

TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

EXTENDED ESSAY

ENGLISH B

Student: Doğa Bakar

Diploma Number: D1129079

Supervisor: Mine Mavioğlu

Word count: 3993

Research Question: *To what extent are the personalities of the characters shaped with the influence of social texture in the novel “Mansfield Park” by Jane Austen?*

Table Of Contents

Abstract

Introduction	1
I. The effect of social texture on the personalities	3
A. The effect of setting on characters	3
B. The effect of social rank on characters	6
II. The change in characters due to social texture	8
Conclusion	11
Bibliography	13

Abstract

With moral and social content of a setting, characters' personal traits are changed and shaped. In this essay, the role of social texture on the formation of individuals' characters will be examined in the novel "Mansfield Park" by Jane Austen in which the story takes place during the 19th century, in England city and country settings. Furthermore, the term "social texture" will be accepted and used as the effect of the setting on the development of the personalities of the characters through social status and the current moral and social understandings of the given time and place. Social texture will also be studied under the topics of social setting (city and country), social ranks and effects of each will be explored by the examination of the personalities and attitudes of various characters that belong to different settings, and different social ranks; together referred to as different social texture. While exploring the question, I will try to base my findings on the current social and moral understandings of the setting, and the examples from the novel. In order to support the subject, the question "Can characters change their personalities, which is affected and shaped by the social texture?" will be explored and conclusions about the effect and power of these elements on the development of characters' personalities will be made.

Word count: 220

Introduction

Character is defined as “the combination of emotional, intellectual and moral qualities distinguishing one person from another”¹. Emotional, intellectual and moral qualities of the individual, that is his-her character, is mostly shaped by the social texture of the environment he or she lives in. Similarly, in a novel the reader observes the characters with the background of their social texture. In this essay the social texture will be accepted and used as the cultural, moral and social understandings of the setting in which the character lives. Status and social traits of the setting will also be focused on.

“Mansfield Park” by Jane Austen, first published in 1814, right after author’s two very successful novels “Pride & Prejudice” and “Sense & Sensibility”, is often claimed to be the writer’s most complicated novel by critics due to Austen’s detailed study of social texture and character. The story takes place in a small section of gentry, love and social ranks, themes that are common in most of the Austen novels, are again included, however, “Mansfield Park” unlike Austen’s others, does not centre its major theme around heroine’s way to finding love, but it mostly focuses on the social and moral texture of Mansfield Park and its effect on the characters. With this concern, in the novel, characters are clasped with different social and rural settings to enable the reader to have a closer look at the effect of each on their minds and acts.

The protagonist Fanny Price, living with her poor family, is accepted by her uncle and aunt, Lord and Lady Bertram, which can be considered as a drastic change in her life, followed by long silence and shyness period. Another change is done by Mary and Henry Crawford by leaving their colourful lives in the city and settling down to country with immobile lines of morals.

¹ "Character." Def. 1. Webster's two New College Dictionary. 3rd ed. 2005. Print.

In this clasping backgrounds some characters like Edmund and Henry, try to change their habits right opposite to each other. Timid Edmund tries to accompany lively Miss Crawford, while Henry tries to change and settle down for silent and fragile Fanny, which brings out the question "Do characters resist or accept changes that come with the change in social texture?"

Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, Mary and Julia Bertram, on the contrary, are figures of resistance. They do not change or try to change and yet family and social texture also shape them.

All characters are affected to different degrees by the social texture, and few of them are able to change these, depending on the degree of the ability to change which the author permits them to have.

I. The Effect of Social Texture on the Personalities of Characters

Social texture (setting and social ranks), affects the life and personality of a character. The character is born into a world of certain social ranks and environment that consist of certain understanding of morals, point of view and knowledge. The effect of the social texture of 19th century could create even more distinctions between the point of view of the characters, as the distinction between social ranks and between country and town was very obvious at the time.

Different kinds of personalities, ambitions, emotions and moral values take their places in *Mansfield Park*, however, characters and the connotations of their personal traits on the background of social and moral texture is different from other Austen novels. Some critics suggest that “Austen is influenced by the evangelical movement in the 19th century England, which was calling for moral reform and trying to infuse religion on the country life”². This serious impact results in a new understanding of personal traits. In the novel, rich, witty and socially adept characters often conflict with moral propriety. Liveliness and wit may be socially agreeable and added to the charm of Elizabeth Bennet, and Emma Woodhouse, but they are not morally right. Therefore, the personal traits of the characters in the novel will be studied according to this background and the new connotations.

A. The Effect Of Setting On Characters

Setting has an important effect on the personalities, manners, ambitions and expectations of characters. During the time, people, families often travel from where they grow up, to the city or to the various places of country, like Mary and Henry Crawford’s coming to country from London. These changes may not be always suitable for the character, in terms of different understanding of social and moral traditions, and this enables the reader to understand the effect of the former setting on the personality of the character.

² Littlewood, Ian. Introduction. *Mansfield Park*. By Jane Austen. 1992. Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions, 2000. Print.

In terms of setting, two different settings are presented; city and country, with the ongoing tension between their values. Bertrams, Prices and Grant's are inhabitants of country, and Crawfords and their friends are characters of city. Mary and Henry Crawford grew up in the city, and they came to live in the country for a short period of time, therefore they live by the moral and social standards of the city and both are foreigners to the rural life. "Coming down with true London maxim that everything is to be got with Money, I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence with your country customs"³ says Miss Crawford with awe. Siblings both seek joy and entertainment and are hardly ever serious on any matter. They are rich, witty, socially adept with graceful manners, however connotation for the word "lively" here is rather negative. "Your lively mind can hardly be serious even on serious subjects"⁴ tells Edmund to Mary. She is claimed to have "none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind of feelings as her attention is all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively"⁵. Another negative connotation example would be the Twickkenham family. The family is associated with lively, agreeable manners and morals and discretion to suit. Soon after Maria goes to the family, she elopes with Mr Bertram. Another trait associated with Mary is selfishness, which she herself confesses. "Selfishness must always be forgiven you know because there is no hope of a cure"⁶. Henry Crawford is very much like his sister. He is not interested in his own land in the country or country customs, but merely seeks for attendance and entertainment. He flirts with both Bertram sisters, then proposes to Fanny, and finally elopes with Maria when she has married. Mary, Henry and their friends act very natural about putting on the play "Lovers' Vows", in spite of the fact that custom of the country forbids any woman of modesty to take part in such a drama. Religious views of Mary are neither strict nor formal compared to the morals of the country. After her speech about how unnecessary the requirement of formal attendance to the chapel prayers is, Fanny

³ Austen, page 60

⁴ Austen, page 90

⁵ Austen, page 83

⁶ Austen, page 70

speechlessly blushes, and Edmund tries to reason with her. What city seems to inject are freedom in acts, "liveliness" and selfish motivations.

The country setting consists of Mansfield Park and the Portsmouth. Bertram's are a family who lives in, and therefore affected by the country traditions and moral values. Country life, in the novel has clearly set moral bounding and can claim none of the glory or the fun that city might offer. Unlike town, country is strict about morals and people obeying them. Like in the example of acting of woman is not approved, country has prototypes of modest women and men. Fanny rejecting any effect of town brought by the Crawford's like acting, suits to this prototype of modest woman. Both in her former home and in Mansfield Park she has always lived in the country, and so she lives by the rules of the setting. Mr. Bertram and Edmund can also be given as examples to the country affected characters, Mr. Bertram is a slaveholder, however he is strict about his family obeying the moral rules. Edmund is educated to be a priest, and religion is important in country life, he is also timid and respectful, both very accepted characteristics in the country. However, country life does not bring these characteristics to every character. The rest of the Bertram family Tom, Julia and Maria are characters who stand out in the social setting of the country with their attitudes. Tom does not get a proper education, nor he takes up some of the business of his father, which he is expected to do, instead he has fun in the town, and even gets sick from the fast life he has there. Maria and Julia also have improper attitudes in the country background. They are so eager for every town entertainment that the Crawford siblings bring. Mary gets married to a rich man, and then elopes with Henry Crawford. Then Julia also elopes to the actor, whose character and job Mr Bertram does not approve. It can be seen that country sets its moral rules and expectations to characters, some of them reflect this like Fanny and Edmund, however, they may fail to shape the character, like in case of Bertram siblings.

The clash of the opposing characteristics that are brought by different settings is one of the central conflicts in the novel. When she comes to the country, Mary Crawford insists

on getting a wagon to transport her harp, when the wagon is needed for the harvested hay to be carried by the farmers. When Henry reads a piece from a play, and expects Fanny to congratulate him on his ability to act, Fanny feels disturbed, because she does not like acting, or pretending even if it is for a play. Culture and understandings of the city and country is completely different, and when clasped, they result in complications in the relationships.

B. The Effect of Social Ranks On Characters

Social ranks, being a part of the social texture, can also affect the characters, and their attitudes. The effect of social ranks on characters personalities' is very evident in the novel, and the novel itself opens with a passage that states the marital status of three Ward sisters, one of whom is married to a common sailor, one to a clergyman, and the other to the baronet Mr. Bertram. Even this very first paragraph suggests that the novel includes and deals with social ranks and mobility which is very common in all Austen novels.

In the nineteenth century, woman could not enter a profession, or earn a living herself, and she has to marry to determine her status. Three sisters define their social status by getting married, which will affect the rest of their lives. Although we are not given the lives or personalities of three sisters before they were married and changed their social status, to compare with their personalities in the novel, Ward sisters show characteristics of their ranks.

In the novel upper social rank often brings a need for entertainment, irresponsibility and passivity. Baronet's lady, Mrs Bertram is described as a picture of elegant decorum who enervated to have any sort of moral existence at all. She is a passive and uninterested character. Her mere interest is her puppy, and manners, and not very interested in her family. When Mr Bertram leaves for the Antique "She was not disturbed by any alarm for his safety, or solícute for his comfort, being one of those who think nothing can be dangerous or difficult, or fatiguing to anybody but themselves."⁷. Lady Bertram's large income and

⁷ Austen page 31

comfortable life enable her passivity, for if she had been a member of middle or lower class she should have been busy with work.

The elder brother of Edmund, Thomas is another example of the effect of the higher social rank. Thomas is selfish and irresponsible. He has no interest in carrying out the business of his father, although according to the rule of the aristocracy called "primogeniture", eldest brother inherits all the fortune of the father. He lives in London, and only interested in having fun, despite this, his unnecessary expenses are always paid, while Edmund who gets a proper education to be a priest, cannot hold the position in the Mansfield Park, because Mr Bertram spends most of his money for his eldest son, which enables Tom's reckless manners.

Edmund, however, is an exception to these common features of the aristocracy. He stands out with his good and hardworking character. He is the only one in the Bertram family who does not use the advantage of being a member of the upper class, and who is kind and helpful. When Fanny first comes to the Mansfield, Edmund is the only one who helps her as a friend, not noticing the difference between his and Fanny's level. It can be seen that the social texture is not necessarily the most dominant effect on the character, at least not always shapes it according to its values.

Mrs Norris, the wife of the clergyman, has an ambitious character. Her income is much less than Lady Bertram's, and yet she manages to include herself in the Bertram family, live a better life than she could afford for herself. She is witty and impatient. In terms of social rank she is not on the same level with the Bertram's, however, she is very comfortable with her place in the Bertram family, so she hysterically insists on preserving the social distinction, and by doing so she affects three characters (Maria, Julia Bertram and Fanny) in opposite ways. Mrs Norris has great influence over Maria and Julia when they grow up, by always reminding them they are rich and so they have the right to be privileged. Later on, the effects of this treatment on the characters of Maria and Julia are understood

and regretted by Mr Bertram. On the contrary, she always reminds Fanny that she does not belong to the family and “wherever she goes she must be the lowest and last, and she should by no means see herself equal with her cousins.”⁸. This treatment makes Fanny even more shy and unhappy.

Mrs. Price who is married to a common sailor, is also the mother of Fanny. Her husband is unemployed and drunk. She has nine children and only one maid, so she has to look after the children and run the house at the same time. Her life standard is low compared to her two other sisters. Having many children, she is not able to have a proper relationship with each of her children. She is always busy with work, and mostly uninterested in the problems of her children.

The father of Fanny, Mr. Price is a sailor who prefers to stay at home and be mean towards his family, is an example of the effect of lower social rank. He does not work, nor he has any attempt to be kind to his family. Being a sailor is not a prestigious job in the society, and generally seen as the job of the lower class. Brother of Fanny, George, however is kind and hardworking although he has his father as the role model, and he belongs to lower class. His good character stands out in the Price family, although he does not have an effect of another family like Fanny.

Social rank has an important effect in the formation of the character, by shaping their attitudes, expectations and emotions. However, some characters manage to escape from the effect of the rank, in a good way, to some extent like Edmund and George.

II. Change In Characters Due To Social Texture

All the characters in the novel, are affected from the social texture, and their personalities; aims, motivations, decisions are shaped accordingly, however, they are also clasped with different settings, and under the new conditions some of them can change and

⁸ Austen page 228

adapt, and the others do not change their positions in life. Some characters are able to change for better, and some are not.

Fanny is the only character in the novel who always gives the right decisions and strictly bound to the rules which are considered as morally right in the country. When she comes to Mansfield Park for the first time, she is defined as having “No glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty, exceedingly timid and shy.”⁹ After moving to Mansfield Park she has better conditions, however she still lacks the attention and care which was probably also missing in her former home with nine children. Being taken from her family at a very small age, and neglected by the household she is never able to come over her timidity and yet she improves to a stage where she can speak for herself, which brings us to the question, can a personality change? The answer for Fanny is yes to a certain extent, as she is able to break through her extreme shyness and loyalty towards the end of the novel, and she also improves in terms of culture and manners during the time she stays in Mansfield Park. Fanny refuses the proposal of Henry Crawford, despite the insistence of the household. She herself admits that she has changed for better, with the help of her cousin Edmund. As her manners and culture improve, she changes from the little girl from Price family to a member of Bertram’s. When she visits her family, she realizes the distinction between the park and her former house. She feels tired of the noise and impropriety of her former house, and she longs for the elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony and tranquillity of the Mansfield Park.

Another character that goes through a change is Edmund. He is raised in Mansfield Park, he is the one who is most dedicated to the moral rules of the country between Bertram siblings. Despite this, Edmund leaves all his value and his way of being raised aside, for his affection for Maria Crawford who is in the novel associated with lack of moral concern. Though he is sometimes surprised by the reckless attitude of Maria, for most of the novel he resists to see the distinction between their characters. Although he knows that their father

⁹ Austen, page 10

would be very angry, he accepts to take part in the home drama with the insistence of Mary Crawford. He constantly tries to make himself look worthy of Crawford's affection. However, in the end, when he sees Mary Crawford in London, in her own setting, and being insulted by her in front of other people, he realizes his miscalculation, which can be considered as a change for better, and later on he finds love in Fanny.

Mr Bertram also changes. He is a slaveholder, and yet he is associated with strong morals. During her childhood, Mr Bertram does not have a proper relationship neither with nor with his own daughters. As a slaveholder he has to go to Antigua very often, he provides the best education for all his children, however, he does not have a dominant role in the Bertram siblings' lives as much as Mrs. Norris. Even when Henry Crawford proposes to Fanny, he insists on Fanny agreeing to the marriage and telling her that otherwise it would be ungratefulness. However, after his daughter's socially unacceptable elopements, Mr. Bertram undergoes a great change; now he can fully appreciate the loyalty and the strength of the character of Fanny, and he also realizes the mistreatment Julia and Mary get while they were growing up, mostly from Mrs Norris, who gives them unlimited permission to do what they please. " Too late he become aware how unfavourable to the character of any young people, must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt, had been continually contrasted with his own severity."¹⁰ He also understands how he caused the childhood of Fanny to be unhappy, because of his rigid treatment towards her.

On the contrary, some characters never seem to change. Henry and Mary Crawford are examples to this. As she lives in the country, Mary Crawford leaves her country habits behind for her affection for Edmund. However after her return to London, she adapts herself right away, and when Edmund comes to see her, he also realizes that she did not change from her true character. Henry's tries to change is very similar to that of his sister. He is a rich

¹⁰ Austen page 484

and charming man, but for Fanny to accept his proposal, he tells that he has changed, however, after the rejection of Fanny, he elopes with Mrs. Rushword, "He was to meet Mrs. Rushword there, curiosity, and vanity were both engaged, and the temptation of immediate pleasure was too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifices to right."¹¹ In the end siblings are not able to change their characters for better, and they end up with their town way of life.

It can be seen that, Austen gives the ability to change for better, only to those who has strong moral bonding, and a trait that is associated with the country.

Conclusion

One of the reasons that Mansfield Park is seen as Austen's most socially aware novel, is that its complexity in characters and in settings, which can be gathered under the title of social structure. Affected by the social and moral movements in the 19th century England, writers' primary concern here is to show how social and moral structure is dependent on one another and so on the characters. In the novel characters are affected by different settings, different social textures, and they are able to change as well at least the ones with strong moral understanding, like Mr. Bertram and Edmund. By means of moral understanding and what is considered to be socially acceptable, city and country settings are used as a background to this exploration. Rural setting proposes high and strict morals; however it is not free from corruption, as in the example of Bertram daughters. On the other hand, city promotes recklessness and freedom in the understanding of morals. The attempts of the ones like Henry and Mary, who belong to city with a loose attachment to the religion and morals, are contemporary. The novel suggests that the change for better can only be permanent for those who have high morals and it underlines the need of stability and order throughout the novel; by rewarding the characters who have strong morals, generally timid, passive and prefers order over fun, and by punishing those with social and reckless

¹¹ Austen page 489

manners, by making them have unhappy ends. Another issue which affects the characters are the social ranks. Upper, middle and lower class characters have their own kinds of manners, moral understanding. A high social rank generally comes with good education and with snob and reckless manners like in the example of Bertram siblings. The only character who is a member of middle class is Mrs Norris and she is a witty ambitious character who tries to stabilize her position in the Bertram family. Lower class, family of Fanny, has no chance of getting proper education, may not have socially acceptable manners, however, they also have a strict understanding of morals.

To sum up, social content of the physical setting, and social ranks, together referred to as social texture, do effect and shape characters, their lives, and set their ambitions and motivations in the novel. However, these effects may lose their strength afterwards, for there are also characters who step out of the lines that their social setting puts around them and some are able to change these traits, or at least try to change. In the end characters who deserve a happy end with their proper personalities, do get it.

Bibliography

1. Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park*. 2008 ed. Canada: Bantam Dell, 2008. Print.
2. Littlewood, Ian. Introduction. *Mansfield Park*. By Jane Austen. 1992. Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions, 2000. Print.
3. "Character." Def. 1. *Webster's two New College Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 2005. Print.
4. "Social structure." *Oracle ThinkQuest Library*. Web. 28 June 2009.
<http://library.thinkquest.org/C0126211/pag/social_bg.html>
5. Haker, Ann. "Mansfield Park, By Jane Austen." *Austen.com | Jane Austen novels, fan fiction and more*. Web. 21 June 2009. <<http://www.austen.com/mans/>>.
6. "Social history of England -." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Web. 21 June 2009.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_history_of_England>