



Q6 - Individual & society.

The representation of the individual and society is inherently linked to a context, but this does not preclude responders from other times responding to the texts. The poignance and relevance of the texts Pride and Prejudice (Langston), A Doll's House (Ibsen), Madame Bovary (Flaubert) and Wilde (Fry) for 20th century responders is testament to the skill and devices with which they are composed and the universal nature of their thematic concerns. Though the social conventions of marriage, gender, class and inheritance, being the primary means through which individuality is explored in these texts, are fundamentally linked to the economic, religious, philosophical and scientific paradigms of the 19th century, the core examination of the individual and society transcends this way of thinking.

to have universal relevance.

The texts *Pride & Prejudice* and *Wilde* are of the filmic genre and composition in the 1990s. As such, the composers have employed techniques, emphasis and omission through which the stories and themes of the 19th century become more accessible to a 20th century viewer. In *Pride & Prejudice*, Elizabeth's refusal of the prudent proposal of Mr Collins is legitimized and understood through the deliberate casting of Mr Collins as a repulsive, sycophantic man. Moreover, the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, based on the revolutionary notion of "love" which is the norm for 20th century viewers, is made worthwhile and ~~more~~ meaningful through the camera shots of their eye contact,

and scenes such as Darcy's swim which lend him sexuality. The visual use of dance also exemplifies their relationship, with symbolic coming together and moving away reflecting their relationship, and, in an imposition of 20th century values, the camera angle is carefully designed so that Elizabeth and Darcy appear equal in height. Similarly, in Wilde techniques are employed to create audience empathy with the individual protagonist, Oscar Wilde. Private scenes juxtaposed with those of public facade and perception reveal a loving man, such as the scenes of Wilde telling his children stories. Thus he is humanised whilst his society condemns his actions.

Comparably, though Madame Bovary is not constructed for 20th century readers,



Flaubert pioneers, with this text, the modern writing style of third person narration facilitating reader empathy. Unlike the objective, detached narration which characterized many 19th century novels, Flaubert uses prose to convey the character's emotions. When Emma, the novel's namesake, is bored the prose is paced slowly, when she is excited it moves swiftly.

Ibsen's A Doll's House also employs numerous dramatic techniques which make the issues presented compelling for a modern audience. The use of contrast and foils, such as Torvald acting in opposition to Nora as he exemplifies middle class values and morality, highlights key concerns of the text. The setting of a "cosy, happy



"little home" at Christmas time is accessible and a poignant contrast to the cold isolation of the world Nora leaves to enter as she slams the door. Fundamentally, however, it is the timeless themes of human self-determination, sense of self & how this is constructed and individual rights which makes these texts relevant and vital.

The social convention of marriage is examined in each text with differing conclusions that affords the responder insight. In "A Doll's House" the superficial nature ~~of~~ and falsity of the ~~the~~ Helmer marriage is revealed and we come to appraise Nora beyond Torvald's ~~patronising~~ pet names for her: "songbird", "lark".



"little squirrel", she is truly, as she reveals "more than you think". Moreover, Ibsen deliberately observes the formation of Mrs Linde & Krogstad's union simultaneous to the disintegration of the Helmers. Being based on mutual need, respect and equality it represents the "true relationship" which would give the Helmers a future. Ultimately, however, as Nora comprehends the games, literal & metaphorical, within her marriage she is compelled to leave it in her search for self-awareness and determinism.

Similarly, Emma (Madame Bovary) must leave the limited and circumscribed roles of provincial "Doctor's wife". She suffers boredom in the monotony of ~~married~~ matrimony and finds



no interest in motherhood. In her desperation to find fulfillment she conducts two adulterous affairs which contravene the religious values of her time. Unlike, Nora, however, Emma is not on a journey of self-discovery but rather a desperate search for the reconciliation of her sense of self and societal roles. Perceiving no such situation, she suicides.

Elizabeth, by contrast, in *Pride & Prejudice*, finds autonomy and freedom within her marriage. In a revealing scene, Lady Catherine confronts and admonishes Elizabeth for her rumored engagement to Mr Darcy, voicing many societal values when she asks: "Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted? - by the 'mystical pretensions



of a young woman without family connection or fortune". Elizabeth responds "I am fully resolved to act in the manner which will constitute my own happiness, without reference to you or any person who wholly unconnected with me". In this assertion, Elizabeth demonstrates ~~an~~ independent values to the duties and expectations of society regarding her marriage. She chooses to marry for love, and in finding Darcy will enjoy the autonomy and freedom ~~to~~ ~~continue her~~ of individuality. Thus Elizabeth, unlike Nora & Emma, finds a place within society through marriage.

Gender roles are another significant construction of society for the individual, and the dilemmas of the 19th century



are still noteworthy today. Torvald's plea to Nora "you're a wife, a mother... they come first" and Nora's response "I don't think so now... first I'm a human being" encapsulates an unresolved debate about the rights & responsibilities of the individual. Clearly, Nora is more than the pet names Torvald gives her, which infantilize women eg. "little squirrel". She finds empowerment in work, feeling "almost like a man". Elizabeth equally transcends her gender role, portrayed in conflict to other women in the miniseries. Her clothing is colored in bolder hues than the pastels of the archetypal female beauty Jane and her behaviour, such as the opening shots of her running alone in the centresside, unladylike. She shows



strength of character in her contemptuous behaviour to Lady Catherine, when she should be obsequious, and is not portrayed as having typical female "accomplishments". Emma, in Madame Bovary, ~~experiences~~ experienced entrapment symptomatic of her gender. Her limited female Romantic education has created aspirations of chivalry, love and excitement which her reality cannot fulfill. In this sense she is a victim of her gender, the fundamental irony being that society's female constructions for her are incompatible with social reality. She wishes to have a son: "A man, at least, is free.... but a woman is continually thwarted. Always there is the desire urging, always the convention restraining".



In an interesting comparison, Wilde is also the victim of social gender constructs. In his homosexual relationship Wilde challenges social mores and values about masculinity, love and the traditional nuclear family. He is symbolically costumed in bright colours, in one scene wearing a pink suit as he puts a crowd of robed black and white barristers, representing the institution of law which will ensnare him. Wilde is tried for "indecent acts", but declares of his homosexuality "it is in this century misunderstood".

Class and economic paradigms are also evident in these texts and, again, have relevance to a modern audience. Madame Bovary's value

of style and art, resultant in accrued debt, contravenes the economic ethos of thrift, hard work & a frugalness upon which her bourgeois milieu is based. Nera and Mrs Linde, in their enjoyment of work, and Nera in her disregard for the "middle ~~at~~ class morality" which emphasises face & reputation equally provide challenges to class & economics within their society.

Elizabeth, in her assertion that she is worthy of Mr Darcy, though society deems him superior due to his economic status, also conflicts with the mores of Regency England.

Comparably, Wilde challenges his upper-class society ~~it~~ by confronting them with different values & actions.

Indeed, Wilde believes his sexuality natural, while Elizabeth defies her birth standing and Torvald says of Nora 'It's in the blood... it's inherited.

Differently, therefore, these texts also engage with the scientific question of determinism which is relevant to an analysis of the extent & limitations of individual autonomy & free will.

Hence it can be seen that these texts employ various techniques specific to their medium to represent the notion of the individual & society to the responder. As has been demonstrated, the definition & assertion of individuality is fundamentally linked to opposition with social constructions & paradigms of the

19th century. Marriage, gender, class and inheritance are all context-specific representations of "times past" through with the individual's relationship with ~~with~~ economic, religious, philosophical & scientific mores can be examined. However, through the use of techniques to ^{create} ~~read~~ ~~respond~~ ~~empathy~~, in the case of Pride & Prejudice & Wilde, specific to 20th century responses, the central thematic concern of the texts comes to be this relationship of the individual & society. Regardless of the specific social institutions & constructions of the time, the conflict & struggle between individual sense of self & determination with these forces has universal relevance. In our own society, we can regard



to the experience of the 19th century individual as they undergo endless debates, represented in an accessible manner by the composers.