



The Evaluation Of Class Distinction And Moral Values In Emma In Language And Culture Studies

*Emma'da Sınıf Ayrımı ve Ahlaki Değer Konularının Dil ve Kültür Öğrenimlerinde
Değerlendirilmesi*

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmada Austen'in (İngiliz Edebiyatı'nı, dil ve kültür çalışmaları yapanlar, öğrencileri ve çağdaş okuyucuyu etkileyen) Emma (1815) adlı romanı ele alınmaktadır. Bir yazar olarak Jane Austen kadın ve erkek karakterlerinin ilişkilerini, onların günlük ilgilerini ve genel dünyevi konulardaki görüşlerini değerlendirmektedir. Temaları arasında dil ve aşk, para, evlilik, sosyal sınıf, kader, sosyal ve ahlaki değerler vardır. Jane Austen ev eğitiminden pek çok şey öğrenmiştir; bunun neticesinde de bu klasik romanını kaleme almıştır. Austen diğer romanlarında da benzer konuları ele almıştır, ancak onların sonuçları daha farklı kapsamdadır. Jane Austen zamanının arazi sahibi kırsal üst sınıfının gücüne fazlasıyla inanmaktaydı, bu inanç hümanizm çerçevesindeydi ve farklı sosyal kaynaklara dayanmaktaydı; ancak bu fikirler yirmibirinci yüzyıl çıkarımlarını da içermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dünyevi konular, sınıf ayrımı, ahlaki meseleler, İngiliz toplumu

ABSTRACT

This article is intended to examine Austen's Emma. As a female writer, she reviews the relationships between women and men, their daily interests in their lives, and views on general worldly matters. Her themes include language, love, money, marriage, social class, suffering, faith, social, and moral values. Jane Austen learned a lot from her home education, and she produced a classical novel. Austen addressed the same issues in her other novels, but their solutions were fundamentally different. Jane Austen very much believed in the powers of the landed country gentry of her time, her beliefs had been shaped by humanism, and were based on different social sources, but these ideas also have implications for the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Worldly matters, class distinction, moral issues, English society

Emma (1815) is the story of the rich, beautiful daughter of a country gentleman. Her father has willingly let her have her own way after the death of her mother when she was a child. The Woodhouses are at the top of the social group in their very limited neighbourhood Highbury. Emma Woodhouse, "handsome, clever, and rich" (Austen, 1996; 5), is given free rein as mistress of the house by her hypochondriac father.

Although Emma has a high opinion of herself as an intelligent and experienced person, her experience is in fact extremely restricted. At the very beginning of the novel Emma is feeling all alone because her governess has just married Mr. Weston, who is a local gentleman. However, Emma soon becomes friend with Harriet Smith, who is a young woman from the local boarding school. She persuades her to refuse the marriage proposal of Robert Martin, a respectable farmer. Soon Emma decides on a match between Harriet and the local clergyman, Mr. Elton. But Mr. Elton's attention turns to Emma herself but not to Harriet. When Emma refuses him, he goes to Bath, and then he returns with a dominant woman as his wife.

'Mr. Elton, a very happy man. He had gone away rejected and mortified-disappointed in a very sanguine hope, after a series of what had appeared to him strong encouragement: and not only losing the right lady, but finding himself debased to the level of a very wrong one' (194).

In the meantime, two new characters, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, join the Highbury society. Jane is the poor niece of Miss Bates, who is a single, good hearted, but very talkative elderly woman. And Frank Churchill is Mr. Weston's son. After a short time, Emma begins to feel attracted to Frank Churchill. She begins to discourage him from any involvement with Jane Fairfax. She tells him her views of Jane Fairfax. For her, Jane has come there to get rid of an emotional involvement. Emma has lots of misjudgements. She is rude to Miss Bates and is warned by Mr. Knightley, who is a highly respected and cultivated gentleman in Highbury and is a distant relative of Emma. When Harriet reveals her love for Mr. Knightley, Emma realises that she loves him herself. The secret engagement of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax is revealed, and finally Robert Martin proposes again to Harriet, and Emma and Mr. Knightley confess their love. They look for *perfect happiness* in their marriages.

Emma is a self-deceptive character. She lives in her dream world and tends to misunderstand the actions of the people around her. She indulges herself in her imaginative world, and makes plans instead of observing the reality. On the other hand, she is honest enough to accept her wrong doings when they are revealed. Emma, being the daughter of a country gentleman, Mr. Woodhouse, lives in Highbury at the estate called Hartfield. Her governess Miss Taylor and everybody around her have spoiled and flattered her. In other words, she is a beloved one in

the high society in Highbury, and her status in this society has a destructive effect on her personality, and also she is very much self-indulgent in her father's house. Except for Mr. Knightley, people do not seriously try to correct Emma's mistakes:

'I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry... Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's' (108-109).

From the very beginning of the novel Emma regards herself as a perfect individual. She is beautiful, clever, has considerable amount of fortune and also she is the organiser of social activities in her circle. She is considered to be faultless.

For Leigh (1996; 157), Austen is never in doubt about Emma's qualities and capacity. What Austen says about Emma emphasises this point:

'Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her... The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself' (5).

Mr. Knightley's deliberations of Emma are of special interest to the reader. Mr Knightley has known Emma from her childhood, and he loves her. Mr. Knightley in his observations about Emma is balanced and analytical. He says:

'She will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding' (37).

In the novel Jane Austen usually expresses herself through Mr. Knightley. He has the opportunity of visiting the Woodhouses whenever he wants. For him Emma is a fanciful and troublesome creature. He warns Emma whenever he sees a fault with her and tries to improve her

character. He knows that it is necessary to teach her lessons in order to achieve this. He says:

' I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of return; it would do her good. But there is nobody hereabouts to attach her, and she goes so seldom from home' (69).

Emma's judgements are very distant from the realities. From time to time, she misreads a puzzling detail in Frank's behaviour. Mrs. Weston also hopes that Frank will marry Emma, and Emma believes that it is she who attracts him. The Westons are so blind that while Frank and Jane are talking, they can discuss a match between Jane and Mr. Knightley on the way to Hartfield. Only Mr. Knightley himself perceives that there is some prior understanding between the two, Jane and Frank.

Emma fears critical and rational friendships. She has her own hostile fantasies about Jane. Emma has a great antipathy for Jane, "Emma could not forgive her," (169), because Jane is a rival for her. Unlike Jane, Emma treats Frank Churchill with wilful indulgence from the beginning. She easily forgives Frank's manners, unlike Jane, and in a way she is jealous of Jane's fundamental integrity.

It has been suggested by Wright that Emma has, "supreme self-confidence and serene delusion" (1973; 138). Emma always behaves openly and with a kind of mockery to the people around her. Austen adopts a comic treatment not only towards Emma, but also to the other characters. Emma sometimes creates parody under the conditions of the small repetitive business of living. There is a whole perspective of comedy in the remark that Emma makes to Harriet Smith about the way of life she may expect to be enjoying if she still remains a spinster at fifty:

'Woman's usual occupations of eye and hand and mind will be open to me then, as they are now... If I draw less, I shall read more, if I give up music, I shall take to carpet work' (85).

There is a comic contrast between this vision and the actual pleasure in the society of Emma. Emma's opinions are transformed by the text and brought into contact with the world outside it. Emma's merry presentation of herself as a spinster at fifty reveals the actual anxieties and hopes that she must be entertaining herself in relation to a woman's possible destinies. This situation also brings continuous untroubled necessities with Emma that the text itself cannot share, because she gains self-knowledge step by step.

The "carpet work" implies a cheerful acceptance of life as it has to be lived in that world. The riches of the novel are gently mocked by reference to the repetitive monotonies that lie behind them. Most implicit in the comedy, however, is the feeling that Emma at fifty would still be Emma, the same, with carpet work comfortable, and at home.

At Hartfield Emma is the centre of interest. She thinks that she cannot be in control of everything in her husband's house as she is in her father's. Moreover, she wants to have wealth and to be the mistress of her father's house. These are enough for Emma to be happy all her life.

Miss Taylor, who has taken place of Emma's dead mother for eight years, has married the cheerful Mr. Weston and has left Hartfield for Randalls, a house half a mile down the land. Her loss is acutely felt, and Emma and her father sink into a sorrowful self-pity which they comically decide to call grief. The situation brings out all of Mr. Woodhouse's weaknesses. For poor Emma now there is a new responsibility, she has to have the burden of her father's care.

Mr. Woodhouse married late, and his enthusiasm for his two daughters lately has been transferred to playing backgammon and gossiping to his children without trouble. But when Isabella, his elder daughter, marries John Knightley, he regards all marriages as deaths. His 'poor Isabella' and his 'poor Miss Taylor' are laughable and unnatural. He is timid and antisocial. He hates all changes in his life. In fact he is an important child for Emma and Emma has two roles. As a daughter and a mother, she must both obey him and command him. Although his name refers to thoughtfulness in Highbury, he is really selfish. He has primary egotistical activities such as: 'sleeping after dinner, as usual' (65). He just lives without an active mind or body, but Emma loves him and at the very end of the novel she is persuaded by him for the union of his greatest friend. Mr. Knightley, and her dearest daughter, Emma.

Even though Emma does not think of marriage at the beginning, she likes match-making more than anything else. She is the person who prepares the marriage between Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor and she is proud of this success. She says:

'And you have forgotten one matter of joy to me, and a very considerable one that I made match myself. I made the match myself, you know, four years ago; and to have it take place and be proved in the right when so many people said Mr. Weston would never marry again may comfort me for anything' (43).

Mr. Knightley is against the idea of Emma's match-making. He does not find it proper for a young lady to arrange marriages. Emma decides that Harriet Smith is the most suitable match for Mr. Elton.

She feared it was what everybody else must think of and predict. It was not likely, however, that anybody should have equalled her in the date of the plan, as it had entered her brain during the very first evening of Harriet's coming to Hartfield (63).

Emma, healthy, vigorous, almost aggressive, is the real ruler of the household at Hartfield in her domestic world. She is also the only one who is the natural feminine leader of her whole community. At her time social taboos would have prevented any young woman from taking such a commanding role in pursuing a man for herself, but Emma actively tries to find a husband for Harriet. The reason why Emma directs Harriet lies in the fact mentioned above. Harriet is the type of girl who will make Emma feel her superiority. This has been a point emphasised by Kennedy:

'Miss Woodhouse slights Jane Fairfax because she finds that she cannot patronise her, she does not quite know how to be friends with a girl who is not, socially, her equal. But she is lonely and there is no girl in Highbury quite on her level, so she selects, as a companion, Harriet Smith, a harmless, feather-pated little nobody who is grateful for patronage. And in her attempts to make a lady of Harriet she makes a great goose of herself' (Kennedy, 1970; 78).

Craik also agrees with Kennedy and points out as:

'Harriet's beauty arouses a reasonable reaction, but her manners appeal to Emma's vanity and snobbery and the two together produce the delightful but quite unwarranted conclusion that is, she must be sensible because she is pretty and admires Emma, and therefore should occupy a higher place in society' (Craik, 1975; 151).

Emma considers Harriet and Mr. Elton to be equal in most respects though not in all. For her, Mr. Elton is a good-looking man, and has a comfortable home and a very sufficient income. He does not have low connections and his family is not of the kind that will object to the doubtful birth of Harriet, the only fault that one can find in her. But

Emma absolutely believes that Harriet comes from a respectable family. She says:

This misfortune of your birth ought to make you particularly careful as to your associates. There can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter, and you must support your claim to that station by everything within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you' (60).

Jane Austen here criticises Emma's moral values which reflect not only the values of the middle class landed gentry, but also the latent class discrimination at that time in England. In fact, Emma herself looks down upon Harriet. She is not the type of girl to be a good match for Mr. Knightley or Frank Churchill or for anybody else other than Mr. Elton. Emma also does not want Harriet to get married to Mr. Martin, the farmer, who has a great interest in Harriet:

'and on Harriet's there could be little doubt that the idea of being preferred by him would have all the usual weight and efficacy, and he was really a very pleasing young man, a young man whom any woman not fastidious might like. He was reckoned very handsome; his person much admired in general though not by her, there being a want of elegance of feature which she could not dispense with: -but the girl who could be gratified by a Robert Martin's riding about the country to get walnuts for her, might very well be conquered by Mr. Elton's admiration' (64).

Mr. Martin who makes a marriage proposal to Harriet Smith, is in fact superior to Harriet according to Mr. Knightley, whose opinion on this subject seems to be reflecting Austen's own view:

'No, he [Mr.Martin] is not her equal indeed, for he is as much her superior in sense as in situation. She is not a sensible girl, nor a girl of any information. She has been taught nothing useful, and is too young and too simple to have acquired anything herself. At her age she can have no experience, and with her little wit, is not very likely ever to have any that can avail her. She is pretty, and she is good tempered, and that is all' (87).

Jane Austen is also very ironical about Emma's class consciousness. Emma scorns Mr. Martin because he is a simple farmer. As has been

pointed out above, class discrimination was a typical attitude in eighteenth-century England; but the fact that she considers Harriet to be superior to Mr. Martin shows how wrong her values are. Hence, Austen ridicules Emma's snobbery with regard to class discrimination. In order to satisfy her curiosity about how people from lower classes live, she likes to hear Harriet's stories about the Martins. Her snobbery is ridiculed when she makes a scathing remark about the lower class:

'A young farmer whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do' (59).

Emma regards the Martins to be so inferior to her own class in society that she can be so arrogant as to say the following words to Harriet after making her refuse Mr. Martin's marriage proposal:

'It would have grieved me to lose your acquaintance which must have been the consequence of marrying Mr. Martin' (80).

For Butler, Emma's thoughts are censurable. The terms Emma applies to Mr. Elton are not quite worthy: "expediency", "suitable", "well-meaning", "without low connections", and "without any deficiency of useful understanding"(261).

According to Mr. Knightley Emma is guided by her fancy instead of her reason and that's why she fails to understand the motives of others, as Mr. Knightley says:

Upon my word, Emma, to hear you abusing the reason you have is almost enough to make me think so too. Better be without sense, than misapply it as you do' (60).

Austen's irony becomes more obvious when it is seen that Emma is completely blind to the facts, so she is shocked to learn that Mr Elton's aim is to marry herself and not Harriet. Emma becomes the target of Austen's irony and ridicule when she despises Mr. Knightley's judgement concerning Mr. Elton's interest in her:

'She walked on, amusing herself in the consideration of blunders which often arise from a partial knowledge of circumstance, of the mistakes which people of high pretensions to judgement are forever falling into; and not very

well pleased with her brother for imagining her blind and ignorant, and in want of counsel' (133).

When Emma hears Mr. Elton's declaration of his love for, she realises that Mr. John Knightley was right. However, she still goes on deceiving herself with regard to Mr. Elton's behaviour as a transfer of his emotions from Harriet to herself. Later on, Emma has to be honest to her and accept that she has misunderstood Mr. Elton from the very beginning. As Kennedy has remarked, this is Emma's "first lesson" (1996; 79). From that point on Emma starts to grow psychologically.

Thus Emma gradually gains self-knowledge and becomes mature. When Emma hears about Mr. Elton's intentions to marry her, she realises that she can also make mistakes, and she decides to compensate for what she has done to Harriet. She invites Harriet to Hartfield and devotes all attention to her by reading books or playing the piano. She even lets Harriet visit the Martins with the hope that she may forget about Mr. Elton. But at that moment Emma is not mature enough to realise that Harriet is Mr. Martin's equal when their social levels are taken into consideration. For Harding, Jane Austen wants Emma to become aware of this fact as " She will have Emma correct her errors through her own experiences" (Harding, 1977; 57). As a result of this unpleasant event Emma decides not to get involved in match-making any more. Moreover, Emma cannot prevent herself from imagining a match between Harriet and Mr. Frank Churchill. Later, Emma cannot help expressing her opinion on a similar matter. Harriet tells her that she fell in love with a man superior to Mr. Elton, and Emma thinks that the man may be Mr. Frank Churchill. She remembers her resolution not to make any comments; she gives Harriet hope by saying:

'He is your superior, no doubt, and there do seem objections and obstacles of a very serious nature; but, yet, Harriet, more wonderful things have taken place, there have been matches of greater disparity' (338).

Afterwards Emma realises that Harriet has Mr. Knightley in her mind instead of Mr. Frank Churchill. Emma becomes the victim of her careless opinions, and she cannot even bear the thought of Mr. Knightley marrying Harriet. Meanwhile, Emma, who is always interested in others' affairs, feels involved for a short time with Frank Churchill. Emma has heard of him often, and she persuades herself that she will like him and even perhaps have the thought of an engagement:

'Now, it so happened that in spite of Emma's resolution of never marrying, there was something in the name, in the idea of Mr. Frank Churchill, which always interested her' (139).

So Emma thinks of Frank Churchill a great deal. His manners are gentle and good and he is also young and handsome. She is almost certain that she is in love with him when he first leaves, but after a day she begins to have her doubts. Meanwhile, Frank Churchill's secret affair with Jane Fairfax is revealed. Frank and Jane have to hide their secret relationship and this creates an intrigue in the novel.

Emma then realises how she has been misled by her own imagination. The revelation of this secret contributes to her gaining self-knowledge. She realises that Frank means nothing to her and she unconsciously makes a comparison between Frank and Mr. Knightley. Mr. Knightley is in fact just the opposite of Frank. He is not a hypocrite, but a real gentleman.

Jane Fairfax, who is Miss Bates's niece, has almost all the respected moral values that one cannot find in Emma. She does not interfere into other people's affairs. She is content with her books and with her music. On the other hand she also likes to be with others; she is a sociable and agreeable character. For Wright (1973), Jane is a rival in everything to Emma. Emma because of her envy does not show her the affection that she deserves as a friend. And towards the end of the novel Emma does her best to be forgiven by Jane:

'She had scarcely a stronger regret than for her past coldness; and the person, whom she had been so many months neglecting, was now the very one on whom she would have lavished every distinction of regard or sympathy, she wanted to be of use to her, wanted to show a value for her society; and testify respect and consideration' (380).

As for Emma's relationship with Miss Bates, Emma is indifferent in the beginning. She knows that Miss Bates is talkative, but a very good woman. Despite this, Emma behaves very rudely towards her at the picnic on Box-Hill. After Mr. Knightley's warnings she regrets what she has done to Miss Bates and decides to put things right if she can:

'If attention, in future, could do away the past, she might hope to be forgiven. She had been often remiss, her conscience told her so; remiss, perhaps, more in thought than fact; scornful, ungracious. But it should be so no more. In the warmth of true

contrition, she would call upon her the very next morning, and it should be the beginning, on her side, of a regular, equal, kindly intercourse' (370).

Mr. Knightley is perhaps the most influential character on Emma's gaining self-knowledge. He tries to show Emma what is right and what is wrong whenever he finds the opportunity. Emma has respect for his judgements, and tries to act in accordance with them.

Mr. Knightley, who is a realist unlike Emma, sees people's merits and demerits like Jane Austen. He is aware of Emma's capacity to overcome her faults and to become the woman he would appreciate, and he feels respect for her. And Emma gradually becomes the very woman whom Mr. Knightley has in mind; she gains complete self-knowledge and she is no longer blind to the facts:

'With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. She was proved to have been universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing-for she had not quite mischief. She had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and she too much feared, on Mr. Knightley...' (412).

On the other hand Mr. Knightley is also Emma's ideal man from the very beginning. When she criticises Frank she, in fact, reveals the moral qualities which she wants to see in an ideal man she dreams of marrying:

'None of that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleneck, which a man should display in every transaction of his life (388).

Emma loves Mr. Knightley without being aware of it. She cannot bear the idea that Mr. Knightley is going to marry Jane Fairfax when Mrs. Weston tells Emma about her opinion on this subject. She objects to such a marriage under the pretext that her sister's little son Herry will inherit Ponwell Abbey. But later on she realises that she loves Mr. Knightley. Then she understands what kind of a mistake she has made for Harriet and for herself, though it is very hard for her to admit and recognise for her. Jane Austen says:

'Her own conduct as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which

had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world' (398).

In fact what matures Emma is her suffering and fear that Mr. Knightley may have the intention to marry Harriet. But in the end she becomes very happy when she learns that Mr. Knightley loves nobody but her:

'While Mr. Knightley spoke, Emma's mind was most busy, and, with all the wonderful velocity of thought, had been able to see that Harriet's hopes had been entirely groundless, a mistaken delusion, as complete a delusion as any of her own that she had been saying relative to Harriet had been all taken as the language of her own feelings' (417-418.)

Another great change in Emma's social values is the concept of class distinction and social order. This is most obvious in Harriet's case. Emma, when she first deals with Harriet, whose parentage is unknown, hopes to lead her to a superior life without thinking of the necessary changes that would affect the established social order of the village. She finally understands how she has misjudged Harriet's pride when Harriet dreams of marrying Mr. Knightley, and she regrets having prevented Harriet from marrying Mr. Martin, the farmer.

Emma is then able to see Harriet as she is. Harriet has neither wealth, nor nobility which are the two necessities needed to be included among the higher class. Emma even decides that Harriet must return to her origin, and she becomes happy when she learns that Harriet has accepted to marry Mr. Martin, who has proposed to her for the second time.

One may say that *Emma* is probably Jane Austen's most finely constructed novel. Emma Woodhouse is constantly at the centre of the narrative with her lively personality, energy and charm. Yet, Jane Austen never conceals Emma's defects, and through a masterful control of irony and aestheticism she keeps her heroine in a critical perspective. Emma's illusions lead her not to a tragedy, but to a moral education through a painful process. Until the moment of her self-recognition, her spirit

remains free, but Mr. Knightley acts the role of a guardian for her restless imagination.

To conclude, throughout the novel, Emma is seen with moral and social contradictions in her mind. However, Emma has come to self-recognition and self-knowledge gradually through repetitive.

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