Paul Bartlett

Professor Christopher Keep

Elizabeth Jinsun Song

ENG 1027F, Tutorial 009

27 November 2017

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

The society in *Pride and Prejudice* is divided into classes but the social boundaries do not seem to be clearly defined. Darcy, Bingly, and Lady Catherine are not financial equals but they still share social equality. Bingly earns roughly half the amount that Darcy does per year and he is not even from the landed gentry. The landed gentry is considered to be part of the upper class, and since Bingley’s wealth came from trade and he didn’t own an estate, him and his sisters were considered to be part of the middle class. The Bingley’s are considered to be of lower class than Darcy, Bingly, and Lady Catherine and Mrs. Bennet did originally come from the middle class. But Mr. Bennet, who is from the landed gentry, is considered to be from the upper class and is still said unworthy of becoming a relative through marriage due to the connections that he has. Ironically, Bingley’s sisters spend most of the novel making “snide remarks about Mrs. Bennet’s middle class connections, when their own family came from the same class” (“Social Class and the Bennet Family”). Near the end of the story when Lady Catherine asks about Darcy’s proposal to Elizabeth, Lady Catherine threatens Elizabeth by saying that “[y]ou will be censured, slighted, and despised, by everyone connected with him. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us.” (Austen 437). Elizabeth stands up to Lady Catherine and says “[h]e is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (Austen 439). Lady Catherine agrees with this statement, but counters by asking “who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition.” (Austen 439). Unlike Lady Catherine, Elizabeth does not value class and connections highly, and she states that “[she is] only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in [her] own opinion, constitute [her] happiness, without reference to [Lady Catherine], or to any person so wholly unconnected with [her]” (Austen 441). By refusing to act in a manner considered suitable based on a person’s class or connections, she is able to improve her perception of the world and escape the expectations others place on her. Through marrying Darcy, she is able to take on his name and be free of the prejudice she endured as a Bennet.

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 selfish and 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. Elizabeth’s 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.

All the characters of the story are believable, and Austen doesn’t just poke fun at the misbehaviour of the upper class.

Jane Austen “wrote behind a door that creaked when visitors approached; this warning allowed her to hide manuscripts before anyone could enter” (Sparknotes Editors). This allowed her to “preserve her privacy at a time when English society associated a female’s entrance into the public sphere with a reprehensible loss of femininity” (Sparknotes Editors). This background reflects how Elizabeth is in the story. Even though she goes against many of societies expectations of woman at the time, she still has good manners and converses well with everyone. When Jane is sick and she can’t take a carriage to visit her, Elizabeth walks there “alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise” (Austen 39). She arrives at the house dirty, and although she understands that Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley probably hold her in contempt for it, she still seems to be only concerned with her sister’s well-being. Many characters in the story, such as Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine, overvalue class and social ranking, and these characters are portrayed as having a lower intelligence. Even though these characters are older and more mature than Elizabeth, their lack of judgement and self-reflection causes them to stagnate. Throughout the story, the characters that change the most are Darcy and Elizabeth. They both go through a gradual transformation of their opinion of 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). When the ladies first see Darcy, he is described as being “much handsomer than Mr. Bingley” (Austen 12) and having around double the fortune, but is found to have too much pride that these features cannot save him. 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 prejudice. If she had put more thought into her judgement of Darcy, she might have thought that he can’t always be that disagreeable if Bingley was friends with him. Elizabeth’s change in opinion of Darcy only happens once she gets the letter from him.

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).

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).

Works Cited

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. www.planetebook.com/ebooks/Pride-and-Prejudice.pdf.

"The Fear of Alienation in Pride and Prejudice." *The Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2013. *Academic OneFile*, go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=lond95336&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CA359707522&it=r&asid=a16b375b30d211c410dc4be2dd3e9789. Accessed 25 Nov. 2017.

Ashfaq, Samina, Samina Ashfaq, and Nasir Jamal Khattak. *Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences (Pakistan): Self-Realization and Social Harmony in Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. 22 Vol. , 2014. Web. 25 Nov. 2017.

Greenfield, Susan C. “The Absent-Minded Heroine: Or, Elizabeth Bennet Has a Thought.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2006, pp. 337–350. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30053475.

Paris, Bernard J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Routledge, books.google.ca/books?id=-D4rDwAAQBAJ&lpg=PA135&dq=She%20washumbled%2C%20she%20was%20grieved%3B%20she%20repented&pg=PA135#v=onepage&q=She%20washumbled,%20she%20was%20grieved;%20she%20repented&f=false.

SparkNotes Editors. “SparkNote on Pride and Prejudice.” SparkNotes.com. SparkNotes LLC. 2007. Web. 25 Nov. 2017.

“Social Class and the Bennet Family in ‘PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.’” *The Powell Blog*, 1 Sept. 2010, rpowell.livejournal.com/52202.html.

[https://uwo.summon.serialssolutions.com/search?s.q=pride+and+prejudice&s.cmd=addFacetValueFilters%28ContentType%2CNewspaper+Article%3At%29&spellcheck=true&keep\_r=true#!/search?ho=t&fvf=IsPeerReviewed,true,f&l=en-UK&q=pride%20and%20prejudice%20elizabeth](https://uwo.summon.serialssolutions.com/search?s.q=pride+and+prejudice&s.cmd=addFacetValueFilters(ContentType%2CNewspaper+Article%3At)&spellcheck=true&keep_r=true#!/search?ho=t&fvf=IsPeerReviewed,true,f&l=en-UK&q=pride and prejudice elizabeth)