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With reference to ONE of Gilgamesh, Oedipus the King, Pride and Prejudice, or Ghost World discuss the importance of setting. How do the physical and social circumstances in which the protagonist finds him or herself define his or her character? Does it mirror his or her condition? Is it something he or she must escape in the quest for self? Or is it that to which he or she must return?

Social status is something that has always been valued in society. Whether it’s by comparing income, education, or occupation, people seem to be drawn to determining where they are in relation to others. In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, social status is a pivotal aspect that defines a person’s intrinsic worth, as well as their importance and influence in society. Jane Austen uses irony repeatedly in Pride and Prejudice to expose the ridiculousness of the social circumstances at the time. Characters such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Miss Bingly who strictly follow the rules of society are ridiculed and left for the reader to detest for their snobby and overbearing nature. Elizabeth is constantly struggling against her unfortunate social circumstances and her overconfidence in her abilities to draw conclusions about the world, and manages to overcome this by developing sympathy for others, reevaluating her views. Austen’s social ideology is based on how people can benefit from human emotion

Elizabeth’s family is of a lower social ranking, and she feels that she is weighed down by her family. Her mother often embarrasses her because of her lack of social graces, and her behaviour is predictable. As a flat character, Mrs. Bennet seems to be only interested in her children getting married, and she ends up withdrawing her cold behaviour towards both Darcy and Bingley only once they unexpectedly become marriage prospects for her daughters. She belongs to a lower class than the majority of the other characters who belong to the upper class. Mrs. Bennet has little to no redeemable characteristics, and her shallowness prevents her from ever growing as a character. Elizabeth fears telling her mother that she is engaged to Darcy because she knows how much she detests him, but Mrs. Bennet’s reaction upon telling her changes to excitement about how “how rich and how great” (Austen 466) Elizabeth will be. Her younger sisters are also reckless and lack manners. Her youngest sister Lydia Bennet planned on eloping with Wickham even though he obviously had no intention on marrying her, and risked damaging her whole family’s reputation. This causes Elizabeth to feel guilty about keeping her knowledge of the true nature of Darcy and Wickham hidden from the rest of her family. Upon this reflection, she realizes the mistakes of her family’s prejudice towards others and their lack of manners towards others. Furthermore, she reflects on her own mistakes in her judgement of Darcy:

She was humbled, she was grieved; she repented, though she hardly knew of what. She became jealous of his esteem, when she could no longer hope to be benefited by it. . . .

What a triumph for him, as she often thought, could he know that the proposals which she had proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been most gladly and gratefully received! . . .

It was a union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved; and from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance. (Austen 383)

Her repentance for her mistakes in judgement help her realize how well they are suited for each other. Her ease and liveliness would help improve Darcy, but his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world would be of greater importance in improving Elizabeth. Through their marriage, Elizabeth is able to escape from her family’s selfishness and improve herself.

Even after Darcy managed to convince Wickham to marry Lydia, their affection for each other soon “sunk into indifference” and they constantly moved from place to place (Austen 476).

Because of this, Elizabeth feels that others are quick to judge herself by her status and family and ironically herself is quick to judge others. Darcy is described as being “much handsomer than Mr. Bingley” and having around double the fortune, but is found to have too much pride that these features cannot save him (Austen 12). From the first time Elizabeth meets Darcy, she does not like him because he appears arrogant and obnoxious in his manners and actions. He refuses to dance with Elizabeth saying “she is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt ME” and Elizabeth goes back and tells the story to her friends “with great spirit” (Austen 13). This reveals that she doesn’t take serious offense to what he has said, and allows her to make a fair observation of his character. Although this judgement does seem to be valid, Elizabeth fails to determine Darcy’s true character because of her lower social ranking. Although Darcy does not change much in the story, he does learn to not immediately dismiss people he does not find agreeable, revealed later that “If he did shrug his shoulders, it was not till Sir William was out of sight” (Austen 473).

Uncertainty creates the need for thought.

(Austen 435) Argument with de Bourgh

While writing her novels, Jane Austen would hide her manuscripts when guests approached to preserve her privacy at a time when a female’s entrance into the public was associated with a loss of femininity (<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/context.html>). As mentioned in “The Fear of Alienation in Pride and Prejudice”, the society is divided into classes but the social boundaries do not seem to be clearly defined. Bingly earns roughly half the amount that Darcy does per year and he is not even from the landed gentry but they still share social equality. Mr. Bennet, who is from the landed gentry, on the other hand, is unworthy of becoming a relative through marriage due to the connections that he has.

Darcy and Elisabeth both go through a gradual transformation about each other. Elizabeth is described from Darcy as being “tolerable” (Austen 13) to “a pretty woman” (Austen 33) and finally to “one of the handsomest woman of [his] acquaintance” (Austen 334)

<https://www.planetebook.com/ebooks/Pride-and-Prejudice.pdf>

<http://www.jstor.org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/stable/30053475?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>

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Self-Realization and Social Harmony in Austen's Pride and Prejudice

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