Class distinctio



Jane Austin critiques the way in which people put the importance of status to their actions, as we see the distinction between the gentry and trade being interwoven in her novels. In her essay on Class, Juliet Master remarks that, "Class difference was of course a fact of life for Austin, and an acuteobservation of the fine extinctions between one social level and another was a necessary part of her business as a writer of realistic fiction" (1 15). InPride and Prejudice, Mr. Collins instructs Elizabeth to dress simply, and not to try to copy the elegant attire of her high-standing hostess Lady Catherine as he says, "Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes herself and her daughter She likes to have the distinction of

but they also have to be seen. However, Jane Austin sets moral status against social status, and for her tutus has to be earned and not inherited.

rank preserved" (138). The distinctions in class are not only to be present,

In Pride and Prejudice, Elizabethan first impression of Mr. Dairy's treatment of Victims, makes his moral standards to be not worthy of his standing in society. However, when she learns about his extensive responsibilities and goodness from his servant, her opinion of him changes as Mrs. Reynolds says, He is the best landlord, and the best master, that ever lived; not like the wild young men needlewoman's commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than praise of an intelligent servant? As a rather, a landlord. A master, she considered how many people'shappinesswere his guardianship! To? How much pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow!... Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favorable to his character. "---- Jane Student's characters constantly keep reminding each other of their social

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 Bennettfamilys 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, stationery 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 Austin questions just what it is that makes a true gentlemen 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 to 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 royal¶y', and not much that is special about peers. In fact characters with tittles - 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 advices 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 e him in conversing with his tenant Robert Martin. In contrast in Sense and Sensibility, Mr. Dashboard, is deficient of the dedication that makes good curators and ethical aristocrats of Mr. Dairy and Mr. Knightly.

Through class distinction, Jane Austin also draws attention to the unfairness of primogeniture, which unfairly privileges one family member to inherited 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 Longhorn at the death oftener father, because the estate has to be inherited by a male relation who will keep it the family. Similarly in Sense and Sensibility, the Dashboard girls are made homeless because the old gentlemen Mr. Dashboard 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!