

I. Jane Austen, *Emma* and Middle-Class Ideology: An Introduction

Though Romantic novelist Jane Austen belonged an age earlier than Victorian, her novels anticipated the rigidity of normativity and mannerism which became dominant in Victorian era, and got down into history as a Victorian social character. So, this research locates her in Victorian thematic setting when class equations are considered as social curse. P. Stonyk in *Jane Austen and Victorians* (1992) explores Victorian qualities in Austen's novel. For her, the usual themes of Austen's novels were about women and men dealing with the threats of dishonesty and selfishness and to re-state their values:

The most known theme of pre and early Victorian novelists was society manners and attitudes, for it was an interesting subject in the period of social movement, and at the time when money was in circulation among the rapidly increasing middle class. Jane Austen was a pre-Victorian novelist in presenting everyday life and events of people. Readers can sense the value of integrity, the response to nature, and the pure emotions in her novels. She often presents themes in a comic way that ought to create a change in society. (48-9)

Keeping in mind that Austen was a Pre-Victorian in her themes and presentations, this research examines the rigid middle-class ideology and its biased construction of class hierarchy and female self in the pre-Victorian society in Jane Austen's novel *Emma* (1816). In the novel, the protagonist Emma Woodhouse has maintained her middle-class dignity with her conformity to the class-ideology as it is highly patriarchal. Maintaining her dignity as middle-class lady and following the conduct proper to her class and status, she challenges male intelligence. But the ideological ground from

which she challenges the male intelligence is wrong as she is already immersed into the patriarchal ideology in the name of class-ideology.

This research unveils how and why Austen's characters fall in the trap of class to appropriate their socio-economic status by power operation resulting discrimination, dehumanization and other oppressive social devices of the time immediately preceding Victorian era. Her characters try to escape from them either by avoiding or going against them but the middle-class ideology entangles them in such a way that they are subjugated by the passivity of the conducts of showy manners, aristocratic ways of life and female-norms. Emma Woodhouse, Jane Fairfax and Miss Bates are the best example who challenges the early Victorian stereotypical patriarchal norms and values through their silent rejection as they are interpellated by the ideology of the time.

Jane Austen was born on the 16th of December 1775 at Steventon, and stayed unmarried with her parents and sisters in her entire life. Austen began writing at the age of twenty but she did not publish until 1811, when *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) appeared anonymously, followed by *Pride and Prejudice* (1814). *Emma* which is appeared in 1816, was a last novel published during Austen's lifetime. *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818) appeared posthumously.

Austen's novels received little critical popular recognition during her lifetime and her identity as a novelist was not revealed until after her death. As admired as Austen's novels later became controversial, critics have had a difficult time placing them within literary history. She is known for her gently satirical portraits of village life and of the rituals of courtship and marriage as in *Emma* but she wrote during the Romantic period when most major writers were concerned with a very different set of interests and values. Romantic poets confronted the hopes and failures of the French

Revolution and formulated new literary values and centered on individual freedom, passion and intensity. In comparison, Austen's detailed examination of the rules of decorum that govern social relationships and her insistence that reason and moderation are necessary checks on the feelings presented through the bold heroine Emma Woodhouse, make her seem out of step with the literary times. One way to understand Austen's place in literary history is to think of her as part of the earlier Victorian feminist novelist. Virginia Woolf writes about Austen as an early moralist feminist:

Authorship for Austen is an escape from the very restraints which she imposes on her female characters. And in this respect she seems typical for women may have contributed so significantly to narrative fiction precisely because effectively objectives even as it sustains and hides the subjective of its author. (Gilbert and Gubar 168)

Rather than dismissing Austen as a writer who shuns the artistic and political movement of her time, it is perhaps more useful to think of her as an early feminist with some sort of ideological exploration. Critics have pointed out that the Romantics, who were almost exclusively male, offered a poor model of literary fulfillment of the ambitious women of the time. Women were denied freedom as Shelly and Byron possessed but for women, the penalty for sexual freedom was social ostracism, poverty and worse which are well amplified in *Emma* by avoiding the then political concerns only centered on domestic life. Jane Austen was profoundly moral.

As so often in Austen's novels, *Emma* also concerns the social issues of her time and particularly the matter of class. The story begins with Emma Woodhouse, a twenty years old resident of the village of Highbury who loves matchmaking although convinced that she will never marry. She succeeds in match-making between her

governess Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston and also tries an eligible match for her friend Harriet Smith, whose parents are unknown. Emma is convinced that Harriet deserves to be a gentleman's wife like Mr. Elton rejecting Robert Martin's proposal who is in fact a farmer. Here, Emma is totally guided by the Victorian middle-class ideology. Though she tries to blur the middle class ideology of pre-Victorian society by trying to engage Harriet (who is of lower class) with Mr. Elton (of Middle class), she possibly accepts the Victorian norms and conducts. Where as Elton purposes Emma as his equal denying Harriet whose class is lower and finally marries with Mrs. Elton of high class. Mr. Elton is the fine example of middle class ideology of the time. As it was a serious crime of the time to go against it. Similarly, Frank Churchill loves Jane Fairfax but couldn't marry because of her lower class and economic status. Jane is doomed to be a governess who does not have any private property and natural parents. Miss Bates remains spinster her whole life because she also didn't have any inherited property. These are some of the implicit instances that guide each reader to think about the ideological formation of the society. Each character silently accepts the hierarchy of the society as they are completely subjected by the ideology. In this regard T. A. Van Dijk in *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (1998) makes more clear;

...ideologies as a form of special cognition shared by social groups.

Ideologies thus form the basis of social representation and the practices of the group members, which at the same time serves as the means of ideological productions, reproductions, silent challenges and the acceptances. (3)

Similarly, there are many ups and downs in Emma's life as she tries to go away from the so called social boundary of class and status. The plot of the novel moves around

the domestic reality of the then society which is interpellated by the class ideology. There are several love affairs like Mr. Elton-Harriet, Harriet- Mr. Martin, Elton-Emma, Emma-Frank, Frank-Jane and finally Knightly-Emma but completely supporting the ideology of Victorian middle class at the end of the novel.

Accidents and various engagements ensure leading to what reader will be expecting another finale of poetic justice and reunited love. There are not only love intrigues but also reunions with the progression of the novel. Emma dissolving her infatuation with Frank, and she is finally awarded by the love of Mr. Knightly who is a generous and appropriate man for her. Overcoming different troubles and complexities Frank finally marries with Jane and Harriet marries with Mr. Martin happily by resolving the question of who loves whom after all supporting the Pre-Victorian ideology of class hierarchy.

In this social context, Austen's commitment to reason and moderation can be seen as progressive rather than conservative. The intelligence and resourcefulness of her heroine Emma Woodhouse, stands in contrast to the limits of the constricted world of courtship and marriage defining their sphere of action. While reading *Emma*, it is interesting to consider to what extent Austen accepts or questions the idea that marriage represents a woman's maturity and fulfillment because Miss Woodhouse is shown mature in comparison to other characters like Jane Fairfax and Harriet Smith but at last she accepts marriage as a source of maturity for a woman which can not avoid the patriarchal ideology. Heroines of Austen's time have to face internal and external conflicts due to the prevailing social restrictive pressure of tight social morality. Her heroines Emma, Jane and Harriet are beyond that they have to learn to understand themselves and relationships with other people for the sake of personal integrity of own values and beliefs. Austen does her business of delineating the

surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well who proliferates the ideological discrimination.

The world that *Emma* presents us to is essentially late 19th century world in its habits, tastes and appearance. We do find the crystal precision of style, the beautifully poised sentences and paragraphs and the calmly pertinent marching of dialogues and incidents. Austen gives the sense of solidly based social world, in which the adjustment of personal relationship is interesting and significant problems, a world in which individuals, however, sensitive or introspective, belongs to community pattern even though there is highly circulation of power to maintain and balance the social hierarchy and class ideology. There is delicacy, ironic insight, precision and shrewd style which silently avoids and challenges demarcations of status inherent within the society. Her talent was for the exploration of those aspects of human emotion and behavior most closely associated with the socio-economic ideological framework that looms so large in most people's lives through the trivial characters like Miss Bates, Mrs. Bates, Mr. Martin and Mrs. Elton with a trivial subject matter of the plot.

Prevailing social hierarchy caused Austen to ignore the social norms and to do what she liked. However, she remained paralyzed in her daily life because of the ideological formation of the society where middle class should always behave as superior to the lower class. As for social and physical discrimination, cultural problems of low and high classes, birth backgrounds and also gender problems. One of the serious intension of her novels is to devaluate class division in society. This research admires her capacity to express herself despite the suffocating atmosphere of the society of the time. She invents the character like Emma who is revolutionary for her identity and liberty even in the adverse socio-economic and political condition of her time. While the contemporary society was rapidly influenced with the industrial

and economic values along with social liberalization, she was also influenced by it in a balanced way for the sake of social harmony and existence to quench the thirst of Pre-Victorian middle class ideology. That's why there is reunion and acceptance in *Emma* where Harriet marries Mr. Martin who is equal in status and Emma with Mr. Knightley, a man with large amount of wealth and status as they are equal in their class.

Many critics have many views regarding Austen and her novels. Her characters are absolutely true to life and all her work has the perfection of a delicate miniature painting. In this regard, Beth Fowkes Tobin in her *Aiding Impoverished Gentle Woman: Power and Class in Emma* points out power relations that are embedded in material status to maintain status quo in society:

Emma addresses political, social and economic problems specific to early nineteenth century Britain. *Emma* can, in fact be read as Austen's attempt to deal with the threatened erosion of the old social order and conflicting claims and the ideologies of the emergent middle classes.The novel asks to be analyzed from an economic and political perspective because the power relations that surface during Box Hill expedition result, at least in part, from the material conditions that determine *Emma's* power, Miss Bates' powerlessness and Knightley's role as the arbitrator of Highbury's social relations (134-141).

Emma is a story of how a few central characters interact within the society navigating the rules and structures which governed their lives. It can more deeply be understood as to study the complex class and gender relationship which underscores early 19th century English middle class society. Harriet is forced to marry with Mr. Martin who equals with her status, when her parents are revealed as of middle class people. After

different tricks and dramas Jane Fairfax marries to Frank who is the sole owner of Aunt Churchill's property.

There is great importance of money in *Emma* as relationship between money and social status is well understood by Austen. As characters are subjected by the ideology that middle class positions and conducts are superior and which can be obtained by large amount of money and heritage. Among all her novels *Emma* is the only novel in which the central character of the novel is presented as the daughter of a wealthy man. But the other characters of the novel are haunted by the problems and worries of lack of money and financial support to maintain and upgrade their social status. The social strands are almost entirely those of money and snobbery. It is remarkable to what an extent the plot and characters are dominated by questions of money. In this regard, Tobin again clarifies the relation and importance of money and status for every character in the novel:

Austen explores in *Emma* the plight of impoverished gentleman, not just their scrimping and saving and constant worry about financial security, but also their depression over their loss of social status and shame at all the small indignities accompanying their social exclusion.

(141)

Emma is constructed around a number of marriages recently consummated or anticipated and in each case; the match solidifies the participants' social status. Marriage played one of the major roles to increase one's ideological status in the society.

Because they are literally or figuratively motherless, the daughters in Austen's fiction are early persuaded that they must look to man for their security. Although their mother's example proves how

debilitating marriages can be, they seek husbands in order to escape from home and serve the ideology of the time. What feminists have recently called metrophobia – fear of becoming ones’ mother supplies one more motive to free parental home, as does the financial necessity of competing for male protection, Gilbert and Gubar, ‘All of Jane Austen’s opening paragraphs (125-126), and the best of the first sentences, have money in them; this may be the first obviously feminine thing about her novels, for money and its making were characteristically female rather than male subject in English fiction. From the earliest years Austen had the kind of mind that inquired where money come from on which young woman to live, and exactly how much of it was.’ (Moers 67 emphasis original)

The representation of class structure through different level of characters is the basis of the plot of *Emma*, as it is in all Austen’s novels. The responsibilities and behaviors of each character are generally known and accepted. Austen shows the characters’ relationships and interactions in the context of society, whose values give their behavior and activities meaning. One anonymous reviewer commented that Austen sees man “not as a solitary being completed in himself but only as completed in society.”

Similarly, Alistair M. Duckworth amplifies the importance of society in Austen’s novels that how society is more important that the individuals are never separated who get existence from society to serve the ideology of Pre-Victorian middle class ideologies “*Emma* in the end chooses society rather than self, an inherited order rather than a spontaneous and improvised existence” (31).

Many writers of nineteenth century have explored the human behavior most closely associated with social and economic framework. In the similar vein Kathy Smith, in her “*Critical Essays on Emma*” explores the importance of belongings for the characters to maintain their social status in the society writes:

That belonging is finally crucial to Emma’s happiness, for like most others in the village, “Not one of them had the power of removal or of effecting any material change of society. They must encounter each other, and make the best of it”. Mrs. Elton considers herself prominent in Highbury society by connections to and by the trappings of wealth and position. While Emma also feels herself superior and wants to remain so, her social position as ‘first’ is challenged on the moral grounds. (213)

Austen’s ironic awareness of the tension between spontaneity and convention and between the claims of personal morality and those of social and economic property, her polished and controlled wit, and beneath all her moral apprehension of the nature and of human relationship, made *Emma*, a novel with multidimensionality. It satirically presents the social balance where there is class demarcation and prevailing social hierarchy in the Victorian era that are the basic parameters to serve the ideology. To present domestic reality with certain amount of wit and satire, to criticize human nature and social behavior through comedy of manner is the prime concern of Austen in *Emma*. Harold Bloom, comparing Emma with Austen, in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Emma* writes:

The acute aesthetic pleasure turns on the counterpoint between Emma’s spontaneous cry, “Oh God! That I had never seen her.” And the exquisite economic touch of: “She sat still, she walked

about, she tried her own room, she tried the snobbery- in every place, every posture, she perceived that she had acted most weakly.”.....Jane Austen, who seems to have identified herself with Emma, wisely chose to make this moment of ironic reversal a temporary purgatory, rather than an infernal discomfiture. (1-7)

Bloom primarily compares Austen with Emma from different ways focusing economy and social status that are identical to each other. Talking about the situation when Emma humiliates Miss Bates and then Knightley makes Emma to confess it. The situation is really tragic which, to Bloom, makes crystal clear about the nature and economic status of Emma as well as, silent expression of Austen’s condition.

Although, Jane Austen is counted under Romantic period, her novels established the relationship between social convention and individual temperament. The alteration of social relationship – love followed by marriage, quarrelling and reconciliation, gain or loss of money or of social status – is important to blur the hierarchical ideologies privileged in society. There is significance of social alteration in *Emma* as, Miss Taylor was a governess of Emma but after marrying Mr. Weston, her social status is uplifted, Jane is saved from being a governess after marrying Frank but Harriet is doomed to marry with a farmer named Mr. Martin because of her unknown parentality. The class consciousness shown by *Emma* from the beginning, the importance of social status and the use of the rise or fall from one class to another as reflecting critical developments in characters and fortune, indicate the middle class origin of this literary form. The novel tends to realism and contemporaneity in the sense that it deals with people living in the ideological social world known to the writer.

Austen's presentations of Highbury society is typically in transition period even though there is rigidity prevailed in the society. There is ideological operation of power which maintains the discourse of superior and inferior. Always the powerful class dominates and creates truth through the means of different discourses to maintain the class ideology which provides them higher status.

Emma addresses political, social and economic problems specific to early nineteenth century Britain . It can be studied as Austen's attempt to explain the threat and erosion of old social order and conflicting claims and the ideologies of the emergent middle classes like Coles and Mr. Elton. And different parties and ceremonies organized by aristocrats like Woodhouse, Mrs. Elton and Coles where Bates and Martin family is always invited at last to eat remainings, shows material and economic discriminations. The lower class people like Martins and Bates just happily accept to join in those parties to eat remainings at last as they are totally interpellated by the ideology take it as their right position. The novel can be analyzed from an economic and political perspective because the power relations that surface during Box Hill expedition result, at least in part, from the material conditions that determine *Emma's* power, Miss Bates' powerlessness and Knightley's role as the arbitrator of Highbury's social relations which maintain the ideological formation of the society.

Similarly Emma's conformity to class consciousness can be judge from her thought about Mr. and Mrs. Cole which indicates how she has become the subject of Victorian Middle-class ideology. Coles are trades-people and longtime resident of Highbury whose good fortune and struggle has led them to adopt a luxurious lifestyle that is only a notch below that of the Woodlouse's. Offended by their attempt to transcend their "only moderately genteel" social status, Emma has long been

preparing to turn down any dinner invitation from the Coles in order to teach them their folly in thinking they can interact socially with the likes of her family(134). Like the Martins, the Coles and Bates are the means through which Emma demonstrates her ideological class-consciousness.

Almost every character in the novel is guided by the middle class ideology where behaviour, actions and speeches just exercise and empower it. The extreme example of ideological behaviour and opinion of Emma can be seen when she unattractively dismisses Robert Martin's condition and his proposal to marry Harriet. She says:

The yeomanry (the class of farmers who hold land under long-term leases) are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might be hopeful to their families in some way and another (17).

Emma is only interested in people who are of her social class or so far beneath her that she might, from a comfortable position of superiority; flatter herself by being "useful" to them. Such superior usefulness is what Emma attempts with Harriet, and she even lies to her friend in order to manipulate to refuse the proposal of Martin who is a lower class farmer. Although Emma observes to herself that Mr. Martin's "appearance was very neat and he looked like a sensible young man...he is very plain...remarkably very plain, but that nothing compared to his entire want of gentility" (19). She emphasizes gentility rather than good, sensible and plain behavior of Mr. Martin as a good match for a girl like Harriet as she assumes that Harriet's conduct, beauty and good temper indicates of her higher gentility though her parents are unknown.

Similarly, Mr. Knightley suggests Emma that Mr. Martin is the right person for Harriet to marry because she is from lower class or her gentility may be low as her parents are unknown. His objection to Emma saying that Elton will not accept Harriet as his equal and will not marry her as he is of higher class reinforces the class hierarchy and the importance of gentility. A model character and spokes person of Austen, Mr. Knightley, whose purpose is- to correct the excesses and missteps of those around him, who is unfailingly honest with tact and kindness- also cannot escape from the ideological of middle class superiority that is vested in each characters and their actions. Through out the novel, Knightley's reason and judgment stand in as surrogates for Austen's own, and whether or not she believes that class distinctions are always fair. Along with all her characters, Austen is also totally manipulated and subjected to the ideology of superiority of Victorian Middle-class society. Therefore, Austen like Emma, Knightley, Elton, Harriet, Bates and other characters, is certainly does not want to overturn the notion of class hierarchy.

In relation to conformity and class conduct, the purpose of my research will be to study Jane Austen's *Emma* through the vantage point of ideology to explore class discrimination and power relations embedded in the hierarchical society of Highbury as the novel presents these concepts by the help of employed characters like Jane, Miss Bates, Mr. Martin, Elton, Knightley and others in the novel. This research will explore the intricate and embedded power relationships in the novel where Victorian Middle-class Ideology will be prime concern to study.

The present research work has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter fundamentally deals with introductory outline of the present study. It introduces critical review and the writer and her characters in relation to their context and ideological tendency, to reject the traditional discourses and search for the

possibility going beyond the discourses with the highlight of the protagonist, Emma and the writer of the novel. Thus it presents the bird's eye view of the entire research. The second chapter aims at providing the theoretical methodological reading of the text briefly with both the textual and theoretical evidences. It attempts to examine ideology of Pre-Victorian Middle-class and its pivotal role to unravel the pros and cons of the traditional discourses of good conduct and manners to unveil the mask of hierarchy of the society. On the basis of theorists and analysts of ideology and conduct literature theorists, the novel will be analyzed in this chapter. It will further sort out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the research. This part serves as the core of the present research. The third chapter concludes the ideas put forward in the earlier chapter, focusing on the outcome of the entire research. The various logical conclusions will be summarized as the proof that the novel explores the pros and cons of ideology of Pre-Victorian Middle class highlighting the conclusion of the whole research.

II. Ideology, Subversion and Conformity in *Emma*

This research focuses on the study of the class hierarchy and the ideology of upper-middle-class of the English society of the Pre-Victorian period. Like Jane Austen's other novels, *Emma* also deals with the subject of young ladies finding proper husbands. The assertion of the female code of conduct to achieve the goal of getting the husband and the role of courtship are the major themes of the novel. Within the chosen limits of upper-middle-class society and within the even more limited strict feminine point of view for telling the story in which all the events are presented from within a domestic or social context, though not, merely from within a drawing room, Jane Austen is fervently preoccupied with the way people behave. Central to the novel, the conduct of the upper-middle-class and the role of courtship for the people belonging to the class including the protagonist Emma, have been schematized which are charged with the class ideology, patriarchy and the appropriation of a subject that is faithful to the discourses of the conduct in Pre-Victorian society.

The excessive concern over the code of conduct so as to be regarded as the English middle-class is the characteristic of the time that it tinged with the ideology of the middle-class superiority. Lara Baker Whelan discusses about the middle-class in the Pre-Victorian society in the book *Class, Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era* with its historical origination:

That the middle class came into its own in Britain in the nineteenth century is well documented, but despite its continued consolidation of power and cultural dominance throughout the century, the issue of class identification—who was in, who was out and how one was to know—remained a contested issue, primarily among those who

considered themselves “in.” As membership in the middle class grew throughout the century, and as members of that class tried to find ways both to define themselves in contrast to other classes and to solidify their power base . . . (2)

It becomes clear with the Whelan’s observation that the middle-class of Pre-Victorian society had employed its own way of conduct and the people who thought themselves as the member of the middle-class observed it rigidly to be defined as the true middle-class member.

In contrast to the superior middle-class, the vast majority of the population lived out the whole of their miserable lives laboring or serving others. The Industrial Revolution had already begun to create the horrific living conditions of the great manufacturing towns in the Midlands and North, but this was unknown to the people of Jane Austen’s world; it took the Victorians to discover what had happened in their own country. To Jane Austen, the lower orders would have meant servants, laborers on the land, and paupers, their existence accepted as part of the natural order of things. So, Austen is full of the class ideology of the Pre-Victorian middle-class and she imagines that they deserve it. To understand the notion of ideology the definition of Louis Althusser is very effective here that defines ideology as the imaginary relationship of the individuals to his /her real condition of existence. With the definition Althusser further clarifies the notion of ideology as:

We commonly call religious ideology, ethical ideology, legal ideology, political ideology, etc., so many ‘world outlooks’. Of course, assuming that we do not live one of these ideologies as the truth (e.g. ‘believe’ in God, Duty, Justice, etc. . . .), we admit that the ideology we are discussing from a critical point of view, examining it as the ethnologist

examines the myths of a 'primitive society', that these 'world outlooks' are largely imaginary, i.e. do not 'correspond to reality'.

(123)

Austen's notion of superiority over the working class is imaginary and with this imaginary idea of her superiority over the working-class, she develops her affinity and relation to the Pre-Victorian middle-class.

Large numbers of servants were employed in the great houses in the Pre-Victorian society, while anybody with any pretensions to gentility employed at least one servant. Servants in Jane Austen's world seem well-treated and at least enjoy shelter and sufficient food. The average wage of an agricultural laborer in the period was seven or eight shillings. In *Emma* there are the glimpses of the teeming poor outside the world of the great house. Emma visits a sick cottager; the ostler John Abdy who cannot maintain his father who can no longer work; gypsies obtain money with menaces, and Mrs. Weston's poultry houses are thieved. Just as every other class is capable of divisions and subdivisions, so the poor could be divided into the deserving and the undeserving. The social spectrum of Highbury which is wider than in any other Austen's novel includes both. This division was also made in the favor of the middle-class so that they could be employed in the household hierarchically.

Sara Mills observes how the decisions made by the higher and middle-class regarding the lower-class are regarded as more intelligent. This gives the upper and middle class the power to create hierarchy and bolster their power in the society. In her book *Michel Foucault*, she writes to clarify this:

Marxist theory generally uses the term ideology to describe the means whereby oppressed people accept views of the world which are not accurate and which are not in their interests. Ideology, for Marxists, is

the imaginary representation of the way things are in a society, and this fictive version of the world serves the interests of those who are dominant in society. Thus, an ideological view of society might be one where the middle classes are portrayed as naturally more intelligent than the working classes, rather than a Marxist economic view which would focus on the fact that schools with a majority of middle class pupils have better facilities. (34)

Thus, in the society, the middle-class is more privileged and has the better provision than the working class due to the discursive, ideological construction of their superior position. Since Jane Austen belongs to the middle-class, she barely mentions the aristocracy in the novel. She only glances at the existence of the members of the minor professions, whose status was at best that of “half-gentlemen” (128) in her own term used in *Emma*. It makes the novel the most class-conscious one. Surgeons and apothecaries, teachers and musicians, merchants and attorneys held a dubious place in society; they were educated men, but without “breeding” (182) or “good connections” (48). Beneath they were the tenant-farmers, tradesmen and clerks who constituted the lower middle class. The term middle classes, incidentally, was first used in 1797, and the term working classes in 1813. Before that the usual words for the levels of society were ranks and orders; the phrase the lower orders persisted into the twentieth century.

Lara Baker Whelan sees the strict social conduct in the Pre-Victorian society which she defines as the most desirable course of action in the people of the society. She brings the references of various families and their proper conduct citing the various scholars. She proceeds:

The most desirable course of action . . . was “to treat his neighbor as himself in the matter of conduct, but not to know him personally if he can in any way decently avoid doing so” (Panton 17). Ruskin’s family, according to one modern commentator, “saw almost nothing” of their neighbors when living in their “three-storey semi-detached house at Herne Hill” (Sheppard 107). The Smiths of Surbiton are described as “on nodding terms with fifty people, on visiting terms with twenty, and on ‘dropping in’ terms with two,” their immediate neighbors (Keble 34). (18)

With the examination of the matter of conduct like not to know the neighbors if they decently avoid the familiarity, not to care about neighbors’ property, keeping intimate relation only to twenty people and so on, Whelan concludes how the particular conduct was typical to particular class or caste and how their conduct help them to be respectable as she writes, “All accounts seem to confirm that this pattern was fairly typical. Suburbanites wanted to be seen by all as respectable and did not want to risk endangering this image by too-close familiarity with “outsiders” who might be quick to pass judgment” (18). The people were conscious of their class ideologies and did not want to be judged superficially making them too familiar to the people outside their class.

Behavior that we term “conduct” denotes a broad range of activity under the guidance of social–moral norms. In *Emma*, right conduct is of the utmost importance, precisely because right conduct demonstrates and affirms the social–moral norms upon which society is based. Wrong conduct which Austen regards as blunders is a threat to the guiding codes of race, class, and gender that help imagine and instate social and political boundaries. The various courtship games of Austen’s text

challenge and deconstruct some of the polite codes that make up right conduct in Regency England. By explicitly emphasizing conduct as a theme in *Emma*, Austen extends the challenges of her courtship puzzles by further exposing the logic behind other social and political codes. Just as Austen's game of courtship riddles exposes the material calculus of early Victorian marriage ("Power" + "Wealth" + "luxury and ease" = "*courtship*"), so, too, Austen's game of "blunders" (or wrong conduct) serves to subvert the gender equation that places women subordinate to men in reason. Lee-Lampshire criticizes Victorian ideology that equates men with conscious, rational activity and women with "the unconscious, the irrational and the affective" (195). In the same manner, Austen has also been successful to criticize the male rationality and female inferiority in terms of intelligence in her novel.

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas studies the hierarchy and its strict maintenance in the Pre-Victorian society that gives the upper-class and the males of the society the sense of security from the fear of democratization and class contamination. The females were the major victims of hierarchy and the tales about the gentle women with right conduct were promoted to appropriate their social position. She writes to this move in her essay "MacDonald's Fallen Angel in 'The Light Princess' (1864)":

During the Victorian period, with its obsessive fears of democratization and class contamination, the systematic quest towards categorization and dichotomies shaped the Victorian frame of mind. In particular, with growing anxieties regarding the nature of the 'feminine' and the Woman Question, feminine types were above all subjected to such antinomies in order to secure potentially slippery boundaries. (40)

As Austen challenges the male rationality with the profound display of intelligence of her protagonist Emma Woodhouse, she subverts the hierarchy between males and the females in terms of the intelligence. Even then, Emma Woodhouse is not free from her middle-class ideology as she rigidly follow the conduct designed by the society for a middle-class, gentle woman. She subverts the male superiority in terms of the intelligence staying inside the boundary of the good woman.

Austen develops *Emma* with the popular tradition of conduct literature in mind. The idea that a novel should serve as a guide to social behavior was inescapable for a female novelist in early Victorian England. Indeed, the conduct novel was the most popular mode of fiction for a female writer at the time. Austen read with interest the popular works of Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth — conduct novelists whose works greatly outsold Austen's in the nineteenth century. It was from Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth that Austen learned the shortcoming of conduct fiction, and it was in her attempt to address these shortcomings that she arrived at the theme of conduct and the character of Mr. Knightley for *Emma*.

Unlike Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth, however, Austen refused to subordinate the pleasure of a realistic narrative to direct moral instruction. More's conduct novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* struck Austen as ridiculous as she writes in her *Letters* (169–70). Edgeworth's more psychologically nuanced work Austen could admire: "I have made up my mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth's, Yours & my own," Austen writes to her niece Anna (*Letters*, 112). Edgeworth had pioneered novels in the tradition of the conduct book, like More, but she had managed a richer art of characterization, though still the unity of interest was achieved by subordinating the events of the novel to the teaching of a moral lesson.

Before *Emma*, Austen seems to have identified herself as writing novels in the tradition of Edgeworth, judging from the titles of her first two published works: *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Indeed, *Courtship and Conduct* would have made a fitting title for *Emma*. But Austen's artistic gifts and aesthetic sensibilities worked against following Edgeworth towards writing traditional conduct novels like *More*. The conduct is the ideology of Pre-Victorian middle and upper-class that is seen as the outcome of the tradition. Everything does not prove to be ideology as Slavoj Žižek writes in his essay "The Spectre of Ideology" but when the class-split began with the advent of capitalism, the class started the particular ways of conduct for its members so as to maintain its dominance in the society:

Marx saw the paradigm of this primordial social consciousness in Greek mythology) *is not yet ideology proper*, although (or, rather, precisely because) it is immediately *vécu*, and although it is obviously 'wrong', 'illusory' (it involves the divinization of the forces of nature, etc.); ideology proper emerges only with the division of labor and the class split, only when the 'wrong' ideas lose their 'immediate' character and are 'elaborated' by intellectuals in order to serve (to legitimize) the existing relations of domination -- in short, only when the division into Master and Servant is conjugated with the division of labor itself into intellectual and physical labor. (19)

The emphasis upon the conduct in the Pre-Victorian society in Austen's novel is thus, the result of class and labor division. Gradually after the origination of the English middle-class, many middle-class intellectuals and novelist started to devise the conduct proper to maintain the dominance of their class over others. The male writers started to write about social and familial conduct of the females and thus, appropriated

the male dominance over females. The females were treated as the domestic labors and they were regarded inferior to the males both physically and intellectually. Emma Woodhouse resists the intellectual dominance of the males with her intelligent puzzles called charade but she is compelled to follow her class conduct and plays the role of a common victorian lady accepting the patriarchal hierarchy imposed by Frank as there is no way out of it for a middle-class woman.

Austen's conformity to the middle-class ideology is revealed in the teaching of a moral lesson to the unity of interest. It is found in her realistic characterization strictly within her class structure. Even then, her artistic gifts were taking her in a new direction that can be found in the titles of the three novels she arranged for publication before her death: *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Northanger Abbey*. Austen's innovative brand of the realistic novel, as opposed to the conduct novel popular in her day, can be glimpsed in her literary encounter with Thomas Gisborne's popular conduct book *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, and the subsequent use she made of this encounter in *Emma*. Austen was unexpectedly pleased by Gisborne's conduct book (*Letters*, 112), but where there is a coincidence of opinion between her and Gisborne, Austen's use of such a shared opinion in her novel proves very different from the conduct novel tradition. For instance, Austen would have assented to the distinction that Gisborne makes between a healthy spirit of emulation, and the destructive effects of rivalry. She writes; "We are all prone to harbor unkind sentiments toward those by whom we feel ourselves surpassed, especially if we were for some time level with them in the race. We find it more easy to depreciate than to equal them" (*Enquiry*, 70).

Although Austen clearly gives us an example of Emma "harbor[ing] unkind sentiments" toward Jane Fairfax, to whom she feels surpassed herself, the same holds

true for her conduct here, Mr. Knightley, who also “harbor[s] unkind sentiments” toward Frank Churchill by whom he too feels himself surpassed. And like Emma, Mr. Knightley will also find it “more easy to depreciate than to equal.” The truth of Gisborne’s statement can be realized when it is played out in the fraught complexities of the relationship between Emma and Jane Fairfax and Mr. Knightley and Frank Churchill. Emulation and rivalry cannot be easily separated in these relationships—as it cannot be in real life. The truth of Gisborne’s wisdom has no power until it is placed in a human context. In Austen’s novel, Emma and Mr. Knightley work not simply to become examples of Gisborne’s truism regarding emulation and rivalry, rather they demonstrate the value that can be gleaned by activating Gisborne’s precepts within the tableaux of realistic fiction.

The realism in the novel *Emma* is based on the characterization according to the class structure and the ideology of Pre-Victorian middle class and to the large extent, Austen is influenced by Gisborne’s book *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* in which Gisborne creates the hierarchy in the conduct of the females dividing them into healthy spirit of emulation, and the destructive effects of rivalry. So, females are made to emulate the decent conduct from others. This condition is charged with the patriarchal ideology in which Austen’s novel is based and claimed to be realistic. So, being a female of middle-class, patriarchal English society, Austen seems to rationalize the patriarchal values and continually emphasizes the advantages of being a decent woman with proper conduct. Even if the condition of the women is miserable in the society, there is the pretense charged with the patriarchal ideology that they can be happy if they follow the proper conduct. Without the knowledge of the patriarchal and class oppression, the oppressed group follows the domination as if

it is its natural condition that is the major feature of ideology. Terry Eagleton clarifies this situation in his book *Ideology: An Introduction*:

Oppressed groups in society may rationalize just as thoroughly as their rulers. They may perceive that their conditions leave a lot to be desired, but rationalize this fact on the grounds that they deserve to suffer, or that everyone else does too, or that it is somehow inevitable, or that the alternative might be a good deal worse. Since these attitudes will generally benefit the rulers, it might be claimed that ruling classes sometimes allow those they subjugate to do much of their rationalizing for them. Dominated groups or classes can also rationalize their situation to the point of self-deception, persuading themselves that they are not unhappy at all. (52)

The females of the Pre-Victorian society thus, think that they are destined to show the proper conduct and deserve to be a submissive wife to a gentleman. Thus the emphasis on the conduct in the novel is charged with the Pre-Victorian patriarchal ideology that has made Austen a victim without her knowledge and affected her realistic representation of the Pre-Victorian society.

Austen uses many games and riddles to bolster her themes of proper conduct and courtship. Like Mr. Elton's "courtship" riddle, Frank's "blunder" puzzle serves a major role and both of them are to nurture the theme of conduct. To understand the implication of the puzzle, a short review of the Frank Churchill–Jane Fairfax plot is necessary. Frank Churchill, Mr. Weston's son by his first marriage, has promised for months to come see his father and new stepmother, Emma's former governess. But it is not until Jane Fairfax arrives in Highbury that Frank finally makes his long waited appearance. Jane Fairfax, niece of the garrulous Miss Bates, is Emma's rival in beauty

and accomplishment, one reason why, as Mr. Knightly hints, Emma has never been friendly with Jane. Emma herself blames Jane's reserve for their somewhat cool relationship. When Frank Churchill appears, Emma finds him a handsome, well-bred young man. He calls frequently upon the Woodhouses, and also upon the Bates family, because of a prior acquaintance with Jane Fairfax. Emma, rather than Jane, is the recipient of his gallantries, and Emma can see that Mr. and Mrs. Weston are hoping that a romance will materialize. About this time Jane Fairfax receives the handsome gift of a pianoforte, anonymously given. It is presumed to have come from some rich friends with whom Jane, an orphan, has lived, but Jane herself seems embarrassed with the present and refuses to discuss it. Emma conjectures, in consultation with Frank Churchill, that the gift signals Jane's inappropriate attachment to Mr. Dixon, husband of Jane's best friend and adopted sister. The gift is actually from Frank. The impropriety of Frank's gift as well as his continued flirtation with Emma begins to place a strain on his relationship to Jane, while making Mr. Knightley apprehensive that Emma reciprocates Frank's interest. The role of appropriate and inappropriate conduct has been located as meaningful and action oriented for the development of good or bad relationship, so, it serves the middle-class ideology of Victorian society. Only the appropriate conduct gives the characters the dominant power over other has been highlighted which is the function of ideology as Slavoj Zizek pronounces:

‘Ideology’ can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-orientated set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power. (3-4)

Further conforming to this ideology, the Frank Churchill–Jane Fairfax plot is poignantly repeated in the game of anagrams that Frank Churchill conducts. All the chief characters are present. Like a modern day game of Scrabble, the reader, like the contestants, is encouraged to unscramble and find value in series of mixed letters and words:

Frank Churchill placed a word before Miss Fairfax. She gave a slight glance around the table, and applied herself to it. Frank was next to Emma, Jane opposite them—and Mr Knightley so placed as to see them all; and it was his object to see as much as he could, with as little apparent observation. The word was discovered, and with a faint smile pushed away . . . The word was blunder; and Harriet exultingly proclaimed it, there was a blush on Jane’s cheek which gave it a meaning not otherwise ostensible. Mr Knightley connected it with the dream; but how it could all be, was beyond his comprehension. (227)

The blunder is the wrong conduct that is forbidden for the members of the Pre-Victorian middle-class. The two As Joseph Litvak notes in his extensive reading of the scene, the chief competitors are Mr. Knightley and Frank Churchill. Mr. Knightley dislikes Frank Churchill, not only because the younger man seems to be a rival for Emma’s affections, but also because Frank presumes to “read every body’s character” (141). Having just let slip a possible clue to his involvement with Jane Fairfax, and regretting his carelessness, Frank uses the word game as a pretext for apology.

Litvak’s interpretation of the scene has been developed thus:

As Knightley’s stance here shows, his resentment of Frank stems in part from his fear that Frank may usurp the role of master reader: it is Knightley alone who shall reserve the right ‘to read every body’s

character,' to be 'so placed as to see them all.' Knightley's motives here are typical; if Emma, as many critics have noted, is a detective novel, then Knightley, even more than Emma herself, aspires to the role of chief detective. For while Emma is content to fantasize about various romantic scenarios involving Frank Churchill, Knightley will not rest until he has seen into the heart of the mystery surrounding Frank and Jane. For Knightley, reading fosters 'strength of mind,' but is also a mode of surveillance. (765)

Here, as with Mr. Elton's courtship riddle, Austen draws her chief characters around the interpretation of a puzzle at the center of which is a key term blunder. Here, too, as in the courtship riddle it is the unassuming Harriet who discovers the meaning and announces it to Austen's reader and to the others assembled, including Mr. Knightley. It is narrated in the words of Harriet as "The word was *blunder*; and Harriet exultingly proclaimed it" (227). The irony is that Mr. Knightley—Austen's conduct hero—try as he might, cannot decipher the meaning and value of "*blunder*." Even after "plac[ing himself] as to see them all; and it was his object to see as much as he could, with as little apparent observation," he still fails to understand Frank Churchill's game: "[H]ow it could all be, was beyond his comprehension." Read as Austen's ironic treatment of the traditional conduct novel, the scene become more and more comic. Like More's and Edgeworth's heroes, Mr. Knightley does not literally know what a "*blunder*" means. The blunder also serves the ideological function as it becomes the wrong procedure of the action as opposed to the proper conduct and implies the fear of the loss of the dominance of middle-class. So, it helps to eternalize the notion of proper conduct. To see how it is ideological, Žižek clarifies:

...among the procedures generally acknowledged as 'ideological' is definitely the eternalization of some historically limited condition, the act of discerning some higher Necessity in a contingent occurrence (from the grounding of male domination in the 'nature of things' to interpreting AIDS as a punishment for the sinful life of modern man; or, at a more intimate level, when we encounter our 'true love', it seems as if this is what we have been waiting for all our life, as if, in some mysterious way, all our previous life has led to this encounter . . .): the senseless contingency of the real is thus 'internalized', symbolized, provided with Meaning. (4)

The blunder provides the sense of historically limited, unnatural attitude and hence it serves to establish the idealized position for the right conduct.

As a traditional conduct hero, he is constitutionally alien to the value and pleasure to be found in a blunder. The puzzling "*blunder*" which escapes Mr. Knightley's understanding is parallel to the earlier "*courtship*" riddle that escapes Emma's notice. If the "*courtship*" riddle conceals a lesson for Emma ("Power" + "Wealth" + "luxury and ease" = "*courtship*"), the "*blunder*" puzzle conceals a lesson for Mr. Knightley (right conduct is predicated on a blunder). Like Emma before him, however, Mr. Knightley will have to suffer the lesson before he can realize it. Mr. Knightley's anger toward Frank Churchill throughout the novel ("[h]is letters disgust me") signal something more than simple jealousy. Indeed, even before he apprehends Frank Churchill as a rival, Mr. Knightley develops a deep dislike. Mr. Knightley's vehemence strikes Emma as "unworthy the real liberality of mind which she was always used to acknowledge in him" (98). The antipathy is partly generic on Austen's part.

Frank Churchill is the anti- Knightley; that is, he is the opposite of the conduct hero. In the tradition of conduct literature and conduct novels like More's and Edgeworth's, Frank is a villain associated with the rake from earlier literature. The rake character is primarily defined by his sexual nature. A rake was concerned about his status among other men. He spent most of his time in search of sexual liaisons or relating tales of past sexual escapades. Harold Weber, a leading scholar on the rake figure, explains: "most rakes possess little identity outside of the love game, their lives responding largely to the rhythms of courtship and seduction, pursuit and conquest, foreplay and release." However, as Weber further points out "the rake is too complex and enigmatic a figure to be reduced to a sexual machine: his love of disguise, need for freedom, and fondness for play all establish the complexity of the rakish personality" (3). The rake's sexual desires can be seen as a call for freedom and a break from social order. He balks at the idea of marriage and family in pursuit of personal gratification. In the works of Austen's peers, More and Edgeworth, the business of the heroine is to remain clear of the threat posed by the rake. She is aided in her struggle through the diligent protection of the conduct hero. The drawn distinction between rake and conduct hero like false and true legitimizes the domination of certain individuals over other, for example, Knightley over Churchill and the true is shown powerful in society in the ideological space of the society. Zizek writes to justify the ideological function of such binary as:

We are within ideological space proper the moment this content --
 'true' or 'false' (if true, so much the better for the ideological effect) --
 is functional with regard to some relation of social domination
 ('power', 'exploitation') in an inherently non-transparent way: *the very*

logic of legitimizing the relation of domination must remain concealed if it is to be effective. (8 emphasis original)

The ideological space of the persons of good conduct has been subverted by Austen with the depiction of the Frank Churchill. He functions opposite to the conduct hero and so, he is a critique of this tradition. Mr. Knightley is also a parody of the conduct hero, Frank Churchill is a reworking of the rake. In this light, we begin to perceive still further the comedy Austen provides in Mr. Knightley's peevish surveillance of the anagram game:

The word was *blunder* . . . there was a blush on Jane's cheek which gave it a meaning not otherwise ostensible . . . how it all could be, was beyond his comprehension. How the delicacy, the discretion of his favourite could have been so lain asleep! He feared there must be some decided involvement. Disingenuousness and doubledealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part. (227 emphasis original)

In the tradition of conduct literature, Mr. Knightley is prepared to protect the ladies not only from a possible sexual predator, but also, comically, from a dangerous anagram. Mr. Knightley's keen occupation with reading and comprehending the word "*blunder*" is actuated by generic concerns that Austen wishes to parody. The fact that Mr. Knightley perceives "a blush on Jane's cheek which gave [the word '*blunder*'] a meaning not otherwise ostensible" signals to him the danger Frank Churchill represents to propriety and right conduct (227). Like the conduct hero of a More or Edgeworth novel, Mr. Knightley arms himself to protect the honor of the ladies present. For added comic effect, Austen provides us a rare moment of free indirect

discourse as we follow Mr. Knightley's comic agitation of mind; "With great indignation did [Mr Knightley] continue to observe [Frank]; with great alarm and distrust, to observe also his two blinded companions. He saw a short word prepared for Emma, and given to her with a look sly and demure" (227-28). The good conduct in women as blushing and full of humility has been asserted along with the description of the conduct hero.

Sean Gill locates that the emphasis on the good conduct as evolved out of the Christian tradition with the study of Christianity in Victorian literature as she writes:

As William Wilberforce and later writers recognized, the qualities of love and gentleness on which the Christian character was founded were increasingly the preserve of women within the home, and were incompatible with the tasks that middle-class men were called on to perform in a competitive capitalist economy – tasks that called for the exercise of disembodied rationality not feeling, and calculation rather than compassion. (166)

So, in Austen emphasizing on the good conduct she not only bolsters the middle-class ideology but also gives currency to the Christian ideology.

Mr. Knightley, the conduct hero who also embodies Christ as Austen represents the good conduct in him, perceives the ladies, Jane and Emma, as undoubted victims as it is narrated as "With great alarm and distrust . . . [he] observe[d] . . . his two blind companions (228). His anxiety is further heighten when he regards Frank Churchill prepare an anagram for Emma "with a look sly and demure" (228). In the tradition of the rake figure, Frank's "sly and demure" look prefigures a sexual advance (228).

Austen then depicts Mr. Knightley's further alarm when he perceives Emma accept the anagram with secret pleasure: He saw that Emma had soon made it out, and found it highly entertaining, though it was something which she judged it proper to appear to censure; for she said, "Nonsense! For shame!" He heard Frank Churchill next say, with a glance towards Jane, "I will give it to her—shall I?"—and as clearly heard Emma opposing it with eager laughing warmth with the words "No, no, you must not; you shall not indeed" (228)

Emma's eager laughing warmth further titillates and disgusts Mr. Knightley who strains to comprehend Frank's meaning: It was done however. This gallant young man, who seemed to love without feeling, and to recommend himself without complaisance, directly handed over the word to Miss Fairfax, and with a particular degree of sedate civility entreated her to study it. Mr Knightley's excessive curiosity to know what this word might be, made him seize every possible moment for darting his eye towards it, and it was not long before he saw it to be *Dixon*.

Frank Churchill is transformed by Mr. Knightley into a rake figure saying "This gallant young man, who seemed to love without feeling, and to recommend himself without complaisance". His own apparent secret pleasure as suggested "Mr. Knightley's excessive curiosity to know what this word might be, made him seize every possible moment for darting his eye toward it" (228) subverts the traditional active power of the conduct hero. Austen's parody replaces the sanctified and active "Knight" with a prudish and passive Knightley. His role as mute spectator to Frank Churchill's apparent co-flirtation further underscores his impotence in the presence of the younger suitor. Knightely has been described as protective conduct hero while playing the game in the dusk as:

He remained at Hartfield after all the rest, his thoughts full of what he had seen; so full, that when the candles came to assist his observations, he must—yes, he certainly must, as a friend—an anxious friend—give Emma some hint, ask her some question. He could not see her in a situation of such danger without trying to preserve her. It was his duty. (227–8)

For all of Mr. Knightley's supervision, the game is played out and he is left in the dark. His place as a protector of female virtue is comically undermined by his inability to play games, what he dismisses earlier in the scene as "mere child's play." It is suggested as, "Jane Fairfax's . . . comprehension was certainly more equal to the covert meaning, the superior intelligence of those five letters so arranged" (228). His surveillance leads to no opportunity for action and his greatest fears seem to be realized as suggested by "[Jane] blushed more deeply than he had ever perceived her" (228). Keen to do "his duty," and with "his thoughts full of what he had seen," he perceives "danger," but all he can muster to "to preserve [Emma]" is to "ask her some question" (228).

The question is whether Emma "perfectly understand[s] the degree of acquaintance between the gentleman and lady [Frank and Jane]." Without "perfectly understanding the degree" himself, however, he is in no position to correct Emma's response, or to interfere or direct her conduct. He remains impotent and unenlightened, "staggered" by the "confidence" and "satisfaction" of Emma's response:

Oh! you amuse me excessively. I am delighted to find that you can vouchsafe to let your imagination wander—but it will not do— very sorry to check you in your first essay—but indeed it will not do. There

is no admiration between them . . . I can answer for its being so on his.

I will answer for the gentleman's indifference. (229)

Emma's witty response suggests just how fuddy-duddy Mr. Knightley's secret surveillance of the game must have struck the other participants. Emma expresses "delight" in Mr. Knightley demonstrating a wandering "imagination"—apparently for the first time ("your first essay")—but she "silences him" with her own correction, subverting his authoritative role as the cautioning conduct hero. By the end of the scene, Mr. Knightley is thoroughly routed. He is left very much appearing as weak and enfeebled as Mr. Woodhouse, sitting irritably before the Hartfield fire:

He found he could not be useful, and his feelings were too much irritated for talking. That he might not be irritated into an absolute fever, by the fire which Mr Woodhouse's tender habits required almost every evening throughout the year, he soon afterwards took a hasty leave, and walked home to the coolness and solitude of Donwell Abbey. (230)

Unable to interpret or intervene in the games that have just passed—"he found he could not be useful"—he beats a "hasty" retreat to "the coolness and solitude of Donwell Abbey." Austen's could not paint the picture of a more vivid defeat for her conduct hero. This "*blunder*" game of anagrams ends with Mr. Knightley "[thinking] he saw another collection of letters anxiously pushed towards [Jane], and resolutely swept away by her unexamined" (228). Perhaps it is in imagining the word behind this "collection of letters" that so incapacitates him. One can only guess Mr. Knightley's fears of what the word could be considering the subsequent "danger" from which he finds it "his duty" to "try to preserve Emma." The Austen family tradition has it that the word was "*pardon*." Such an interpretation is fitting with the

sequence of the scene. Frank's "*blunder*" puzzle is meant as a kind of peace offering. The "*Dixon*" puzzle is playful ribbing. The unseen (even by the reader) anagram of "*pardon*" completes the scene's larger structure. Frank seeks "*pardon*" for his "*blunder*," including his suggestion, first guessed by Emma, that the pianoforte is a gift from "*Dixon*."

So, Austen's aesthetic representation of the Pre-Victorian middle-class society is very logical. But, she fails to subvert the hegemony embedded to the literary art and the Pre-Victorian society as she fails to see patriarchal, political and cultural hegemony in large scale. In his book *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton clarifies: "My argument, broadly speaking, is that the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance that it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony" (3). Austen focuses on the English middle-class values like conducts and thus, only attempts to maintain the hegemony of the European middle-class.

In Knightley, she portrays a middle-class conduct hero contrasting him from the rake Frank Churchill who is on the side of blunder. Austen's conduct hero cannot perceive the value behind Frank's "*blunder*," nor can he understand the corrective power of Frank's playful request for "*pardon*." Mr. Knightley's own "emulation" and "rivalship" blind him to the right conduct displayed in this game by Frank Churchill. Caught in his own fiction of right conduct—his role as an embodied Gisborne—his interpretation and actions throughout the scene prove that he himself, as conduct hero, is prone to "*blunder*." His steady gaze in trying to discern Jane's reaction to the puzzle is not delicate, and certainly may have added the color to her blush: "[S]eeing herself watched, [she] blushed more deeply than he had ever perceived her." Of

course, it is not a coincidence that Emma too misreads the puzzle. Frank's word "*blunder*" appears to her a suggestion of Jane Fairfax's inappropriate attachment to "*Dixon*." She is blind to Frank's "double-dealing" and "deeper game." The performance is masterful and one Austen clearly took pains to conduct. At once, Frank Churchill manages to elude the surveillance of Mr. Knightley, apologize playfully to his fiancé, and to disguise his relationship from Emma further. Austen's own "deeper game" puts the lie to the simplistic conduct codes represented by the heroes and heroines of conduct literature. Austen's design becomes clear: to understand the "complete truth" of "*courtship*" and right conduct (i.e. the value of a "*blunder*") the reader must look beyond the traditional heroes and heroines of conduct literature ("seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken"). If Mr. Knightley is set up as the embodiment of right conduct in Austen's novel, he will also come to function as a parody of right conduct, as the "*blunder*" game suggests. And if Emma functions as heroine, she is also—purposefully—the embodiment of wrong conduct ("a heroine no one will much like but myself"). Mr. Knightley can only beat his "hasty" retreat, "confused by it all," while Emma willfully misreads yet another of the novel's puzzles. As Jane Austen confided in a letter, "[p]ictures of perfection, as you know, make me sick and wicked . . ." (*Letters*, 134). Austen's heroes and heroines will "*blunder*" plentifully, and Austen will take "wicked" pleasure in depicting their mistakes. In this way, Austen will embody the wisdom or right conduct in a less than "perfect" world. The emphasis on right conduct and prudence had originated out of Christian tradition in the suburbs of the Pre-Victorian society. So, it has the Christian as well as the middle-class ideology. Lara Baker Whelan clarifies this:

The suburb engendered domesticity, provided privacy and protection from the masses, promoted respectability and simulated the country-house lifestyle on a scale that was less grand, less wasteful and altogether more in line with middle-class values of prudence, propriety and comfort than *actual* country-house living. Presumably, only those who had achieved middle-class status, as defined by salary and occupation, could afford to live there, and, as there was nothing there *but* street upon street of houses, no one but those in the middle class would want to go there. (2)

Being typical to the middle-class ideology, Austen highlights the role of good conduct and idealizes masculinity in the men with the good conduct.

One final example will complete our study of Austen's theme of conduct in *Emma* and its relationship to the tradition of conduct literature. Austen agrees with Gisborne that a young woman should choose her friends from among her social equals: "let her companions be in general neither much above her own level, nor much below it." The danger in the latter case, according to Gisborne, is that a woman may be led "to assume airs of contemptuous and domineering superiority" (98). Though Austen could approve of such a sentiment in a conduct book, when she comes to dramatize the sentiment in *Emma* its truth becomes vastly complicated by the novelistic enterprise of realistic narrative. Where More and Edgeworth would subordinate their characterization to the rule—in this case, their characters would work their way toward assimilating the moral "let her companions be in general neither much above her own level, nor much below it"—Austen's narrative works the other way, expressing and then testing and complicating such conduct codes by putting them to the test of realistic characterization. When Emma wishes to adopt her

social inferior Harriet Smith as her protégée, Mr. Knightley objects to the choice on the grounds that Emma's "doctrines" lack "strength of mind" and rationality. Mr. Knightley—a surrogate Gisborne once again—states the rule in form of a question and a statement:

How can Emma imagine she has anything to learn herself, while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority? . . . I am much mistaken if Emma's doctrines give any strength of mind, or tend at all to make a girl adapt herself rationally to the varieties of her situation in life.—they only give a little polish. (24)

Here Mr. Knightley echoes the sexism and snobbishness of Gisborne as he says "let her companions be in general neither much above her own level, nor much below it" by imagining that Emma has nothing to learn from Harriet. By "lacking strength of mind," Emma's "doctrines" cannot assist Harriet in adapting herself "rationally" to the "varieties of her situation in life." According to Mr. Knightley's edict, Emma and Harriet's friendship can only offer unsubstantial, feminine "polish." As such, Mr. Knightley advises that the friendship constitutes wrong conduct, or a "*blunder*." Unlike Gisborne, however, Mr. Knightley does not express the implied code of conduct in a vacuum; rather, he states it in a conversation with Emma's former governess Mrs. Weston, who knows better. No answer is made, in part, because Mrs. Weston, who cannot be unaware that she herself has little claim to being a social equal with Emma, may, in fact, be a living example of the rule's speciousness.

Mrs. Weston's good sense has helped to shape Emma's character in a positive fashion, despite the fact that Mrs. Weston is decidedly much below Emma in social equality. The conduct rule may sound well in the context of a conduct book, but in a

world of complex human interaction, no such rule is advisable. The realism of Austen's domestic fiction tests the truth and falsehood of Knightley's precept in a way that no other work, particularly in the conduct novel tradition, could. The rest of Austen's *Emma* serves to overturn the implied precepts of Mr. Knightley and Gisborne. If, for Mr. Knightley, women like Emma "lack [the] strength of mind" and "rational[ity]" to practice right conduct in a relationship with one who is socially their inferior, thereby committing a blunder in contracting the friendship, the business of Austen's novel will be to demonstrate the rational advantages such a relationship holds for Emma, thereby overturning Mr. Knightley's blunder in undervaluing the value of the unequal alliances. As we noted in Austen's games of *courtship* and *blunder*, Harriet holds the key to many surprising lessons in Austen, and regarding right conduct she does the same.

In these encounters, Austen is once again making the point that her conduct hero is prone to blunders, and what is worse, that he is blind to their value. Austen asks us to regard Mr. Knightley's persistent right conduct in this context. Just as he struggles with Frank Churchill's "*blunder*" anagram, Austen invites us to scrutinize Mr. Knightley's comprehension of other "*blunders*" in the novel. Thus when Mr. Elton snubs Harriet at the Crown Ball, and Mr. Knightley comes to her rescue, Austen is doing more than demonstrating Mr. Knightley's chivalry. She is also demonstrating the way in which a blunder surprises us into re-examining accepted codes of conduct.

The scene is described through Emma's perspective; "In another moment a happier sight caught [Emma];—Mr Knightley leading Harriet to the set!—Never had she been more surprised, seldom more delighted, than at that instant" (214).

Emma appears to recognize the value initiated by Mr. Elton's mistake: his blunder has the happy consequence of breaking down the social codes that separate

Harriet and Mr. Knightley. Where the novel opens with Mr. Knightley considering Emma's acquaintance with her inferior, Harriet, a mistake ("How can Emma imagine she has anything to learn, while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority?"), Mr. Elton's snubbing of Harriet challenges Mr. Knightley's premise: crossing social boundaries to befriend an inferior is, in fact, an example of right conduct and an opportunity for growth and instruction. Austen notes, "Never had [Emma] been more surprised, seldom more delighted, than at that instant." With the dance, Mr. Knightley begins a friendship with Harriet that is almost unthinkable at the beginning of the novel. But rather than realize the value to Mr. Elton's, and his own, blunder, Mr. Knightley becomes absorbed in pontificating against Mr. Elton's snub:

Emma had no opportunity of speaking to Mr Knightley till after supper; but, when they were all in the ball-room again, her eyes invited him irresistibly to come to her and be thanked. He was warm in his reprobation of Mr. Elton's conduct; it had been unpardonable rudeness; and Mrs. Elton's looks also received the due share of censure. (214)

Emma appears to expect recognition of her and Mr. Knightley's accord ("Her eyes invited him irresistibly to come to her and be thanked"). But instead of realizing the similarity between her right conduct of befriending Harriet and Mr. Knightley's in doing the same, Mr. Knightley instead grows "warm" in "reprobat[ing]" Mr. Elton's conduct. His focus does not shift to the object of his kindness (Harriet), but remains in the mode of self-righteous condemnations; "[I]t had been unpardonable rudeness; and Mrs. Elton's looks also received the due share of censure, righteously condemning the conduct of now Mrs. Elton" (215). Clearly, the similarity between Mr. Elton's snub, and his own in regarding Harriet as a worthy friend to Emma escapes him. Once again

regarding this particular anagram on “*blunder*,” it is Mr. Knightley who still has the most to learn.

Those who read *Emma* as only a novel in which the heroine undergoes an education of experience in right conduct from Mr. Knightley, miss half the story, along with most of the novel’s good jokes. No doubt, the logic of the novel makes some element of this reading undeniable. Mr. Knightley does assist Emma in regulating her conduct, especially as it regards her jealousy to Jane Fairfax and her snobbishness towards the Martins, the Coles, and others. But Mr. Knightley, despite his superiority of age and experience, is also lacking in right conduct himself. Early in the novel he says, “I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good” (39). He is quite right, but the irony, as we noted earlier, is that only when he becomes jealous of Frank Churchill does he begins to understand his own feelings. Emma is rude to Miss Bates, while flushed with the pleasure of showing off with Churchill, and gets properly corrected for it by Mr. Knightley, but he, under the pressure of jealousy, is quite rude to Miss Bates himself. Angry at seeing ““that fellow Churchill showing off his own voice’,” he says, ““Miss Bates, are you mad, to let your niece sing herself hoarse in this manner? Go and interfere’ “ (149). Mr. Knightley’s angry rebuke of Miss Bates—warmed by jealousy of Frank Churchill—has a the potential of humiliating Miss Bates far more than Emma’s clever retort during the Box Hill excursion. Everywhere one turns in the text Mr. Knightley guides the way to right conduct, stating the precepts of proper behavior in the stately cadences of conduct literature. But, the novel and Emma—full of wit and word games—refuse to allow Mr. Knightley to remain blind to the opportunity of a blunder—his and other’s. Austen and Emma will not allow Knightley to become just another “Knight” in the tradition of conduct literature. Indeed, the novel goes to some

lengths to make Mr. Knightley a figure of fun, a sententious and righteous bore, as we have seen. And the comedy continues, right up to the very end of the novel, as Mr. Knightley continues to be blind to the value of a “blunder.” Consider the close of the Emma–Knightley courtship game, after love declarations by both Emma and Mr. Knightley, when Mr. Knightley declares: “Mystery; Finesse—how they pervert the understanding! My Emma, does not every thing serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?” (293)

Plain, open speech—direct, manly exchange and interaction, according to Mr. Knightley, are the true path to “understanding.” The problem is, of course, the whole novel—and Emma’s appeal as the central consciousness of the book—rests on the fact that true understanding is not so simple. It is precisely because of the “Mystery” and “Finesse” that we have a story at all. Indeed the “Mystery” and “Finesse” of Mr. Knightley’s misapprehension that Emma is in love with Frank Churchill leads him into making his declaration.

He had, in fact, been wholly unsuspecting of his own influence. He had followed her into the shrubbery with no idea of trying it. He had come, in his anxiety to see how she bore Frank Churchill’s engagement, with no selfish view, no view at all, but of endeavouring, if she allowed him an opportunity to sooth or to counsel her.—The rest had been the work of the moment, the immediate effect of what he heard, on his feelings . . . [I]n the momentary conquest of eagerness over judgment, [he made his declaration] . . . (283)

Here the righteous Knightley follows Emma “into the shrubbery” where at “the work of the moment” and in the “conquest of eagerness over judgment,” he seeks Emma’s hand in marriage. In other words, stealing behind Emma and into the “shrubbery,” “eagerness” gets the better of his vaunted “judgment.” Thinking that

Emma is heartbroken over Frank Churchill's preference for Jane Fairfax, he tries to catch Emma on the rebound. His behavior here can only be interpreted as a social "*blunder*," unbecoming the usual "Knightleybehavior" of the conduct hero. And yet we like Mr. Knightley the better for it, and indeed, he can thank this social—and for him, scandalous—" *blunder*" for the series of revelations that bring the pair to the altar.

Austen is not done in teaching her conduct hero the lesson of the value of a "*blunder*" even after his marriage. Even at the end of the novel, Austen goes to some trouble to signal Mr. Knightley still blindly probing the meaning of "*blunder*." She writes: Mrs. Weston's poultry-house was robbed one night of all her turkies—evidently by the ingenuity of man. Other poultry-yard in the neighborhood also suffered.—Pilfering was housebreaking to Mr. Woodhouse's fears.—He was very uneasy; and but for the sense of his son-in-law's protection, would have been under wretched alarm every night of his life . . . The result of this distress was, that, with a much more voluntary, cheerful consent than his daughter have ever presumed to hope for at the moment, she was able to fix her wedding day . . . (317–9)

No real narrative business is being conducted here, though the passage comprises the penultimate paragraph of the novel. We already know that Emma and Mr. Knightley are pledged to marry; we know, too, that Emma and Mr. Knightley have both arrived at the solution of the couple living with Mr. Woodhouse at Hartfield after the marriage—so that no great change will disturb Mr. Woodhouse's delicate health. Why the business about the "pilfered poultry"? Surely, the effect is meant to be comic at Mr. Woodhouse's expense. But Austen, too, holds up Mr. Knightley for his share of ridicule. In what must be one of the biggest blunders in the comic novel tradition, Mr. Knightley abandons his own capacious grounds at Donwell Abbey so

that he can move into the house of his invalid father-in-law to look after his chickens until Mr. Woodhouse's decease—which may be some time delayed considering the power of gruel and the keen attendance of Mr. Perry. He may well wish he were again a bachelor contemplating Frank's "*blunder*" instead of his own. At least then, he could take "a hasty leave, and walk home to the coolness and solitude of Donwell Abbey." Instead, he is likely to remain suspended in the moment in which he puzzled over that first "*blunder*" Only love could reduce such a stern, erect figure as Mr. Knightley into a protector of the Woodhouse chicken pen, by casting him into this peculiar living hell. Mr. Knightley's own judgment on Emma and Harriet proves particularly apt:

How can Mr. Knightley imagine he has anything to learn himself, while Mr. Woodhouse is presenting such a delightful inferiority? . . . I am much mistaken if Mr. Knightley's doctrines give any strength of mind, or tend at all to make a man adapt himself rationally to the varieties of his situation in life. (37)

Certainly, such a conclusion subverts the gender equation that places women subordinate to men in reason. So, the middle-class patriarchal ideology of Pre-Victorian society that women are less intelligent has been subverted by Austen but still, she is not able to understand that in the favor of good conduct she is also in the grip of the same ideology. Emma follows the good conduct without knowing that she is being oppressed by the patriarchal ideology approving the patriarchal notion of good conduct for the women. Zizek clarifies the function of ideology as:

Ideology compels us to assume 'humanity' as the neutral medium within which 'man' and 'woman' are posited as the two complementary poles -- against this ideological evidence, one could

maintain that 'woman' stands for the aspect of concrete existence and 'man' for the empty-ambiguous universality. The paradox (of a profoundly Hegelian nature) is that 'woman' – that is, the moment of specific difference – functions as the encompassing ground that accounts for the emergence of the universality of man. (24-25)

Looking from Žižek's perspective, in the human and just middle-class society which is full of virtues like good conduct, prudence, gentle-men and good ladies, there is still the grip of ideology and the hegemonic power relation is maintained with the assumption of male universality and the female inferiority.

III. Class Ideology and Confirmation in *Emma*

The English class system is deeply rooted and complicated, but essentially follows a feudal system and owns class ideology throughout the ages. The families Austen writes of in her novel are aristocrats and middle class. Thus, it is useful to see Austen criticizing the aristocrats and upper middle class ideology in her novel *Emma* but also she patiently accepts the hierarchical society of Highbury. The Pre-Victorian ideology has made the Bates, Martins and Coles in the novel as its subjects. Thus, their actions are guided with their class-ideology that is basic to the construction of class rigidity and their subjectivity that conforms their social status. So, they act in ridiculous; way time and again in the course of the novel.

The middle-class ideology regard themselves as 'self' and lower class of the society as 'other' is clearly visible in the novel. The characters are hailed by the English and middle class ideology, which creates social hierarchy. Ideology, thus, continually at work to repress the individuals with the interpellation making sure that they would remain the subjects forever of middle high class. The Woodhouse family, Churchill family, Knightley family, Coles family and Elton family are upper and upper middle class families and are ready to do anything to maintain their social status and class hierarchy. The binarism of the 'self' and the 'other' is working as the ideological assumption in Woodhouse with which they define the action of Harriet as 'other' and as a wrong decision when she decides to marry poor Martin.

The revealed truth here does not come from a divine source but from the characters. Like the other characters, Mr. Knightley is clearly aware of the idea of class. When Emma and Mr. Knightley discuss about Harriet, Mr. Knightley notes that Harriet is pretty and good natured but other than that she has nothing else to recommend herself as potential wife to a man such as Mr. Elton "...she stands a better

chance marry a man like Mr. Martin who is socially her equal.” He then points out that Harriet is socially Mr. Martin’s equal much more than Mr. Elton as “...men of family would not be very found of connecting themselves with such a girl of such obscurity...Let her marry Robert Martin...” who is a farmer and equals in her status(76).

It is very important being connected to respectable families to maintain the ideological class hierarchy in Pre-Victorian society. Mrs. and Miss Bates were very poor but because they were of respectable birth they were socially acceptable. The Coles family, on the other hand were quite wealthy but not nearly so socially acceptable because they had no connection with “gently bred families” (128). Mr. Weston earned his fortune through trade but his purchase of Randalls ensconced him in the ranks of the socially acceptable. Augusta Hawkins came from Bristol which was a port known for its connection with the slave trade. The name of Hawkins was associated with the Bristol slave trade and Mrs. Elton does not display any “true gentility” (234), so her respectability is suspected even though Emma must accept her as a social equal.

Austen establishes that Emma is not entirely at fault for her conduct, because it was the society she lived in and her upbringing, which shaped her character; she did not perceive or comprehend the extent of her follies because the majority of the community was not at the position to criticize a person of Emma’s status. It is because Emma as well as the community is guided by the Pre-Victorian middle class ideology. As Emma belongs to middle-class citizen, she was expected to visit the less fortunate members as it was a social conduct of Pre-Victorian society and although Emma visits the Bates, her attitude towards them suggests that her visits were an obligation; “tiresome women- and all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second

rate and third rate of Highbury (99).” Emma, subjugated by Victorian middle-class ideology, clearly shows her shallow attitude towards the underprivileged by dehumanizing them.

Within Emma, Austen creates a world, which is very much influenced by wealth and status, reflecting the relative importance of wealth and status during her time of existence. The society where wealth and material possession dictates status and class, and ultimately their respectability in other people’s point of view. The elite upper and middle classes of society were determined by property ownership, prestige was governed by heritage and inheritance, with the family name determining ideological stature within society. This is shown through the depiction of the Coles who, despite having wealth, do not maintain a high stature within the society of Highbury. The Coles were very respectable in their way, but “they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them” is the Emma’s response to Coles invitation for a party clearly demonstrates her interpellation by the Victorian middle-class ideology (134).

Austen ends the novel with a notion depicting the strength of social values over personal integrity, when Emma states that at the end of the novel “The intimacy between her [Harriet] and Emma must sink” and their friendship must change into “a calmer sort of good will,” and unfortunately, what ought to be, and must be, seemed already in the beginning, run according to the status of the friends (317-18). It shows that the power of social values is not easily over run; the elite must remain among the elite and the lower society must remain below those of high society. By placing emphasis on status and social values and accepting those who belong within it, Austen clearly exemplifies that she is also completely infected by the ideological class construction of the society. According to her, class distinctions are always fair and

certainly she does not want to overturn the notion of class which can be proved through the end of the novel when the heroine Emma accepts the distinction between her and Harriet as friends.

Throughout the past three chapters I have shown how ideology was symptomatic for the conformity of Victorian middle-class and gender issues in the novel. In *Emma*, class ideology serves as a means to maintain the class system in a traditional rural community. This idealized traditional model, when successfully implemented, is based upon class conformity. The gentry engage in class rigidity, by doing so, they gain self-interested benefits by reinforcing the class system and gentry power within that system. Because of this class emphasis, class hierarchy can only be successful when proper boundaries remained in place. Throughout *Emma*, Knightley is charged with teaching the heroine the importance of boundaries and middle class conducts.

This dissertation provides a new perspective on how ideology reflected discussions of class, social change, and gender in the nineteenth century. Although the poor were often helped by middle class, this was by no means the only motivation or result of class ideology. Class rigidity enabled people to reassert the class system, break through the class system, establish gender roles, try out political economic philosophy, and engage in political discussions for which *Emma* is the most fertile field to study

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