



EFFEMINATE FATHERS IN THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I am going to focus on the effeminate father characters in Mr. Woodhouse in Emma, Mr. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice and Sir Walter Elliot in Persuasion. In the majority works of Jane Austen we can encounter the appearance of unconventional principal parental characters. Many times we can notice the existence of some exaggerated figures that are unable to balance their parenting features found in the protagonist's families. Jane Austen had given the common ideas about the exact duties and responsibilities of men and women. Jane Austen had given us even some unmanly fathers. Readers enjoy the social criticism which lies in the inner layer of Jane Austen's text.

Key Words: Effeminate, Parental care, Irresponsible, Luxury.

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy is a social system practiced in the society where the novel revolves around the male authority figures. In this type of custom, fathers had the authority over women, children and property. Here male domination and female subordination is witnessed. Few would rate Jane Austen as an outspoken feminist of her days. Her novels set in the early 19th century England shows the social life of the people where propriety ruled.

When we see in the novel Emma, 'Emma' is not raised by the clinched family set up of a mother and father. On the other hand, Emma had to depend on her father's guidance as, " her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her

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caresses'' (1). It is natural to expect the widower Mr. Woodhouse to be a strong person with masculine nature, but Jane Austen has given him as a neurotic, hypochondriac, and absurd old man. Throughout the novel, by my close observation of Mr. Woodhouse's character, it is evident that he is not a strong parental figure like Sir Thomas in Mansfield Park. I felt and I saw the parent child relationship between Emma and her father as reversed. The behavior of Mr. Woodhouse and the manner he is treated by others is obviously in the childish sense. He often looks Emma as the mistress of his house rather he taking the prime role. He had to be constantly attended and he is too much worried about his health and illness.

When Miss Taylor left the Woodhouse after her marriage, Emma deeply mourned of their separation and greatly felt want of Miss Taylor. Sixteen years of affection and kindness from Miss Taylor forced her feel so. Emma experiences her solitude gravely. Emma loved her father so dearly but he was not her companion. He was unable to meet her in conversation, rational or playful. There was so much of age difference between Emma and her father as Mr. Woodhouse had had a late marriage. Mr. Woodhouse always fears to be left alone. It is only Mr. Woodhouse who has to be blamed for Emma's self absorbed nature. He often complains to Emma and he feels that he is over burdened.

Once when the Woodhouse visit Randall's there is a sudden shower of snow. When they were about to return Mr. Woodhouse felt irritated and thought that it would be a problem to leave Randall's. Like a small child he fears and makes others situations unpleasant. I do not view Mr. Woodhouse as the parental figure for Emma, Instead of guarding and guiding his daughter Emma he had to be guided and guarded by Emma. He is like a spoiled child who needs the attention of others on him. He must be comforted always and Emma had the role of taking the family decisions. His words are

"what is to be done, my dear Emma what is to be done "(.120) when they are caught in the snow at the time of travel.

Mr. Woodhouse is conflicting to what a parent should be and he had to be pampered and cared for Austen has portrayed him as a comic relief. He is an effeminate father.

Mr. Woodhouse is a friendly and an amiable person who had spent his days without much work to his mind or body. He seemed too aged than his real age. Mr. Woodhouse concentrates more on his food, his doctor Mr. Perry apart from his lovable daughter Emma. Regarding marriage changes the course of life. He hates changes and feels marriage is a misery. At the beginning itself we can understand that he is not happy about the marriage of Miss Taylor his governess. He pities her, thinking absurdly that she might be sad to get



married and get separated from the household of the Woodhouse. His lamenting nature is shown.

"His spirits required support. He was a nervous man, easily depressed, fond of everybody that he was used to, and hating to part with them hating change of every kind"(7).

He often converses with his doctor Mr. Perry about his rich food, the drizzling, or the breeze and become tensed soon. He loves to be in the midst of friends always. It is Emma who cares humors and, engages him and sees that he is busy with visitors and friends. He would have faced a terrible life if not for Emma. From all these things it is clear that he does not behave or do his duty as a dutiful parent. Mr. Woodhouse encounters problems in reading and is with linguistic weakness too. He is in great anxiety to understand the meaning of the conversations or letters. This affects him in his business dealings which force him to depend on others. Mr. Knightly gives trust worthy help to Mr. Woodhouse. He often suffers from depression with a negative attitude and fails to enjoy life positively.

When Mr. Woodhouse came to know about Emma's Mr. Knightly marriage he tries to inhibit their wishes.

"When sounded on the subject (of their matrimony), He was so miserable, that they were almost hopeless" (483).

Finally Mr. Woodhouse accepted and felt happy regarding their wedding on knowing that Emma and Mr. Knightly will stay in his house itself, along with him even after their marriage.

Next we can see about Mr. Bennet of Pride and Prejudice. He just ignores his daughters and has too little sense of responsibility. He shows negligence in matter of duty as a husband and as a father. He is totally self centered, indifferent, lazy and does not care about the requirements of his family members. He did not have the economic vision and so he spent his entire income lavishly. He thought that his wife Mrs. Bennet will bear him a son who will secure the family from financial problems and from the entailment. But things did not happen so. As his wife did not bear a son and as they had no resources, the family was in a mess. He very well understood the fact that upon his death and due to the entailment, his wife and his daughters had become homeless and destitute yet his behavior of just always being in the library shows his family attachment. He is just a spectator of the blunders of his family.



Mr. Bennet was very fond of Elizabeth, his second daughter. Even when Mr. Bennet comes to know that unless his daughters get married, their life will become problematic due to the entailment of his estate to Mr. Collins he is not bothered. When Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth for marriage, Elizabeth rejects the proposal. If Elizabeth would have accepted and married Collins there would not be so much of problems for the other daughters or for the Bennet, but Eliza did not accept and was stubborn. Though we may think that Mrs. I Bennett behaves foolishly, she was the one shouting at Elizabeth and begging her to agree for the wedding she felt that the marriage would safeguard the entire family members and change the course of their future lives. Mr. Bennet, even in this situation did not ask Elizabeth for rejecting the proposal. He just declares

"An unhappy alternative is before you. Elizabeth From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents your mother will never see you again n if you do".

When he comes to know about Jane's broken love, he takes it too lightly and this distresses Jane. He is not bothered about Lydia's behavior and gives permission to her to go to Brighton even when Elizabeth warns him and this eventually lead to the elopement of Lydia with Wickham. This shocks him and it is only now, he realizes all his follies and goes out of his house to search Lydia and soon gives even this job to Mr. Gardiner. When Darcy saved Lydia from her marriage he said "so much the better, it it will save me a word of a trouble and economy.

Finally we can see about Sir Walter Elliot of Persuasion who is full of vanity. It will be exact if I say that vanity was the beginning and the end of his character. He felt that his baronetcy was more important than anything else. Even when he is forced to live in Bath from Kellench hall he is not shaken. He just reshapes his arrogance to fit himself to the new life style in Bath. His daughter Anne feels bad at this proud nature of her father even in such a situation.

"She might not wonder, but she must sigh that her father should feel no degradation in his change, should see nothing to regret in the duties and dignity of the resident landholder, should find so much to be vain of in the littleness of a town (15.5).

Even when Sir Walter uproots himself from the grand life style of Kellench hall to the lesser luxury life of Bath he is not bothered. He thinks, as how he can show off at the right place and make friends with the right people in Bath. His ill nature is clearly seen. Some critics feel that if Sir Elliot were an animal, he would be born as a chameleon-because very often he



changes his colour that is he changes his behavior and nature according to the circumstances he is in, He easily adopts himself according to his desires.

In his youth he made his parents get him a suitable rich wife by behaving as they wished. Then when he was in search of a good position and status and money, to be in a high position society he bridged the gap with his cousins. All his success is only due to his adjustments and adaptability. All this is only when he wished and longed and he did not adjust unless he wanted. His adaptability will not always convince others; it will confuse them and even irritate them. Anne feels frustrated and irritated when she thinks about his changing nature. He behaves with Mrs. Clay in public in a pleasing manner like the others but mentions ill about her to Anne though Anne knows how good Mrs. Clay is. In the presence of Mrs. Clay, Mr. Elliot speaks in a different way about her and in her absence he speaks in a different way about her.

Mr. Elliot who is strongly impressed by wealth and social status allows Mrs. Clay who is not of equal rank in society to be a companion to his elder daughter. Sir Walter's vanity forces him to treat his daughters itself with partiality. He always speaks and acts only in the favor of Elizabeth as she resembles his wife and as he feels she has inherited his pride. He feels proud about her as his heir and just simply ignores the other two daughters Anne and Mary.

CONCLUSION:

The real evil of Emma's position was that she thought too much of herself and too well about herself- these qualities were her greatest disadvantages, Throughout the novel we can witness the inefficiency of Mr. Woodhouse and this is the main reason for Emma to act on her one way. All the problems to which Emma landed to be only because of Mr. Woodhouses are parental attention on Emma. Mr. Bennet may seem to be an agreeable character but his short comings reflect on his wife and daughters futures. Though intelligent he spends most of his time in pointing out the weakness of others than looking at his own family troubles. He is not ready to find out a remedy. This shows that he is an effeminate character. He leads a detached life. Neither nor did Mr. Bennet save money for his daughter's futures nor did he take an active role in the decision making of his family, Mr. Bennet just hides himself in his library and proves to be an insensitive father. He is proud and strongly believes that his appearance and title are his assets but he does not realize that both these things he has got, from his parents and not by hard work and toil. Anne's love affair broken, and Anne being without getting married even till the age of 27 was only because of the irresponsible effeminate Mr. Walter Elliot.



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