



## RESEARCH ARTICLE



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## DELIVERANCE OF EMMA'S EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL DESTINY IN JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*

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### ABSTRACT



In the 19th Century or in Austen's age social destiny was something that everyone was very interested in. It depended greatly on one's rank or class in society. One's family name and its roots as well as one's fortune are factors were considered when determining one's social destiny. For example, someone of a higher class would be more fortunate in making a good marriage; good in those days mainly meaning a comfortable marriage due to the financial situation. In *Emma*, social status seems to be very important, especially to Emma herself who says, "farmer can need none of my help, and therefore is in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it". Therefore in Emma's eyes the social destiny of a farmer would not be anything of a high standard. In 'Pride and Prejudice it is also clear that the aspect of social destiny is very important. Mrs. Bennet seems to be much occupied with her daughters' destiny as she is in agreement with the very first line of the novel, 'It is universally acknowledged that a man with a fortune must be in want of a wife'. The social destiny of Jane Fairfax and Harriet Smith are both quite similar as they both come from similar backgrounds. In order to explore the social destiny of these characters that Austen presents their background is an important aspect to consider as well as Austen's actual characterization of them, and their social destiny compared with their actual destiny in the novel.

**Keywords:** *Woodhouse, Emma, Focused, Responsibility, Tradition, Consciousness.*

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*Emma* by Jane Austen is about a girl who is twenty years old and has just matched her governess and Mr. Weston and Emma Woodhouse, who is sure that she will never marry, thinks that she could be a good match maker. So then Emma takes the challenge of finding her friend Harriet Smith a match, Harriet's origin is unknown but Emma thinks she could make a wonderful wife on day to a gentle man like Mr. Elton a village vicar so then Emma tells Harriet to reject the proposal of Robert Martin a farmer who Harriet has feelings for. Harriet admires Mr. Elton but there is one problem Mr. Elton has feelings for Emma and not her friend, that's where Emma realizes that she had been too focused on match making that she got blind sighted for the true situation. Then Frank Churchill comes to town and Emma tries to fall in love with him but she can't, but then she thinks that this would be the man for Harriet. Then Mr. Knightley gives her advice but she ignores him, but then trouble came when she realized that both Harriet and herself fall in love with him, but then at the end Emma marries Mr. Knightley and Harriet marries farmer Robert Martin.

Austen depicts her novels to show clearly the customs and traditions that people had to use in order to get married; her dissatisfaction towards all these conditions; male dominance and also the consideration of women as weak human beings with limited rights. Based on all these issues, Austen chooses different kinds of marriages, mainly based on economical interest. She was a girl whose mother had died and lived with her father, Mr. Woodhouse. Austen describes Emma to be "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence..." (Austen, 2014). Even though, it was not very common for women of the eighteenth century to stay single, without taking into account the wealth that these women possessed, again Emma showed no interest to marry.

Regarding the high economical position that Emma belonged to, Butler states that "Austen situates Emma in a superior social position in order to allow her the freedom to 'act out willful errors for which she must take entire moral responsibility'" (Butler, 1986). Being aware of the fact that Emma did

not want to marry, she got herself involved in matchmaking. Matchmaking became a part of Emma's life, which afterwards proved that it led Emma to many mistakes.

Although fiction is silent on certain biological details of life, other evidence of the time tells us of the inexorable cycle of annual pregnancies interrupted by frequent miscarriages that most married women had to go through. It is against such background that Emma Woodhouse's marriage with John Knightley becomes so significant and exceptional an event. In *Emma* Austen rewrites the traditional romantic version of femininity mainly through the figure of its heroine. Much earlier Austen had expressed her anxiety about Emma's being not so favorite with her readers and critics. Subsequently we have seen that the prime objection against Emma has actually been prompted by her transgressing the gender. But it is possible to suggest that the novel explores not only Austen's presentation of positive versions of female power but also how Emma and Knightley's equal standing are finally readjusted through their marriage, in a way which is radically different from the traditionally accepted tutor-pupil relationship between Mr and Mrs John Knightley.

Social class also dictates the social obligations between the characters, and the way in which their actions respond to these obligations reveals their character.

The novel, for instance, teases out the nuances of charity regarding class: *Emma* is charitable towards the poor, but shows little initiative in befriending the orphaned and talented Jane. The characters' use or abuse of their social standing reveals much about their kindness or cruelty. For instance, Emma's exercise of wit at the expense of the silly, but low-standing Miss Bates is condemned as cruel by Mr. Knightley because it is an abuse of her social clout. Humiliating the hapless Miss Bates sets a bad example for those in society who would follow her example. On the other hand, Mr. Knightley's asking Harriet to dance after she has been snubbed by Mr. Elton is an act of charity, graciousness, and chivalry because he is of a high social standing in comparison to both her and Mr. Elton. His act socially



"saves" Harriet and reprimands the Eltons for their rudeness.

Marriage has no always been about the love and happiness two people bring each other; instead it was considered to be more of a business transaction. Emma by Jane Austen takes place during the early twentieth century, this time period was completely absorbed in social classes and had a much different view on marriage than today. Through the young, bold, wealthy, and beautiful character Emma Woodhouse, Jane Austen exposes the protocol of marriage as well as the effects marriage held based on social standing during the early twentieth century.

Social class also restricts the actions that characters are able to take in fulfilling their desires, as is most evidently seen in the novel's drama regarding marriage matches. Frank must conceal his engagement with Jane because she is an orphan and regarded as an unsuitable social match by his family. Harriet rejects Robert Martin because Emma advises her that he is "beneath" her. Mr. Elton rejects Harriet by the same calculations, and so on.

Moved by vanity and eager for flattering acknowledgment, Emma tended to judge others by their admiration for her. One reason she was not particularly fond of her brother-in-law was that he viewed her rationally, "without praise and without blindness" (p. 99). But a more important cause of her unease was based on her reason, not her egotism; she objected to his occasional impatience with her father. In these incidents, his manners showed an emotional and a moral deficiency. Think of the distress he caused Mr. Woodhouse by his callous overstatement about the snow.

Emma showed a similar delicacy of feeling in forming her judgment of Frank Churchill; she reserved her assessment of him until she saw how he treated Mrs. Weston. She was pleased; it was not merely in fine words or hyperbolic compliment that he paid his duty; nothing could be more proper or pleasing than his whole manner to her—nothing could more agreeably denote his wish of considering her as a friend and securing her affection. (p.181)

Though progress has been made in the direction of self-knowledge, Emma is certainly not yet sufficiently self-aware and Lionel Trilling (1905-1975) says that "The extraordinary thing about Emma is that a consciousness is always at work in her, a sense of what she ought to be and do." Pondering over Harriet's disappointment, Emma resolves that 'Where the wound had been given, there must the cure be found if anywhere; and Emma felt that, till she saw her in the way of cure, there could be no true peace for herself.' In other words, Emma is still determined to find Harriet a husband but decides not to be so 'active' in her schemes of promotion.

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