

Module a: comparative study of texts and context

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Module A: Comparative Study of Texts and Context Elective 1: Exploring connections
Connections between texts open up new meanings of texts. What is your view? Context changes due to audience, writers and time; though it still has the effect of influencing perspectives and creating/reshaping meaning.

Through the context, us as readers are able to establish an understanding of the time period, the writer and the purpose of the text.

Through the exploration of both contexts relationships are established to enrich and illuminate connections on the unchanging nature and universality of certain values, ideas and language forms, also highlighting through implicit or explicit means relationships, writing and societal changes. Connections are made between the text that explore and develop new meanings. Thus considering the nature of connection between 'Pride and Prejudice- Jane Austen' and 'Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen- Fay Weldon' can elucidate one's understanding and perception.

Between these two texts there are many direct and explicit references that draw superficial connections, both are written by female composers, both deal with family relationships and issues of social standards, both explore the role of letters.

However it is the implicit relationships that create deeper connections that hold a greater value effectively opening up and developing new meanings, through the characters and context.

Marriage and relationships- the need for love and affection as well as wealth and security in order to bring happiness and fulfilment. The intrinsic need for deep and meaningful relationships is examined by both authors as well as for financial security in order to provide happiness and fulfilment. Austen heavily conveys her ideas of the importance of love and security in relationships in order to bring happiness- contradicting the attitudes of her time.

The context at the time creates an understanding about what is read, this being that 18th century women, being lower in society had to marry in order to have wealth and security. Austen displays the need for not only genuine respect and affection, but also balanced matches and security through the development of character relationships.

Elizabeth's "strong sense.. of her own worth" enables this idea to be conveyed as she "naturally looks for the happiness in the marriage state. Elizabeth's rejection to Collins persistent proposals is a prime example of both Elizabeth's autonomous character and also the value Austen places on true affection and happiness in relationships. Elizabeth insists, "I am not one of those ladies.

.. Who are so daring to risk their happiness...

you could not make me happy and I am convinced that I would not make you so", Austen highlights that whilst love should be involved it should not succeed over sensible and logical behaviour.

Working in conjunction with Austen, Weldon's 'letters to Alice' stresses the importance of both relationships and marriage to bring happiness and

security, as it is still a concern for women. Underpinning Weldon's stance on her values is her feminist attitude as a post 1970s feminist writer. The authorial intrusion and didacticism she manipulates through Aunt Fay demonstrates her belief in female equality and independence. Although Weldon shares this value with Austen, Weldon believes that marriage is not only way to power.

She draws a parallel with unsatisfactory marriages that Austen revealed and modern day marriages of 'bought Asian brides,' that marriage 'in order to survive' is considered no better than slavery. Weldon downgrades the role Austen places on wealth in relationships, with less emphasis on income compatibility as a critical factor to marriage, but supports the notion of marriage for love and relationships based on affection. When looking at Fay Weldon in 'Letters to Alice' we see the broken relationship Fay has with her sister and also how she is willing to plead to amend it.

Throughout letter six "letter to a sister" the use of 'a' instead of 'my' in the title indicates that they are sisters though, this is not recognised or addressed; also the formal tone in which Fay addresses Enid, creates another disconnected feeling for the audience, we acknowledge that Fay wishes to repair the relationship "It is time we patch up this quarrel" the reinforcing impersonal, formal tone emphasises that this is truth the line being very direct and informative showing that Fay intends the argument to be predetermined.

The push to reconnect with Fay's sister gives a sense of the context; showing that Fay does not gain wealth or satisfaction in a man but through her

relationships with family and her own independence this in itself shows the different context though still the importance of relationship in any time period. In both texts we are able to see the different characteristics of characters through relationships that they establish.

We also see a connection between the character Fay Weldon and Elizabeth Bennet; both determined people who hold value in own independence and relationships for satisfaction Success that comes from pride, self-worth, independence and social class, both texts share the belief that society demands conformity that comprises and inhibits your true self.

The value Jane Austen places on the autonomy of women is tempered with a warning against being too proud.

She is openly supportive of Elizabeth, a ' young women with a strong sense of her own worth as an individual', who rebels against social conventions of a patriarchal society, despite the narrowness and rigid conventions the protagonist possesses independence of mind. In challenging the stereotypical ideal woman her self-confidence enables her to act on her beliefs, fearlessly voicing her opinions and criticising behaviour she believes is arrogant and proud unperturbed but the judgement of others.

Drawing a connection with Weldon's protagonist ' Aunt Fay' a liberal, freethinking spirit who explains the importance of independence in the complexities of the writing process and the relationship between composer, critics and audience through the extended metaphor of the city of invention. Fay emphasises the value of independence when she encourages her niece, Alice to ' show your work to no one'. She teaches the importance of self-

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worth and judgement as being more relevant than other opinions, the epistolary nature enables the strong communication of ideas and beliefs to be widely regarded.

Weldon believes those who choose to ignore the 'rules' governed by society often succeed. Alice ironically confirms the belief as she chooses not to listen to Fay's advice and consequently produces a top selling novel. However like Austen, Weldon subtly warns about excessive pride and independence that social conventions can be excessive and ridiculous and should not interfere with common sense and moral righteousness.

Austen highlights her point of view by deliberately juxtaposing Jane and Elizabeth and in doing so warns the reader of the dangers of conforming to expectations, rather than being true to yourself. Elizabeth's independence blinds her to the 'unexpected' affection between Darcy and herself with the use of dramatic irony to highlight the issue, she allows her initial opinion of Darcy to be shaped by the communities perception that he is 'ate up with pride'. Like Austen, Weldon values independence, self-worth and personal judgement over following social conventions.

The use of writing as a form of expression highlights the contrasting contexts of the time, both authors work in conjunction with their societal conventions to reflect certain attitude beliefs and values. Weldon express her personality through her work, projected by snippets of autobiographies and the apparent ventriloquism of her omniscient first-person narratives. " Writing is more than just the making of a series of comprehensible statements: It is the

gathering in of connotations; harvesting of them, like blackberries in a good season, ripe and heavy, snatched from among the thorns of logic.

Weldon's expression is evident in her use of language forms and features. The frequent use of extended metaphors; 'the city of invention' allows the readers to easily grasp the ideas being present.

Weldon's context is shown through her writing; the 80s were a time of excess which was mirrored through an individual's lifestyle, where possessions were readily accessible. Reflecting through Weldon's writing the extensive use of language form's and features is used almost to bring credibility to her works.

In contrast Weldon helps to deconstruct the writing process of Austen, Weldon uses epistolary form to compliment Austen showing that the form is universal and can be manipulated to suit different contexts. Letters create a sense of realism and are used to drive the novel as a plot device to reveal characters, avoiding the use of a single, explicitly didactic, authorial voice. For Austen epistolary form was a way of personal expression, her concise word-choice, timing and tonal nuance typifies her masterful handling of dialogue, representing the 'polite' social context she represents so well.

Austen's periodic sentence forms and precise expression rather than abrasive rhetorical density shown through Weldon's writing contrasts the societal expectations. The effect of examination into the societal, cultural and historical contexts in both texts allows for a further informed understanding of the texts values and attitudes. Weldon's "Letters to Alice"

is enriched by Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" therefore through critical study one can establish an informed perception on the basis of context.