...) Mr. Woodhouse's hypochondria also functions as a pastime, as a way of fending off the dangers of the universe, and as a way of insuring that he is being taken care of (Gorman 105). Mr. Woodhouse's hypochondria led him to a situation close to disability, which conditions and limits the lives of those around him, especially his daughter Emma. Any circumstance is analysed by this character from a medical point of view, which almost always causes him uneasiness and complicates other people's lives. But these inconveniences put into

evidence a variety of characters' which, otherwise, might have passed hidden to the readers.

### The Magic Mirror

The differences between each person's external appearance and his/her inner reality is a frequent topic both in literature and in other disciplines as well as popular knowledge. Legends, myths, stories and proverbs abound that deal with this matter, inviting us to pay attention in order to discover the true personality of those around us, without being fooled by external factors. Literature offers some examples of items with special powers, which allow to discover the inner truth of people. One of them is The Magic Mirror, which appears in the novel *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende (1979). In the novel, Atreyu, a young warrior who has been chosen to carry out a mission on which depends the survival of the Kingdom of Fantasy, has to overcome various tests. One of them is the Magic Mirror's Gate:

Anyway, when you stand before it, you see yourself. But not as you would in an ordinary mirror. You don't see your outward appearance; what you see is your real innermost nature. If you want to go through, you have to - in a manner of speaking - go into yourself."

"Well," said Atreyu. "It seems to me that this Magic Mirror Gate is easier to get through than the first."

"Wrong!" cried Engywook. Once again he began to trot back and forth in agitation. "Dead wrong, my friend! I've known travelers who considered themselves absolutely blameless to yelp with horror and run away at the sight of the monster grinning out of the mirror at them. We had to care for some of them for weeks before they were even able to start home."

The dichotomy between appearances and reality can not only confuse others, but even surprise oneself. "Know yourself" was the inscription in Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Both self-knowledge and the knowledge of others are complicated tasks, which require attention, study and resorting to some "objects with special powers" that allow us to discern between the external appearance and the inner reality of each one. As we will see in the next section, the attitude towards a sick or needy person can be that touchstone that reveals some features of someone's character.

### Analysis of the attitude toward Mr. Woodhouse of Emma's characters

As stated at the beginning of this article, Jane Austen's books are novels of characters. For this reason, the author continuously delves into the various personality traits of each of them, especially the protagonists. One of the strategies that Austen often uses is the contrast between characters. By contrasting two different characters, it is easier to observe the differences and also the characteristics of each of them, thus acquiring a broader view of the characters. In this section, we will make a brief analysis of the various attitudes of some of the characters in *Emma*, focusing on their relationship with Mr. Woodhouse. The aim of this analysis is to highlight how Austen uses the difficulties that coexistence or dealing with a sick person can bring to reveal the true personality of those around her. In the first place, we will analyse the attitude of Emma Woodhouse, she is described in the first line of the

novel as "handsome, clever and rich". From the beginning she is depicted as a young woman of great natural talent, but inconstant, stubborn, manipulative and classist. In fact, Austen herself defined Emma as a protagonist that nobody except her would like. However, despite the many Emma's imperfections, that the narrator does not hesitate to point out, there is a positive trait which is never questioned: her affection for her father, her constant dedication and her endless patience. Emma's life is completely conditioned by her father's limitations, but Emma never complains about this. She accepts her role and plays it with affection and delicacy, adapting to the circumstances. As it is, she never visits the seaside because of her father's views: "I never had much opinion of the sea air...the sea is rarely of use to anybody" (101). Nor does she get to London: "Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be...the air is so bad!"(104). Emma may never have got out at all to parties..."the sooner every party breaks up the better" (210), or arranged visits to the neighbors, especially if windows are left open (251), but she has learned to navigate the vagaries of her father's hypochondria. (Beard 5)

In her role as daughter, companion and nurse, her feelings are relegated to the background: "It was a melancholy change; and Emma could not but be over it, and wish for impossible things, till her father awoke, and made it necessary to be cheerful."(3). Emma's wit is always alert to avoid discomfort to her father and redirect those situations and conversations that could cause him any inconvenience. All the negative features of the protagonist's personality disappear in her relationship with her father. Her capricious and obstinate attitude turns into a selfless and generous dedication to seek his comfort, and she is even willing to delay her marriage indefinitely just for her father's health and well-being. We now turn to another main character, Mr. Knightley. In this case, he is an unblemished gentleman, from whom a very positive vision is offered at all times. Therefore, his attitude towards Mr. Woodhouse does not show a counterpoint to his personality, but rather reinforces the favourable impression that readers get from him. Mr. Knightley treats Mr. Woodhouse with respect and understanding, but without condescension. His attitude is similar to Emma's. He also knows how to redirect conversations that could cause Mr. Woodhouse discomfort and prepare things in the way that will be most pleasing to him. For example, when he invites several friendly families to spend the day in his mansion, aware of Mr. Woodhouse's objections to leaving his home, he arranges everything so that the old gentleman finds himself comfortable and entertained:

Mr. Knightley had done all in his power for Mr. Woodhouse's entertainment. Books of engravings, drawers of medals, cameos, corals, shells, and every other family collection within his cabinets, had been prepared for his old friend, to while away the morning; and the kindness had perfectly answered. Mr. Woodhouse had been exceedingly well amused. (323)

The affection for Mr. Woodhouse and the constant attention to his needs is another point of union between Emma and Mr. Knightley, which increases their complicity. Therefore, a few words are enough for both of them to understand each other. As it happens when during the dinner at the Weston's house, it starts snowing with the subsequent risk of roads becoming impassable. This news arouses the doubts of the guests, but:

Mr. Knightley and Emma settled it in a few brief sentences: thus—

"Your father will not be easy; why do not you go?"

"I am ready, if the others are."

"Shall I ring the bell?"

"Yes, do." (114)

Throughout the novel, Austen uses this relationship to show readers the virtues of both characters and, thus, prepare the outcome. Therefore, when it arrives the affection between the protagonists will be reinforced by their attitude towards Mr. Woodhouse. As was said a few paragraphs above, Emma is determined to delay her marriage, since she does not contemplate the possibility of leaving her home while her father lives. Mr. Knightley is aware of this situation and, once again, anticipates the needs of the patient, although that entails certain personal resignations.

He had been thinking it over most deeply, most intently; he had at first hoped to induce Mr. Woodhouse to remove with her to Donwell; he had wanted to believe it feasible, but his knowledge of Mr. Woodhouse would not suffer him to deceive himself long; and now he confessed his persuasion, that such a transplantation would be a risk of her father's comfort, perhaps even of his life, which must not be hazarded. (...) But the plan which had arisen on the sacrifice of this, he trusted his dearest Emma would not find in any respect objectionable; it was, that he should be received at Hartfield; that so long as her father's happiness in other words his life--required Hartfield to continue her home, it should be his likewise. (402)

Mr. Knightley is willing to be the one to leave his home to avoid any discomfort to Mr. Woodhouse, although that change would mean that Mr. Knightley would pass from being the lord of his house to a tenant in the home of another gentleman. We have stopped especially in Emma and Mr. Knightley, since they are the two main characters of the novel. Next, we will analyse in a more succinctly other relevant characters' attitude toward Mr. Woodhouse, starting with his closest circle. The novel begins with the wedding Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor, who for years had been the governess and friend of Emma. Miss Taylor, who from that moment becomes Mrs. Weston, plays the role of confidant of the protagonist and is always described as an affectionate and genteel woman. The best way to describe her attitude towards Mr. Woodhouse is to highlight how he repeats over and over again that she should never have married, since that meant she had to leave his home: "Ah! Miss Taylor, if you had not married, you would have staid at home with me" (185). In this way, Austen highlights the virtues of Mrs. Weston, since it is understood that she knew how to treat him with patience and affection, despite the inconveniences that had involved living with someone like him. We will now focus on Isabella, Emma's older sister, married to Mr. John Knightley. Her attitude towards her father is affectionate and sincere, but devoid of Emma's abilities. The narrator tells that Isabella has inherited some of her father's fearful and hesitant character. For this reason, instead of reassuring him and moving away from worries, she increases them further by playing along and paying excessive attention to issues related to health and well-being. Unlike Emma, Isabella lets herself be overcome by her feelings and, therefore, adopts measures that go against the well-being of the sick Mr. Woodhouse. Returning to the situation we discussed earlier, when talking about the snowfall that threatens to block roads, while Emma does not doubt that the best thing for her father is to return home as soon as possible, Isabella is only able to think about her problems without assessing the needs of others.

His eldest daughter's alarm was equal to his own. The horror of being blocked up at Randalls, while her children were at Hartfield, was full in her imagination; and fancying the road to be now just passable for adventurous people, but in a state that admitted no delay, she was eager to have it settled, that her father and Emma should remain at Randalls, while she and her husband set forward instantly through all the possible accumulations of drifted snow that might impede them. (112) Mr. John Knightley, Isabella's husband and Mr. Knightley's younger brother, is described as an educated man with solid principles, but with a strong character, and sometimes somewhat brusque, therefore his positive characteristics are shaded by his attitude toward Mr. Woodhouse. But hardly any degree of personal compliment could have made her (Emma) regardless of that greatest fault of all in her eyes which he sometimes fell into, the want of respectful forbearance towards her father. There he had not always the patience that could have been wished. Mr. Woodhouse's peculiarities and fidgetiness were sometimes provoking him to a rational remonstrance or sharp retort equally ill-bestowed. It did not often happen; for Mr. John Knightley had really a great regard for his father-in-law, and generally a strong sense of what was due to him; but it was too often for Emma's charity, especially as there was all the pain of apprehension frequently to be endured, though the offence came not. (82). The lack of tact and patience when dealing with Mr. Woodhouse reveals the Mr. John Knightley's defects, who maintains a very different attitude to his brother. Although his politeness leads him to avoid some comments that could be offensive Emma's sensitivity detects his inner attitude and makes her suffer for the grievance that her father is subjected to. After analysing the attitude of the characters that belong to the inner circle of Mr. Woodhouse, we will proceed to comment on the attitude of the other characters that are the object of our study.

Mrs. Bates and her daughter's situation deteriorated dramatically after Mr. Bates' death. In spite of their complicated economic situation, both -especially Miss Bates- keep a cordial attitude towards their neighbours. Miss Bates is a character who might seem ridiculed in the novel, as she is described as a woman of little intelligence and excessively talkative. However, her natural goodness and her respectful and kind relationship with Mr. Woodhouse acts as a counterpoint to her defects. For this reason, although Emma is critical of the Bates and sometimes avoids their treatment, which is tedious, she includes them within the group of suitable companions for her father.

Both Mr. Weston and his son, Frank Churchill, are described as educated and courteous gentlemen and are Emma's intimate friends. However, in their dealings with Mr. Woodhouse, both share a common defect, their lack of sensitivity to the needs of others. In the case of Mr. Weston, he manifests in his clumsiness in proposing plans that, far from pleasing the patient, cause him uneasiness:

"Well, sir," cried Mr. Weston, "as I took Miss Taylor away, it is incumbent on me to supply her place, if I can; and I will step to Mrs. Goddard in a moment, if you wish it."

But the idea of anything to be done in a *moment*, was increasing, not lessening, Mr. Woodhouse's agitation. The ladies knew better how to allay it. Mr. Weston must be quiet, and everything deliberately arranged. (185)

Mrs. Weston and Emma must intervene to prevent the gentleman's clumsiness from making the situation worse. Something similar happens later, while preparations are being made for a dance that Emma and her friends are organizing. When explaining the disadvantages of the chosen venue, Frank Churchill wields an argument that causes consternation to Mr. Woodhouse.

"From the very circumstance of its being larger, sir. We shall have no occasion to open the windows at all--not once the whole evening; and it is that dreadful habit of opening the windows, letting in cold air upon heated bodies, which (as you well know, sir) does the mischief."

"Open the windows!--but surely, Mr. Churchill, nobody would think of opening the windows at Randalls. Nobody could be so imprudent! I never heard of such a thing. Dancing with open windows!--I am sure, neither your father nor Mrs. Weston (poor Miss Taylor that was) would suffer it."

"Ah! sir--but a thoughtless young person will sometimes step behind a window-curtain, and throw up a sash, without its being suspected. I have often known it done myself."

"Have you indeed, sir?--Bless me! I never could have supposed it (...).

"Oh!" interrupted Emma, "there will be plenty of time for talking everything over. There is no hurry at all." (223)

Again, it must be Emma who redirects the situation, provoked by a good but insensitive person, to avoid altering the mood of her father. At the beginning of the novel, Mr. Elton has the sympathy of the protagonist, who has decided to mediate to achieve a marriage between the minister and her friend Harriet Smith. Although Emma's perception of Mr. Elton is very positive: attractive, intelligent, educated, etc., the reader perceives the falsehood that pervades the gentleman's attitude. When analysing his behaviour towards Mr. Woodhouse, it is striking that it is non-existent. Despite his frequent visits to the Woodhouse home, Mr. Elton does not pay attention to Mr. Woodhouse, since all his interest is focused on Emma, whose affection he wants to conquer in order to achieve a very advantageous marriage. The old man is seen by Mr. Elton as insignificant, not worthy of spending time with, since he cannot benefit from it. Finally, we will briefly comment on Mrs. Elton, the wife of the parish priest of Highbury, who is characterized as a woman without taste or education, who only seeks to stand out and. Within her pedantry and her desire for notoriety, Mrs. Elton allows herself to treat Mr. Woodhouse in a condescending way, although he belongs to a higher rank. But this good old Mr. Woodhouse, I wish you had heard his gallant speeches to me at dinner. Oh! I assure you I began to think my carosposo would be absolutely jealous. I fancy I am rather a favourite; he took notice of my gown. How do you like it? (269). Mrs. Elton speech ("good old Mr. Woodhouse") is completely inadequate for the time, but his condition as a sick old man is perceived by Mrs. Elton as a sign of weakness, and therefore she dares to treat him as someone close, despite not enjoying that familiarity.

## Conclusion

To conclude this article, we will offer an ordered summary of the information in the previous section, and we will comment

on the points that seem most relevant to us. Finally, we will offer a brief reflection on the different attitudes toward sick people, that we have found in *Emma*, and how the relationship with a sick person can fulfill the function of the "Magic Mirror" discussed in point 4.

As seen in the previous section, Austen describes in *Emma* the following attitudes towards the sick person, characterized in Mr. Woodhouse.

- a) Being able to understand the circumstances of the patient, anticipate his needs, avoid what may be annoying and provide moments of rest and distraction. The characters who maintain this attitude, often based on personal sacrifices, are Emma, Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston.
- b) Treating him with respect and affection, without causing discomfort to the patient, but without being involved in his care. This is the case of the Bates, who maintain a cordial relationship with Mr. Woodhouse, but who does not belong to his inner circle, and consequently does not have the same dedication as the characters in the previous group.
- c) Keeping an affectionate attitude towards the sick person, but provoking certain discomforts by not understanding his circumstances, or grasping his needs. In this group we could include Isabella, Mr. Woodhouse's eldest daughter, Mr. Weston and his son Frank.
- d) Keeping an affectionate but impatient attitude towards the sick person, which entails certain moments of tension and discomfort. This is the case of Mr. John Knightley, Isabella's husband and Mr. Knightley's brother.
- e) Treating the sick person with condescension, underestimating his abilities, or patronizing him. This is Mrs. Elton's attitude.
- f) Ignoring the sick person. Such would be the case of Mr. Elton.

Readers of Jane Austen's novels know that she reviewed her writings meticulously, and that nothing in them is casual or irrelevant. As was said at the beginning of this article, Austen offers in her novels a study of the human being, and this is the goal of her work. For this reason, Mr. Woodhouse responds to a specific intentionality of his creator. On the one hand, he explains and makes credible Emma's personality, and, on the other, he allows readers to know new traits of the other characters, or to delve into the knowledge they already had of them. Austen's personal experience was familiar to illness and death of close. Therefore, there is no doubt that her great capacity for observation, allowed her to distinguish the various behaviours of people when facing such realities. For this reason, when writing a novel like *Emma*, in which the protagonist has a distorted perception of reality, which leads her to continually confuse herself by judging people, Austen wanted to include an "object with special powers" that would allow readers to know the true personality of each character. In section 4 we talked about the Magic Mirror from *The Neverending Story*, in which each everyone saw themselves, but not as in the other mirrors, but in a real and complete way. The Magic Mirror not only reflects the exterior, but also the interior of the one who looks at it. Before this vision, some people flee in terror to discover all the evil they harbour in their hearts. In this work, we have referred various times to this

mirror, assimilating it in a metaphorical way to the sick person because, as it can be seen in *Emma*, the attitude towards the sick person can serve to reveal the true personality of those who surround, with their virtues and defects. The Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, when analysing the experiences lived during his confinement in several concentration camps during the Second World War, affirmed that, faced with the incapacity of the human being to change some situations, there was the individual freedom to choose how to react to them. The way in which each one of us decides to react to the sick person can provide us with some keys to achieve greater self-knowledge. In the novel *Emma*, Austen provides the main couple an affectionate and genteel attitude towards the sick person. In the case of the protagonist, this is the counterpoint that mitigates her many defects during a large part of the story, fostering a less critical attitude of the readers towards her. In Mr. Knightley's case, his delicate and attentive treatment towards Mr. Woodhouse, is a peephole to get into his feelings. In both cases, the capacity for sacrifice and affectionate attention of the sick person is a feature that enriches them more than their titles and possessions, and makes them win the affection of the millions of readers who have entered the pages of *Emma*.

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