



## **CHAPTER II**

### **ROLE CONFUSION OF HARRIET SMITH IN JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA* (1815)**

This chapter analyzes and discusses how Harriet Smith experienced role confusion in the novel *Emma* (1815). Analysis done based on the development of Harriet's character from the beginning to the end of the story by using Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, especially the fifth stage, Identity versus Role Confusion. This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part identifies the signs that show that Harriet is experiencing role confusion. The second part discusses the factors that cause the emergence of role confusion.

#### **2.1. The Characteristics of Harriet Smith's Role Confusion**

*Emma* is a novel that explores Harriet Smith's struggle to find her identity in the social class system of Regency England. Throughout the story, Harriet experiences role confusion because she is unsure about her family background and social status. She is also strongly influenced by Emma Woodhouse, who often guides her decisions and shapes the way she sees herself. As a result, Harriet becomes dependent on others when making important decisions and has difficulty understanding who she really is. Therefore, role confusion becomes the main psychological issue experienced by Harriet Smith in the novel.

##### **2.1.1. Dependence on Others in Making Important Decisions**

One of the earliest signs that Harriet Smith experiences role confusion is her dependence on others when making important decisions. Throughout *Emma*, Harriet often depends on Emma Woodhouse's opinions instead of trusting her own

judgment. Rather than making decisions independently, she follows Emma's advice about friendship, social status, and romantic relationships. This dependence shows that Harriet has not developed a clear sense of identity and becomes one of the main signs of her role confusion.

From Harriet's first appearance in the novel, Jane Austen describes her as a kind and gentle young woman who easily depends on other people's guidance. Emma describes Harriet by saying.

“Harriet certainly was not clever, but she had a sweet, docile, grateful disposition; was totally free from conceit, and only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to.” (Austen, 1815, p. 30)

This quotation shows that Harriet does not have much confidence in making her own decisions. The phrase "only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to" means that Harriet prefers to follow people she admires instead of trusting her own opinions. This characteristic is not only a sign of her kindness but also shows that she lacks independence. Harriet depends on others because she has not yet developed a strong understanding of who she is. As a result, she becomes easily influenced by people around her.

This behavior can be explained through Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Erikson (1968) explains that during the stage of Identity versus Role Confusion, individuals need to explore different experiences before developing their own values, beliefs, and life goals. Through this process, they learn to make decisions independently. Harriet, however, does not go through this process. Instead of exploring her own identity, she prefers to rely on the

opinions of others. Therefore, her dependence is not simply part of her personality but also an early sign that she is experiencing role confusion. Harriet's dependence becomes clearer after Emma decides to make Harriet her close friend. Emma immediately believes that she should improve Harriet and guide every aspect of her life. Emma says:

“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.” (Austen, 1815, p. 27)

This quotation shows that Emma wants to do more than simply help Harriet. She also wants to shape Harriet's identity. The phrase "she would form her opinions" suggests that Emma intends to create Harriet's way of thinking instead of allowing Harriet to develop her own opinions. Emma believes that Harriet needs someone to guide her because she is unable to decide what is best for herself.

Harriet accepts Emma's influence without questioning it. She admires Emma's intelligence, confidence, and higher social status. Because of this admiration, Harriet believes that Emma always knows what is right. Instead of thinking carefully about Emma's advice or considering her own feelings, Harriet follows Emma's opinions. Gradually, Harriet begins to depend on Emma in making important decisions, and this prevents her from developing her own identity.

According to Erikson (1968), identity develops when individuals explore different possibilities and make personal commitments based on their own

experiences. Harriet does not experience this process because Emma makes many important decisions for her. As a result, Harriet builds her identity based on Emma's expectations rather than her own values. This shows that Harriet has difficulty separating her own wishes from the influence of another person, which is one of the characteristics of role confusion.

Harriet's dependence becomes even more obvious when Emma persuades her to reject Robert Martin's marriage proposal. At first, Harriet sincerely admires Robert Martin because he is kind, honest, and respectful. However, after Emma repeatedly tells Harriet that Robert's social position is too low for her, Harriet begins to question her own feelings. Although she originally believes that Robert would be a good husband, she eventually accepts Emma's opinion instead. Harriet's dependence is clearly shown in her response:

“However, I do not mean to set up my opinion against your's...”  
(Austen, 1815, p. 36)

This statement shows that Harriet chooses to put Emma's opinion above her own. Instead of defending her feelings or making her own decision, she openly admits that she does not want to disagree with Emma. This quotation demonstrates that Harriet lacks confidence in her own judgment and believes Emma's opinion is more reliable than hers. As a result, Harriet's decision is based on Emma's approval instead of her own feelings.

From Erikson's perspective, this behavior reflects role confusion because Harriet has not developed a stable sense of identity. People who experience role confusion often depend on others to guide their decisions because they are unsure

of themselves. Harriet shows this pattern throughout the novel. Her decisions about friendship, marriage, and social relationships are mostly influenced by Emma rather than by her own judgment. Therefore, Harriet's dependence is not simply a passive personality trait but also a clear sign that she has not yet formed an independent identity.

In conclusion, Harriet's dependence on others in making important decisions is one of the strongest signs of her role confusion. From the beginning of the novel, Harriet prefers to follow other people's guidance instead of trusting her own judgment. Emma's influence becomes stronger as the story develops, leading Harriet to ignore her own opinions and rely on Emma's decisions. According to Erikson's theory, this behavior shows that Harriet has not yet developed a stable identity or enough confidence to make independent life choices. Therefore, her dependence on Emma becomes one of the strongest indicators of the role confusion she experiences throughout the novel.

### **2.1.2. Uncertainty about Her Social Identity**

Another important sign of Harriet Smith's role confusion is her uncertainty about her social identity. According to Erikson (1968), people need to understand who they are and where they belong in society in order to develop a stable identity. Family background, social environment, and personal experiences help individuals build this understanding. However, Harriet does not know who her parents are or what social class she belongs to. This uncertainty makes it difficult for Harriet to understand herself and easily accepts other people's opinions about her identity.

At the beginning of the novel, Jane Austen clearly shows that Harriet has no knowledge of her family background. When Emma tries to learn about Harriet's parents, Harriet is unable to provide any information.

“Her first attempts at usefulness were in an endeavour to find out who were the parents, but Harriet could not tell. She was ready to tell everything in her power, but on this subject questions were vain. Emma was obliged to fancy what she liked—but she could never believe that in the same situation she should not have discovered the truth. Harriet had no penetration. She had been satisfied to hear and believe just what Mrs. Goddard chose to tell her; and looked no farther.” (Emma, 1815, p. 31)

This quotation shows that Harriet does not know who her parents are and has never tried to discover the truth. The sentence "Harriet could not tell" explains that she has no information about her family, while "looked no farther" suggests that she simply accepts what Mrs. Goddard tells her without asking further questions. Harriet's unknown parentage contributes to her uncertainty about her social position and identity. This uncertainty is reflected in her tendency to rely on Emma's opinions when making decisions and evaluating her own choices.

According to Erikson (1968), identity develops when people are able to connect their past with their present and future. Harriet cannot do this because she does not know her family history. Without this important part of her identity, she becomes unsure about her place in society. As a result, she is easily influenced by others who try to define who she should be. Emma quickly fills this uncertainty with her own assumption. Instead of encouraging Harriet to accept her real situation, Emma convinces Harriet that she must be the daughter of a gentleman.

“There can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter, and you must support your claim to that station by everything within your own power.” (Austen, 1815, p. 36)

Emma's statement changes the way Harriet sees herself. Although there is no evidence about Harriet's family background, Emma confidently tells her that she belongs to the gentry. The phrase "support your claim to that station" encourages Harriet to behave like a gentlewoman even though her real social position is still unknown. Instead of helping Harriet discover her true identity, Emma creates a new identity for her based only on her own assumptions.

Harriet accepts Emma's opinion without questioning it. She gradually believes that Emma is right and begins to think that she belongs to a higher social class. Rather than trying to understand her real identity, Harriet allows Emma to decide who she should become. Erikson explains that people experiencing role confusion often accept identities given by others because they have not yet formed a clear understanding of themselves. Harriet's willingness to accept Emma's assumption shows that she depends on Emma to define her identity. Emma's influence becomes even stronger when she advises Harriet to be careful in choosing her friends because of her uncertain birth.

“The misfortune of your birth ought to make you particularly careful as to your associates.” (Austen, 1815, p. 36)

This quotation shows the contradiction that Harriet experiences. Emma tells Harriet that she is probably the daughter of a gentleman, but at the same time she reminds Harriet that her birth is uncertain. Because of this, Harriet becomes confused about where she belongs. She no longer feels comfortable with the Martin family, yet she is not fully accepted as a member of the upper class. As a result, Harriet is caught between two social groups without clearly belonging to either of them.

According to Erikson, role confusion occurs when people cannot combine different parts of their identity into one stable sense of self. Harriet experiences this problem because she cannot decide whether she belongs to the simple life she has always known or to the higher social class imagined by Emma. Instead of developing her identity through her own experiences, Harriet continues to see herself through Emma's opinions.

This uncertainty also affects Harriet's expectations about marriage. After believing that she belongs to a higher social class, she begins to think that Robert Martin is no longer a suitable husband, even though she truly loves and respects him. Instead, she develops feelings for Mr. Elton and later Mr. Knightley because they appear to fit the higher social position Emma has created for her. These changes are based more on Harriet's uncertain identity than on her genuine feelings.

In conclusion, Harriet's uncertainty about her social identity is one of the clearest signs of her role confusion. Because she does not know her family background, she cannot clearly understand where she belongs in society. This uncertainty makes her easily accept Emma's opinions instead of developing her own understanding of herself. According to Erikson's theory, Harriet fails to build a stable identity because her self-image depends on other people's expectations rather than on her own experiences. Therefore, her uncertainty about her social identity becomes an important indicator of the role confusion she experiences throughout Emma.

### **2.1.3. Low Self-Confidence and Lack of Independent Judgment**

Another important sign of Harriet Smith's role confusion is her low self-confidence and lack of independent judgment. According to Erikson (1968), people who have not developed a stable identity often doubt themselves when making decisions. Instead of trusting their own thoughts and experiences, they rely on the opinions of people they believe are wiser or have a higher social status. Throughout *Emma*, Harriet shows this behavior many times. She rarely trusts her own judgment and often changes her opinions after listening to Emma Woodhouse. This shows that Harriet lacks confidence in herself and has not yet developed an independent identity.

Harriet's lack of confidence can first be seen when Emma criticizes Robert Martin after meeting him. Before this, Harriet had spoken positively about Robert Martin and admired his kindness, honesty, and good character. However, Emma immediately points out that Robert is not as refined as gentlemen such as Mr. Knightley or Mr. Elton. Instead of defending her own opinion, Harriet quickly agrees with Emma.

“To be sure,” said Harriet, in a mortified voice, “he is not so genteel as real gentlemen.” (Austen, 1815, p. 38)

This quotation shows how easily Harriet loses confidence in her own judgment. The phrase “in a mortified voice” suggests that Harriet feels embarrassed after hearing Emma's criticism. Although she had previously admired

Robert Martin, she begins to doubt her own opinion once Emma points out his lower social status. Instead of trusting her own experience with Robert, Harriet accepts Emma's judgment. This shows that Harriet depends more on Emma's opinion than on her own understanding.

According to Erikson, people with a stable identity are able to keep their own beliefs even when others disagree with them. Harriet, however, shows the opposite behavior. She changes her opinion very quickly whenever Emma disagrees with her. Rather than thinking carefully about Emma's arguments, Harriet assumes that Emma must be right. This shows that Harriet lacks confidence in her own judgment and finds it difficult to make decisions independently. Emma continues to strengthen Harriet's doubts by comparing Robert Martin with gentlemen from a higher social class. Emma asks Harriet:

“Do not you begin to feel that now? Were not you struck? I am sure you must have been struck by his awkward look and abrupt manner, and the uncouthness of a voice which I heard to be wholly unmodulated as I stood here.” (Austen, 1815, p. 38–39)

Emma's questions are not meant to hear Harriet's real opinion. Instead, they encourage Harriet to agree with Emma's view. By repeatedly pointing out Robert Martin's weaknesses, Emma leads Harriet to question her own first impression. Gradually, Harriet begins to judge Robert Martin according to Emma's standards instead of her own experiences.

This situation shows Harriet's lack of independent judgment. At first, Harriet values Robert Martin because he is kind, honest, and caring. However, after listening to Emma, she starts paying more attention to social status and polite

manners than to personal character. Harriet's opinion changes because she wants Emma's approval, not because her own experiences have changed. According to Erikson, people who experience role confusion often rely on other people's opinions because they are uncertain about their own values. Harriet's behavior clearly reflects this condition.

Harriet's lack of confidence also appears when Emma suggests that Mr. Elton may have feelings for her. Instead of questioning Emma's interpretation, Harriet quickly begins to believe it.

“Harriet blushed and smiled, and said she had always thought Mr. Elton very agreeable.” (Austen, 1815, p. 41)

Harriet's reaction shows how easily her feelings are influenced by Emma. Before Emma mentioned the possibility, Harriet had never clearly expressed romantic feelings for Mr. Elton. However, once Emma repeatedly suggests that Mr. Elton admires her, Harriet begins to believe it. She starts to see Mr. Elton's actions as signs of affection because she trusts Emma's interpretation rather than her own observations.

This behavior also shows that Harriet is unsure of her own feelings. Instead of understanding her emotions by herself, she depends on Emma's opinion to decide how she should feel. Erikson explains that people develop a stable identity when they are able to make personal choices based on their own experiences and beliefs. Harriet fails to do this because her emotions and decisions are strongly influenced by Emma. As a result, she becomes less confident in herself and more dependent on other people's approval.

Throughout the novel, Harriet repeatedly changes her opinions whenever they are different from Emma's. Her admiration for Emma makes her believe that Emma is always right, even when Emma's advice conflicts with Harriet's own experiences. Because of this, Harriet gradually loses confidence in her own ability to judge people and situations. Instead of trusting herself, she becomes increasingly dependent on Emma's approval before making important decisions.

In conclusion, Harriet's low self-confidence and lack of independent judgment are important signs of her role confusion. She often doubts her own opinions, easily accepts Emma's ideas, and depends on Emma's approval when making decisions. According to Erikson's theory, this behavior shows that Harriet has not yet developed a stable identity because she cannot rely on her own beliefs and judgment. Therefore, her lack of confidence becomes another clear indication of the role confusion she experiences throughout Emma.

#### **2.1.4. Instability in Romantic Aspirations and Future Goals**

Another important sign of Harriet Smith's role confusion is the instability of her romantic aspirations and future goals. According to Erikson (1968), people who have not developed a stable identity often find it difficult to make lasting commitments because they are still unsure about themselves and their future. As a result, their goals and relationships easily change depending on other people's influence rather than their own wishes. Throughout Emma, Harriet shows this pattern. Her romantic interest changes from Robert Martin to Mr. Elton, then to Mr. Knightley, and finally returns to Robert Martin. These changes do not happen because Harriet truly understands what she wants, but because she is easily influenced by Emma Woodhouse.

At the beginning of the novel, Harriet genuinely likes Robert Martin. She admires him because he is kind, hardworking, and treats her with respect. Her feelings grow naturally from her own experiences with him. However, Emma believes that Robert Martin is not a suitable husband because he is only a farmer. Emma convinces Harriet that she deserves someone from a higher social class. As Harriet listens to Emma's advice, she begins to question her own feelings and changes her expectations about marriage. Emma deliberately encourages Harriet to pay attention to Mr. Elton because she believes he would be a better match.

“Mr. Elton was the very person fixed on by Emma for driving the young farmer out of Harriet's head.” (Austen, 1815, p. 41)

This quotation shows that Harriet's romantic hopes are strongly influenced by Emma. Emma intentionally tries to make Harriet forget Robert Martin and focus on Mr. Elton instead. The phrase "driving the young farmer out of Harriet's head" clearly shows Emma's effort to replace Harriet's original feelings with new expectations. Rather than making her own choice, Harriet slowly follows Emma's opinion about who would be the right husband for her.

Instead of asking herself whether her feelings have really changed, Harriet begins to believe that Mr. Elton is the right person simply because Emma says so. This shows that Harriet's decisions about love are based more on Emma's ideas than on her own feelings. According to Erikson, people develop a stable identity when they make personal commitments based on their own values and experiences. Harriet, however, easily gives up her feelings for Robert Martin without carefully thinking about what she truly wants. As a result, her romantic goals become unstable because they depend on other people's influence. Emma is

also confident that Harriet will quickly develop feelings for Mr. Elton if she believes that he admires her. Emma thinks:

“She had already satisfied herself that he thought Harriet a beautiful girl, which she trusted, with such frequent meetings at Hartfield, was foundation enough on his side; and on Harriet’s there could be little doubt that the idea of being preferred by him would have all the usual weight and.” (Austen, 1815, p. 41–42)

This quotation shows that Emma already expects Harriet to fall in love with Mr. Elton. Emma does not ask Harriet how she really feels. Instead, she assumes that Harriet will naturally like any man who appears to admire her. Harriet eventually believes that Mr. Elton has feelings for her, even though he never directly says so. Once again, Harriet accepts Emma's interpretation without questioning it.

This situation shows that Harriet has difficulty making stable emotional commitments. Instead of letting her feelings grow naturally, she depends on Emma's opinions to decide who she should love. Erikson explains that people who experience role confusion often struggle to make lasting commitments because they are still uncertain about their identity. Harriet's changing feelings toward Mr. Elton reflect this uncertainty. Rather than following her own emotions, she follows the expectations created by Emma.

Harriet's unstable romantic goals become even clearer after Mr. Elton rejects her. Later, Harriet begins to believe that Mr. Knightley may also have feelings for her. Because Mr. Knightley is kind and always treats her with respect, Harriet interprets his behavior as romantic interest. However, this belief is once again based on misunderstanding rather than reality. Like her feelings for Mr.

Elton, Harriet's hope for Mr. Knightley grows from her uncertain understanding of herself and her future instead of clear evidence.

These repeated changes show that Harriet does not yet know what she truly wants in life. Her expectations about marriage continue to change because they are influenced by Emma and by changes in her social situation, not because she has carefully reflected on her own feelings. As a result, marriage becomes more than a personal relationship; it becomes a way for Harriet to find the identity that she has not yet developed.

According to Erikson, this behavior reflects role confusion because Harriet is unable to make stable commitments based on her own values. People with a strong identity are generally able to remain committed to their decisions even when they face pressure from others. Harriet, however, repeatedly changes her hopes for the future because she has not yet developed an independent sense of self. Her uncertainty about her identity is therefore reflected in her uncertainty about marriage, which was one of the most important life decisions for women during the Regency period.

At the end of the novel, Harriet finally accepts Robert Martin's second marriage proposal after realizing her true social position and recognizing her genuine feelings for him. Unlike her earlier decisions, this choice is no longer based on Emma's expectations but on Harriet's own understanding of herself. Although this suggests that Harriet has started to develop a more stable identity, the many changes in her romantic aspirations throughout the novel clearly show that she experienced role confusion for a long time before reaching that point.

In conclusion, Harriet's changing romantic interests and future goals are another important sign of her role confusion. Her movement from Robert Martin to Mr. Elton, then to Mr. Knightley, and finally back to Robert Martin shows more than changing romantic feelings. It reflects her uncertainty about who she is and what kind of future she wants. According to Erikson's theory, Harriet's inability to make stable commitments shows that she has not yet developed a clear and independent identity. Therefore, her unstable romantic aspirations become one of the strongest signs of the role confusion she experiences throughout Emma.

#### **2.1.4. Excessive Need for Social Acceptance**

Another important sign of Harriet Smith's role confusion is her excessive need for social acceptance. According to Erikson (1968), people who have not developed a stable identity often depend on other people's approval to feel confident about themselves. Instead of valuing themselves based on their own beliefs, they seek acceptance from society to feel important. Throughout Emma, Harriet shows this behavior. After becoming close friends with Emma Woodhouse, she becomes more concerned with being accepted by the upper class than with staying true to her own feelings and relationships. This growing desire for social acceptance shows that Harriet is still unsure about her identity and depends on other people's approval.

At the beginning of the novel, Harriet is satisfied with her simple life at Mrs. Goddard's school and enjoys her friendship with the Martin family. However, after becoming Emma's close companion, Harriet begins to see social status differently. Emma encourages her to believe that she belongs to a higher social

class and should spend time only with people of similar status.

“The intimacy between her and Emma must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of goodwill; and, fortunately, what ought to be, and must be, seemed already beginning, and in the most gradual, natural manner.” (Austen, 1815, p.592)

Although this quotation appears near the end of the novel, it reflects how much Harriet has changed throughout the story. Emma realizes that Harriet has developed expectations that go beyond the limits of their friendship. Harriet's close relationship with Emma has made her want to be part of Emma's social world. As a result, when their friendship begins to change, Harriet also loses the social acceptance that she had been seeking. This shows that Harriet's identity has become closely connected to Emma and the upper-class society she represents.

Harriet's need for social acceptance can also be seen in the way she slowly distances herself from the Martin family. Before meeting Emma, Harriet genuinely liked the Martins and enjoyed spending time with them. Harriet's response shows that Emma has already influenced the way she sees the Martin family. At first, Harriet says that she still cares about the Miss Martins and does not want to lose their friendship. However, she quickly accepts Emma's opinion instead of trusting her own feelings.

“To be sure. Yes. Not that I think Mr. Martin would ever marry anybody but what had had some education and been very well brought up. However, I do not mean to set up my opinion against your's and I am sure I shall not wish for the acquaintance of his wife. I shall always have a great regard for the Miss Martins, especially Elizabeth, and should be very sorry to give them up, for they are quite as well educated as me. But if he marries a very ignorant, vulgar woman, certainly I had better not visit her, if I can help it.” (Austen, 1815, p. 36)

This quotation shows that Harriet is beginning to judge people based on their social status instead of their personal qualities. Although she admits that she still respects the Miss Martins, she says, "I do not mean to set up my opinion against your's," which shows that she values Emma's opinion more than her own. Harriet also agrees that she should avoid Mr. Martin's future wife if she is considered socially inferior. This shows that Harriet is willing to change her relationships because she wants to follow Emma's standards. Instead of choosing her friends based on kindness and loyalty, she starts choosing them based on social class.

According to Erikson (1968), this behavior shows that Harriet has not yet developed a stable identity. She does not decide for herself which relationships are important. Instead, she depends on Emma's opinions to decide who is suitable to be her friend. Harriet becomes more concerned with being accepted by people of higher social status than with maintaining the friendships that truly make her happy. This shows that her decisions are guided by her desire for social acceptance rather than by her own values.

## **2.2. The Causes of Harriet Smith's Role Confusion**

This section discusses the causes of Harriet Smith's role confusion in Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815). Throughout the novel, Harriet faces several problems that make it difficult for her to develop a clear sense of identity. Her unknown family background, uncertain social status, and Emma Woodhouse's strong influence affect the way Harriet sees herself and makes important decisions. These factors may contribute to Harriet's dependence on other people instead of trusting her own

judgment. As a result, she struggles to understand who she really is and what role she should have in society. Therefore, this section explains the main causes of Harriet Smith's role confusion based on Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

### **2.2.1. Unknown Parentage and Lack of Family Identity**

One of the main causes of Harriet Smith's role confusion is her unknown parentage and lack of family identity. According to Erikson (1968), people develop a stable identity by understanding their personal background, family, and place in society. Family gives individuals a sense of belonging and helps them understand who they are. Harriet, however, grows up without knowing who her parents are or what social class she belongs to. This uncertainty makes it more difficult for Harriet to develop a stable sense of identity. As a result, she becomes tends to rely on other people's opinions, particularly Emma's, when making decisions about herself.

Jane Austen introduces Harriet as a young woman whose family background is unknown. Emma becomes curious about Harriet's parents, but Harriet cannot provide any information.

“Her first attempts at usefulness were in an endeavour to find out who were the parents, but Harriet could not tell. She was ready to tell everything in her power, but on this subject questions were vain. Emma was obliged to fancy what she liked but she could never believe that in the same situation she should not have discovered the truth. Harriet had no penetration. She had been satisfied to hear and believe just what Mrs. Goddard chose to tell her; and looked no farther.” (Austen, 1815, p. 31)

This quotation shows that Harriet knows almost nothing about her own

family. The sentence "Harriet could not tell" shows that she cannot answer questions about her parents, while "looked no farther" suggests that she never tries to discover the truth. Instead, she simply accepts whatever Mrs. Goddard tells her. Because Harriet has no clear knowledge of her background, she has no strong sense of where she belongs. This becomes the first reason why she struggles to develop a stable identity.

Harriet's uncertain background also affects the way other people see her. Since nobody knows who her parents are, her social position remains uncertain. Emma even feels free to imagine Harriet's background because there is no clear information about it. Harriet does not question these assumptions because she has no evidence to support her own understanding of herself. As a result, other people's opinions become more influential than her own.

The importance of Harriet's uncertain birth can also be seen when Emma considers whether Harriet is suitable for Mr. Elton. Emma believes that Harriet's unknown family background is not a serious problem because it still leaves open the possibility that she was born into a respectable family.

“Mr. Elton's situation was most suitable, quite the gentleman himself, and without low connexions; at the same time, not of any family that could fairly object to the doubtful birth of Harriet.”  
(Austen, 1815, p. 41)

This quotation shows that Harriet's birth is described as "the doubtful birth of Harriet." The word "doubtful" clearly indicates that her family background is uncertain. Instead of being recognized for her own qualities, Harriet is judged by the uncertainty of her birth. This makes it difficult for her to understand her own

place in society. Because her identity is unclear, she becomes more willing to accept the identity imagined by Emma.

According to Erikson (1968), identity develops when people have a clear understanding of their past and can connect it with their present and future. Harriet cannot do this because she has no knowledge of her parents or family history. Without a clear personal background, she cannot develop a strong sense of self. Instead, she depends on other people's opinions to define who she is. This condition makes her more vulnerable to role confusion throughout the novel.

Therefore, Harriet's unknown parentage and lack of family identity become the first cause of her role confusion. Her uncertain background leaves her without a clear understanding of who she is or where she belongs. Because she lacks this foundation, she becomes easily influenced by others and allows them to shape her identity. According to Erikson's theory, the absence of a stable family identity prevents Harriet from developing a secure sense of self and becomes the starting point of the role confusion she experiences throughout *Emma*.

### **2.2.2. Emma Woodhouse's Dominant Influence**

Another important factor that causes Harriet Smith's role confusion is Emma Woodhouse's strong influence on her life. Throughout the novel, Emma does not simply become Harriet's friend. She also takes control of Harriet's decisions and believes that she knows what is best for her. Because Harriet admires Emma and lacks confidence in herself, she easily accepts Emma's opinions. According to Erikson (1968), people who have not developed a stable identity often depend on someone they admire to guide their decisions. Harriet

shows this pattern because she allows Emma to shape the way she thinks about herself and her future. Emma's influence can be clearly seen when she compares Robert Martin with gentlemen from the upper class. Emma repeatedly encourages Harriet to notice the differences between them until Harriet begins to change her own opinion.

“I think, Harriet, since your acquaintance with us, you have been repeatedly in the company of some such very real gentlemen, that you must yourself be struck with the difference in Mr. Martin. At Hartfield, you have had very good specimens of well educated, well bred men. I should be surprized if, after seeing them, you could be in company with Mr. Martin again without perceiving him to be a very inferior creature—and rather wondering at yourself for having ever thought him at all agreeable. Do not you begin to feel that now? Were not you struck?” (Austen, 1815, p. 38)

This quotation shows how Emma slowly changes Harriet's opinion. Instead of asking Harriet what she really thinks, Emma tells her what she should think about Robert Martin. Emma compares him with upper-class gentlemen and expects Harriet to agree with her. By asking questions such as "Do not you begin to feel that now?", Emma pressures Harriet to doubt her own feelings and accept Emma's judgment. This shows that Emma controls Harriet's way of thinking rather than helping her make her own decisions. Harriet quickly begins to follow Emma's opinion. After listening to Emma's criticism, Harriet no longer judges Robert Martin based on his kindness but on his social manners.

“Certainly, he is not like Mr. Knightley. He has not such a fine air and way of walking as Mr. Knightley. I see the difference plain enough. But Mr. Knightley is so very fine a man!” (Austen, 1815, p. 39)

Harriet's response shows that Emma's influence has already changed the

way she thinks. Earlier, Harriet admired Robert Martin because he was kind and caring. After Emma compares him with gentlemen from the upper class, Harriet immediately agrees that there is a clear difference. Instead of trusting her own experience, Harriet adopts Emma's standards. This shows that Harriet depends on Emma's opinion rather than forming her own judgment. Emma's influence can also be seen in the way Harriet begins to develop feelings for Mr. Elton. After Emma repeatedly suggests that Mr. Elton may be interested in Harriet, Harriet slowly starts to believe it. Emma often praises Mr. Elton and interprets his actions as signs of affection toward Harriet. Because Harriet admires Emma and trusts her judgment, she does not question Emma's interpretation. Instead of carefully thinking about her own feelings, Harriet accepts Emma's opinion and begins to see Mr. Elton as a suitable romantic partner. This shows that Harriet's emotions are influenced more by Emma's ideas than by her own personal experiences.

“Harriet blushed and smiled, and said she had always thought Mr. Elton very agreeable.” (Austen, 1815, p. 41)

This quotation shows how easily Harriet accepts Emma's influence. Harriet's reaction, "blushed and smiled," suggests that she becomes excited after hearing Emma's opinion about Mr. Elton. She then says that she had always thought Mr. Elton was "very agreeable." Although Harriet makes it sound as if these feelings had existed before, the narrator shows that her interest becomes more obvious only after Emma repeatedly encourages the idea that Mr. Elton admires her. Instead of examining the situation for herself, Harriet quickly adopts Emma's interpretation. She does not ask whether Mr. Elton has actually shown

any clear signs of affection or whether her feelings are genuine. Rather, she allows Emma's confidence and assumptions to shape the way she understands her own emotions.

Emma's behavior demonstrates her dominant role in Harriet's emotional development. Rather than allowing Harriet to form her own opinions through personal experience, Emma frequently interprets events before Harriet has the opportunity to do so herself. Harriet rarely questions Emma's advice because she believes that Emma is more intelligent, more experienced, and belongs to a higher social class. As a result, Harriet gradually loses confidence in her own judgment and becomes increasingly dependent on Emma's guidance. Even her romantic feelings begin to reflect Emma's expectations instead of her own independent choices.

According to Erikson (1968), identity develops when individuals actively explore different experiences, make their own decisions, and learn from the consequences of those decisions. Through this process, people gradually develop confidence in their own values and beliefs. Harriet, however, does not experience this healthy process because Emma often makes important judgments for her. Emma decides who Harriet should admire, who she should avoid, and what kind of future she should pursue. Harriet simply follows Emma's guidance without critically evaluating it. Consequently, Harriet becomes emotionally dependent on Emma and fails to build an independent sense of self.

Therefore, Emma's influence extends beyond giving simple advice. Emma gradually shapes Harriet's thoughts, emotions, and expectations about love and

social relationships. Harriet's willingness to accept Emma's interpretation without question demonstrates that she has not yet developed the confidence to trust her own feelings. According to Erikson's theory, this dependence on another person's judgment is one of the main causes of role confusion because it prevents individuals from forming their own identity. In Harriet's case, Emma's dominant influence becomes an important factor that strengthens her role confusion throughout *Emma*.

### **2.2.3. Ambiguity of Social Class**

Another important factor contributing to Harriet Smith's role confusion is the ambiguity of her social class. In *Emma*, social status plays a crucial role in determining an individual's relationships, marriage prospects, and position within society. Unlike most of the major characters, Harriet occupies an uncertain social position because her parentage is unknown. She is neither fully accepted as a member of the gentry nor identified as part of the farming class. This ambiguous position prevents Harriet from establishing a clear understanding of where she belongs. According to Erikson (1968), identity develops through a stable integration of personal background and social roles. When individuals are uncertain about the social role they should occupy, they are more likely to experience confusion in defining themselves. Harriet's uncertain class identity therefore becomes an important factor underlying her role confusion.

Emma is among the first characters to interpret Harriet's uncertain background as evidence that she belongs to a higher social class. Instead of encouraging Harriet to accept the life she has always known, Emma convinces her

that she should behave as the daughter of a gentleman.

“There can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter, and you must support your claim to that station by everything within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you.”(Austen, 1815, p. 36)

Emma's statement demonstrates how Harriet's uncertain social status becomes the basis for constructing a new identity. The phrase “there can be no doubt” reflects Emma's confidence, although no evidence is provided to confirm Harriet's family background. Emma's conclusion is based entirely on assumption rather than fact. Nevertheless, Harriet readily accepts this interpretation because she has no definite knowledge of her own origins. As a result, Harriet begins to evaluate herself according to an imagined social position rather than her actual circumstances.

This situation illustrates the psychological consequences of social ambiguity. Since Harriet does not possess a recognized family name or a clearly defined class identity, she lacks an objective standard by which to evaluate Emma's assumptions. Erikson argues that identity formation requires consistency between an individual's self-perception and the social roles recognized by society. Harriet, however, occupies an uncertain position between different social classes. Consequently, she becomes vulnerable to adopting identities imposed by others because she cannot confidently determine her own place within the social hierarchy.

The influence of this ambiguous social position becomes increasingly evident when Emma persuades Harriet to reconsider her relationship with Robert

Martin. Although Harriet has genuine affection for Robert and respects his family, Emma repeatedly reminds her that such an attachment would be inconsistent with the social position of a gentleman's daughter. Emma states:

“I want to see you permanently well connected, and to that end it will be advisable to have as few odd acquaintance as may be.”  
(Austen, 1815, p. 36)

Emma's words reveal that social class, rather than personal compatibility, becomes the primary consideration in determining Harriet's relationships. Emma encourages Harriet to distance herself from the Martin family not because they lack moral character, but because they do not belong to the social circle Emma believes Harriet should enter. Consequently, Harriet gradually begins to judge herself and others according to social status instead of personal values. Harriet's response further demonstrates how easily she internalizes Emma's view of class.

“However, I do not mean to set up my opinion against your's—and I am sure I shall not wish for the acquaintance of his wife.”(Austen, 1815, p. 36)

By abandoning her own opinion, Harriet also abandons the social relationships that had previously formed part of her identity. Before meeting Emma, Harriet feels comfortable visiting Abbey-Mill Farm and considers the Martin sisters among her closest friends. After accepting Emma's interpretation of her social position, she begins to believe that maintaining these relationships would lower her status. This shift does not result from Harriet's own reflection but from her uncertainty about the class to which she belongs.

From Erikson's perspective, this condition reflects a failure to integrate

social roles into a coherent identity. Individuals experiencing role confusion often struggle to reconcile personal experiences with the expectations imposed by society. Harriet's uncertainty regarding her social class prevents her from making this integration successfully. Rather than forming an identity based on her own experiences with the Martin family, she attempts to adopt the identity expected of a woman whom Emma imagines to be a gentleman's daughter. This creates an internal conflict between Harriet's genuine emotional attachments and the social role she is encouraged to perform.

Furthermore, Austen uses Harriet's character to illustrate how rigid class distinctions in Regency society can influence personal identity. Harriet's uncertain parentage places her in a vulnerable position where her social value depends largely on other people's interpretations rather than on her own achievements or character. Because her place within society remains undefined, Harriet continuously adjusts her behavior in response to changing expectations. This inability to establish a stable social identity contributes significantly to her role confusion throughout the novel.

Therefore, the ambiguity of Harriet's social class functions as an important cause of her role confusion. Her uncertain position within the social hierarchy leaves her without a clear understanding of who she is or where she belongs. Combined with Emma's influence, this uncertainty encourages Harriet to construct her identity according to assumptions about social status rather than through an independent understanding of herself. Consequently, Harriet's confusion is not only psychological but also deeply rooted in the rigid class structure that shapes social life in Emma.