

Class distinctio



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

class in society. Dairy prides himself on being a gentleman with all the duties and obligations that his status entails in *Pride and Prejudice*. Caroline Bentley also keeps reminding him that he would be lowering himself by associating with the Bennetts family; they are connected with trade. What she forgets is that the source of their family fortune on which their status is founded is trade.

Emma is a rich woman who does not want to associate with the middle class in *Emma*. Janet Todd argues that, "Emma wants Highborn to remain as almost feudal, stationary through time, so that she will always be 'paramount'." (96) This suggests that social class is very important to her and this portrays the life of the aristocrats in *Student's day* who were opposed to change. Jane Austen questions just what it is that makes a true gentleman or a lady. Social ann. must be part of it but intruding by the example of Lady Catherine. Her domineering superiority and sense of her own dignity is evident in all she says and does.

Her unquestionable authority and right to control people's lives is evident when she confronts Elizabeth about her rumored engagement to Mr. Dairy as she says, "your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us" (186). It is obvious that because of her status, she thinks that she can treat other people the way she wants. She thinks that Elizabeth is not fit to marry Mr. Dairy because they do not belong to the same social class but her daughter does. In response to her confrontation, Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine that "Dairy is a gentleman; am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (186).

However, Elizabeth is not dissuaded by Lady Catering's threats and status. Juliet Macerates remarks that, "so much suggests that for Austin there is nothing divine about royalty", and not much that is special about peers. In fact characters with titles - or 'handles to their names' as the Victorians used to say - are seldom admirable in the novels" (1 16). Even though Lady Catherine holds a title, she is morally and intellectually not worthy. It is only the likes of Mr. Collins who want to climb up the social ladder who succumb to her every whim, as she enjoys Mr. Collision's flattery and his enthusiasm to give it.

In an attempt to remain in her good books and to keep the company of the likes of Lady Catherine, Mr. Collins even knows how many windows Risings estate has. He reveals his self- importance in extraordinary long-winded speeches and ponderous attempts at social grace. Even though Lady Catherine thought of herself as Ewing superior, her tastes are offensive and pretentious. This is because she lacks inborn intelligence and breeding. Her attitudes and behavior offer an illuminating contrast to Mr. Dairy. Who does not wish to show off like other young men in his shoes.

However, like his contemporaries, he despises the lower social class. This becomes evident when he advises Mr. Bentley to end his relationship with Jane. When Elizabeth accuses him that he had not behaved in a gentleman-like manner, he realizes how "selfish and overbearing" he has been. Through Elizabethan prompting, he learns that while status is important, true breeding is not dependent on rank. Here Jane Austin wants us to realist that, even though the gentry are from a higher class they are not different from

the other classes. It is not superiority that makes one a Lady or a gentlemen but it is compassion.

In Emma, Mr. Knightly is a true gentlemen because he does not pride himself on his rank. Unlike other status-conscious people of his rank, he walks instead of riding in his carriage. His carriage is only used to transport Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax. He manages his own estate and he does not look down upon other people as we see him in conversing with his tenant Robert Martin. In contrast in Sense and Sensibility, Mr. Dashwood, is deficient of the dedication that makes good curators and ethical aristocrats of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightly.

Through class distinction, Jane Austen also draws attention to the unfairness of primogeniture, which unfairly privileges one family member to inherit the whole estate, instead of dividing it equally between siblings as would be the normal thing to do today. This allowed the first born son to inherit everything while others remained with nothing. This was done so as to preserve the state and the family name, because if the estate was to be divided then it would eventually come to an end.

In Pride and Prejudice, the Bennett girls are to be turned out of Longbourn at the death of their father, because the estate has to be inherited by a male relation who will keep it the family. Similarly in Sense and Sensibility, the Dashwood girls are made homeless because the old gentleman Mr. Dashwood wants the family estate to go to a male heir who will pass it on to his sons. This then renders the female siblings to be inferior to their male

siblings as Juliet Master argues, " one might suppose that the filings in a single family would be almost by definition of the same rank.

But even here there are marked differences in status, not only between sons and daughters , but also between one son and another' (119). Not only does Jane Austin condemn the unfairness of the inheritance system, but she also expresses disapproval of the significant difference in prestige between elder daughters and younger daughters. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we see Elizabeth saying, " I think it will be had very hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share of society and amusement because the elder ay not have means or inclination to marry early.

The last born has as good a right to the pleasures Of youth as the first..... During Jane Student's time, the eldest daughter was more prestigious than her younger sisters. Jane is called Miss " Bennett" while her sisters are addressed by their first names. The younger daughters could not be out in society before the eldest. While if the younger sister got married before the eldest, she also gained superiority over her elder sisters as we see Lydia saying to her eldest sister Jane, " ah!