

Jane Austen's "Selfless" Subversion of Stereotypes in *Emma*

Date: 23 March 2011

Time: 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Venue:

Room UG02,

*Wong Foo Yuan Building,
Chung Chi College, CUHK*

Speaker:

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Chair:

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*Through looking at Jane Austen's treatment of her female protagonist in her novel *Emma*, we see her attempt to subvert stereotypical thinking that categorizes acts, qualities, and people into fixed "types". Austen suggests a continuous negotiation of acts and qualities that keeps on constructing an ever-changing subject, which in turn illuminates the multiplicity of identities and selves that are always in the making. Austen makes her character have different or even opposite "identities" at the same time. In the novel, Emma's act of getting married is seemingly submissive but really is simultaneously subversive too; and Emma also doubles up to be "mentor" and "mentee" at the same time when considering her role in relation to other characters.*

*Austen attempts to show the impossibility and impropriety of having fixed identities as she highlights the shifting meaning of the subject - the indefinable "being" in the making, and also the discontinuity of the "self", which then creates a lot of "selves", or no "self" at all. Austen actually lets her characters repeat gender norms that signify intelligible "identities" but at the same time, she manages to subvert as she shows potential for change *within* those stereotypes. In this way, she highlights the formation of "identities" as a negotiation instead of anything essential.*

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