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Why Say No?: Marriage Proposal Rejections in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte
Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

par

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Ce mémoire intitulé

**Why Say No?: Marriage Proposal Rejections in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and
Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre***

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Résumé

Ce mémoire étudie l'objectif des multiples demandes en mariage dans *Pride and Prejudice* par Jane Austen et *Jane Eyre* par Charlotte Brontë. Je montrerai que l'inclusion par Austen et Brontë de ces multiples demandes – par Darcy et par Rochester, respectivement – joue un rôle central dans la structure narrative de leurs romans. J'analyserai comment ces auteures présentent à leurs héroïnes des multiples demandes en mariage afin de démontrer le moment approprié pour accepter une telle demande. Ce mémoire contextualisera les choix d'Elizabeth Bennet et de Jane Eyre en engageant en conversation avec plusieurs savants littéraires travaillant sur Austen et Brontë. Le premier chapitre sera consacré à *Pride et Prejudice* et analysera l'évolution des rapports entre Darcy et Elizabeth. Le deuxième chapitre examinera *Jane Eyre* et le parcours individuel de Jane en ce qui concerne sa relation avec Rochester. J'examinera également comment chaque auteure démontre que les rôles et stéréotypes des sexes peuvent constituer une menace pour une relation saine ainsi que pour le développement de soi. Au travers de multiples demandes en mariage, Austen et Brontë démontrent l'importance de l'indépendance et l'égalité dans un mariage. Elles démantèlent également les notions traditionnelles de masculinité.

Mots-clés : Féminisme, dix-neuvième siècle, femmes, mariage, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë

Abstract

This thesis studies the purpose of multiple marriage proposals in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. I will show that Austen's and Brontë's inclusion of two proposals – by Darcy and by Rochester, respectively – are central to the narrative structures of their work. I will examine how Austen and Brontë present their heroines with multiple proposals in order to demonstrate the proper moment at which a proposal should be accepted. This thesis will contextualize the choices of Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre by engaging in conversation with several literary scholars who work on Austen and Brontë. The first chapter will be dedicated to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and the analysis of Darcy and Elizabeth's changing relationship. The second chapter will examine Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jane's individual journey as it relates to her relationship with Rochester. I will also examine how each author demonstrates how gender roles and stereotypes can serve as a threat to a healthy relationship as well as to one's own self-development. Through multiple proposals, Austen and Brontë demonstrate the importance of independence and equality in entering a marriage. They also dismantle traditional notions of masculinity.

Keywords: Feminism, nineteenth century, women, marriage, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë

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*To my mother and father,
Thank you for your love and support*

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Introduction

Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë were among the most significant women novelists of the nineteenth century. As such, many Victorian readers and literary critics drew comparisons between the two authors. Despite this, there is no evidence that Austen and Brontë admired each other's work. Austen, of course, passed away before *Jane Eyre* was published, and Brontë read Austen's novels with little appreciation. In a letter to G. H. Lewes – a fan of Austen's – Brontë wrote, "Why do you like Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point" (*The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* 10). In spite of Brontë's unenthusiastic response to Austen, similarities can be drawn between the works of the two authors. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in particular, contain close parallels in their romantic narratives. Both authors draw on what Elsie B. Michie describes as one of the most common marriage plots in nineteenth-century English literature, in which we have "the story of a hero positioned between a wealthy, materialistic, status-conscious woman who would enhance his social prestige and a poorer, more altruistic, and psychologically independent woman, who is the antipode of her rich rival" (421). Austen's and Brontë's interest in this plot was likely inspired by an interest in and concern for a plight shared by most women of the era: an imposed confinement to the institution of marriage. As Kathryn Sutherland notes in her comparison of Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, both authors seek to understand female realities. "Divided though they are," she writes, "Austen and Brontë are nevertheless united as revisionist historians in their project to realign the categories of gender and history" (413). Both Austen and Brontë were born during an age in

which being a woman – especially one of a lower social status – could force one into a vulnerable position. “Down to the eighteenth century and beyond,” writes Joan Perkin, “women were subjected to the domination of the unfair sex. The law undoubtedly regarded almost every woman as under tutelage to some man, usually father or husband” (1). In their novels, Austen and Brontë address matters related to such gender imbalance.

Austen, who published *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, lived during a time generally known as the Regency period (Gao, “Jane Austen’s Ideal Man” 385). “In this period,” writes Gao, “social position tended to be established in terms of families, not individuals” (“Jane Austen’s Ideal Man” 10). “The concept of value,” Gao continues, “had been converted yet that money became...more important [and] the value of people counted on the possession of a fortune” (“Jane Austen’s Ideal Man” 10). In this respect, women, in particular, found themselves at a disadvantage. Gao notes that if a woman did not marry or did not have family members who could provide for her, there remained only one respectable alternative: becoming a governess or a teacher (“Jane Austen’s Ideal Man” 10). However, the income earned through these occupations was rarely – and barely – enough to support her (Gao, “Jane Austen’s Ideal Man” 10). Furthermore, working as a teacher or a governess lowered a woman’s social status, and this in turn made her even less desirable as a potential wife (Gao, “Jane Austen’s Ideal Man” 10). As Gao explains, “marriage to an economically respectable man was considered to be the only legitimate choice for most women of the gentry or aristocracy. It was tradition that men inherited all fortune. Therefore, women had to obey and gain their life necessities through an adequate marriage” (“Jane Austen’s Ideal Man” 10). While women certainly had very few rights or advantages, marrying wisely would provide them with some security, since Common Law dictated that husbands were obliged to support their wives (Perkin 19). *Jane Eyre* was published

during the Victorian period, in 1847, almost 35 years after *Pride and Prejudice*, but the social and economic realities Austen faced and described in her novels persisted into Brontë's time. During this period, Gao notes, "women [were] subjected to the voice of men. It [was] impossible for low-status women to have a decent life or good marriage. The social structure determine[d] the social position of a person [and] women [we]re discriminated [against] in th[is] patriarch[al] society" (Gao, "Feminism in Jane Eyre" 927).

It is unsurprising, then, that in order to challenge these injustices, Austen and Brontë place their protagonists – Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre – in the same vulnerable positions faced by many women of their age. This allows the authors not only to depict the difficulties women had to endure and the limited choices available to them, but also to critique these issues and to promote what they considered to be the values and morals women must embrace in order to lead fulfilling lives. What Elizabeth and Jane have in common transcends the difficulties they share and extends to the opportunities with which they are presented. Despite being women of lower social status for whom financial security and stability depend on marrying wisely, Elizabeth and Jane both initially reject eligible men who could provide them with such stability. Curiously, however, they subsequently, after some time, turn to and accept these same men. Despite their eventual acceptances of these men, their initial rejections of them – which they both believe at the time officially closes the door on marriages to these particular men – come with great risk. In portraying such a scenario, Austen and Brontë ask their readers to consider an important question: What are the correct circumstances under which a woman should marry? However, simply because Austen and Brontë tackle the same question does not mean they reach the same conclusion. This thesis studies how *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* both intersect and collide in their approaches to the aforementioned question.

Melanie Moe writes of *Pride and Prejudice* that it “considers what it means to marry well” (1075). In order to make her point, Moe compares the views on marriage of both Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas, who, despite their close friendship, have differing opinions. Charlotte, for whom marriage is simply a means to an end, has no romantic fantasy or dreams of a happily-ever-after. Well aware of her prospects – or lack thereof – she simply desires to settle down and marry in order to obtain financial security, which is proven when she does not hesitate to accept Mr. Collins’ marriage proposal despite his rather unlikeable and obnoxious character. “Charlotte’s marriage was the outcome of a deliberate ‘scheme,’” argues Moe, “carried along by anxiety about her economic future and a conviction that marriage was a social necessity for young women” (1075). According to many scholars, Elizabeth and Charlotte embody, respectively, a modern and a premodern view of marriage. “Charlotte’s marriage,” Moe states, “represents past norms whose modern irrelevance is made apparent through the progress of the novel toward a culmination of two affective, consensual unions” (1076). Charlotte then becomes “a foil that allows its modern alternative, as embodied in Elizabeth Bennet, to come into focus” (1076). In addition to her reaction to Charlotte’s marriage, further proof Elizabeth Bennet will not be moved by economic matters presents itself when she refuses the marriage proposal of Darcy. Elizabeth, then, is someone who does not view marriage through a purely pragmatic lens.

In *Jane Eyre*, marriage does not become a significant plot element until quite late in the novel, but it is nonetheless a significant element of Jane’s trajectory and Brontë’s message. Like Elizabeth, Jane does not believe in marrying for purely pragmatic purposes, as is most evident when she rejects the proposal of St. John. However, after initially accepting him, she also rejects the man she loves, Rochester, when she learns the truth about his existing marriage to Bertha Mason. Although tempted to stay with him, Jane’s Christian beliefs and principles lead her to

reject Rochester and flee from Thornfield. “Love,” writes Gao, “in *Jane Eyre*’s understanding is pure [and] divine” (“Feminism in *Jane Eyre*” 930). Therefore, it is impossible for her to stay with Rochester, as being with a married man would be neither pure nor divine. While Austen and Brontë both explore pragmatic and romantic marriage, Brontë tackles a factor largely ignored by Austen: morality. Moreover, while both authors emphasize the personal development and self-actualization of their female protagonists, Brontë’s relegation of the marriage plot to discrete moments in her texts (rather than having it drive the overarching narrative) suggests that a woman’s personal fulfillment is as important as finding an ideal husband.

With these issues in mind, this thesis considers the thematic significance of Austen’s and Brontë’s use of multiple marriage proposals in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*, respectively. Darcy and Rochester each propose to their prospective wives twice, and each are first rejected, and then accepted, and this development is central to the narrative structure of Austen’s and Brontë’s works. Furthermore, the heroines’ initial refusals and eventual acceptances are politically relevant, in the sense that these plot developments, as Austen and Brontë represent them, say something about female independence and marriage in the nineteenth century. Had she accepted a first proposal, Elizabeth or Jane would have consented to entering a marriage that would have both gone against her principles, and demanded she sacrifice her independence and individuality. In presenting heroines with wavering responses to marriage proposals, the authors explore the proper moment at which a proposal should be accepted, while also demonstrating under what circumstances accepting a proposal, however enticing it might be, would be disastrous. Austen and Brontë seem to agree, for instance, that men must put aside their snobbery and their pride to prove themselves as eligible husbands, and both suggest that women must cultivate their individuality and morality before entering into marriage. Austen, however,

presents an ideal man who ultimately eschews conventional notions of masculinity, while Brontë's hero is flawed in ways that only an extreme circumstance can fix. Both authors celebrate the notion of gender equality in marriage, but this is an issue that Brontë insists upon with great urgency. I thus intend to study the similarities, as well as the differences between Elizabeth and Jane's stories. Although they have similar experiences of love and romance, the relationships – and the men – they pursue are quite different.

In my examination of each novel, I will first analyse the protagonist's evolving values and beliefs, and how her choices – understood in their historical contexts – demonstrate the numerous potential consequences that come with their decisions. As both Elizabeth and Jane need to enter into a pragmatic marriage to ensure a stable and secure future, rejecting the offer of financially stable men indeed seems an unwise choice. However, it is significant that the authors attach these decisions to sensible and intelligent characters. Therefore, there is a visibly significant reason for which the protagonists reject these proposals, and for which Austen and Brontë include the rejections at all. The reason lies in the importance these authors place on female independence.

In the following chapters, I build on the work of scholars such as Haiyan Gao, Esther Godfrey, Millicent Bell, and Aubrey L. Mishou, who have explored notions of female independence and marriage in these novels, but I will examine, uniquely, how stereotypical gender roles can serve as a threat. In other words, I consider how traditional masculine or feminine traits can be an obstacle to either a relationship or one's self-development. More specifically, through an exploration of the male characters in these novels, I intend to study how the various ways they assume or reject traditional masculine traits factor into the decisions of the protagonists. As I examine the evolution of both Darcy and Rochester, I explore the ways in

which their initial flaws result in Elizabeth's and Jane's rejection, and how these flaws are consistent with traditional masculine qualities. Furthermore, I demonstrate how only once they redeem themselves and rise above these flaws are they finally accepted by their respective love interests. I look specifically at the ways in which Austen and Brontë view traditional masculinity as it was understood in the nineteenth century, and how this compares to their own vision of ideal masculinity. Both authors seem to suggest that traditional forms of masculinity are a threat to female independence. My approach thus complements that of Michie, who studies the reasons for which the typical upper-class male love interest in nineteenth-century literature would choose the "poor woman" as opposed to someone in their own class; but rather than examining why Darcy and Rochester choose women below their social station, I consider why Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre choose to accept these men after an initial refusal. In other words, I explore what changed in these men between the first and later proposals that finally deems them worthy in the eyes of their female counterparts. I focus mostly on the relationships of the protagonists, but I also look to the marriage choices of secondary characters to provide a more complete view of how these authors viewed marriage, female independence, and masculinity.

Chapter One

Proposals and Masculinity in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Scholars, such as Joan Ray and Leo Rockas, have long debated the evolution of Elizabeth and Darcy's romantic arc in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Elaine Bander examines scholars' arguments on both sides of the debate. The discussion is divided between those who argue that Elizabeth and Darcy experience an immediate attraction to one another, and those who argue that Elizabeth's romantic feelings toward him do not begin until much later in the novel (Bander 25). Scholars in the former group agree that Elizabeth does not display her interest outwardly, instead displaying "superficial hostility" or remaining "unaware of her feelings" (Bander 25). However, they maintain that, nonetheless, those romantic feelings exist from the beginning, however repressed they initially are (Bander 25). The timeline of Elizabeth's emerging feelings is important when considering Haiyan Gao's argument that "Elizabeth is the author's spokesman. She shows her views about the ideal man" (386). As such, Elizabeth's changing feelings toward Darcy not only reflect her growth as a character, but also demonstrate the qualities she, and therefore Austen, values and finds attractive in a male partner. Therefore, whether Elizabeth is attracted to Darcy from the beginning, or whether these feelings arise later in the novel, is significant to understanding her character. Elizabeth's eventual engagement to Mr. Darcy would then mean he encompasses what Austen considers as the ideal man, but it is important to note that his character is first harshly criticized by the novel's heroine. This chapter, by way of contributing to the critical debate regarding Elizabeth's feelings towards her eventual husband, argues that Austen's decision to have Darcy propose twice to Elizabeth – and to have

Elizabeth first reject, and then accept the proposal – provides Austen with the opportunity to illustrate what she deems both the ideal man and the ideal marriage.

Bander fails to find any signs of Elizabeth’s romantic or sexual attraction toward Darcy in the passages that describe the beginnings of their relationship. In contrast, Jocelyn Harris suggests Elizabeth’s initial apparent hatred of Darcy “is a strong emotion akin to love” and creates a parallel with Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* in that “Elizabeth (like Harriet Byron wishing to make Grandison behave in a hateful way so that she would cease to love him) re-reads Darcy 's letter in order to enflame her hatred (106-07)” (Harris qtd. in Bander 25). Like Bander, Susan C. Greenfield examines the contributing factors to Elizabeth and Darcy’s evolving relationship and rejects the theory that Elizabeth is attracted to him from the beginning. Instead, Greenfield analyzes the role of absence in rectifying Elizabeth’s misunderstandings of Darcy, and in allowing her feelings to turn romantic. Like Bander, I argue that Elizabeth’s romantic and/or sexual feelings for Darcy do not arise until much later in the novel, and therefore it is certainly not a case of love at first sight. Her aversion to Darcy is evident soon after she meets him, as “[he] walked off; and Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feeling toward him” (5). Her dislike of him is, of course, why she rejects his first proposal. I intend to build on Bander’s argument by examining how Darcy’s evolution – especially in comparison with those of Elizabeth’s other potential love interests – demonstrates what Austen might consider ‘flawed’ versus ‘ideal’ masculinity, and how such models determine Elizabeth’s affections. Furthermore, while I concur with Greenfield’s suggestion that Elizabeth’s misunderstandings are rectified during Darcy’s absence, my focus will be Darcy’s, rather than Elizabeth’s, transformation. Greenfield focuses on Elizabeth’s growth throughout her separation from Darcy and suggests that the burden of their initial failed relationship is hers. I contend that

Darcy's development is equally pivotal, and that Elizabeth's changing feelings are not only the result of her own growth, but of Darcy's as well.

The use of multiple proposals allows Austen to highlight for readers the ideal hero for her heroine. More specifically, Austen critiques a traditional version of 'flawed masculinity' in favor of a more 'ideal' masculinity that does not adhere so strictly to traditional gender norms. Attempts to define masculinity are centuries old. For instance, as Sarah E. Fanning writes, "In 1750, the Académie des Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres (Corsica) challenged the public to consider 'the virtue most necessary to the hero' and 'the virtue most necessary to man' ... Jean-Jacques Rousseau answered with the assertive 'Manliness!'" (73). However, there is no set definition of what consists of "manliness". "Men's studies," Alex Hobbs writes, "seeks to dispel the notion that there is a single masculinity and set of masculine attributes attached to it that form acceptable male behavior" (384). Masculinity has often been separated into two distinct categories, attributed different names by different theorists. According to Jonathan Rutherford, there are two idealized images corresponding to masculinity: the "New Man", and the "Retributive Man" (qtd. in Hobbs 384). Retributive men, he explains, are associated with "traditional masculine qualities [often] amplified to hypermasculinity...the men who use violence and confrontation to solve problems" (Hobbs 384). New men are "more emotionally open and nurturing" (Hobbs 384). Raewyn Connell developed the concept of "hegemonic masculinity", a model used to identify common male attributes (Hobbs 385). "At the heart of hegemonic masculinity," writes Hobbs, "is the assertion that there are many masculinities, with hegemonic masculinity considered 'the currently most honoured way of being a man', requiring all other men to position themselves in relation to it'" (385). Regardless of the different names

attributed to these types of masculinity, these notions are rather fluid and tend to intersect and overlap.

Although Rousseau links heroism with masculinity, he does not associate masculinity with what Rutherford would have referred to as the “Retributive Man”. That is to say, he does not link it with traits traditionally associated with masculinity, such as violence, dominance, or physical strength. M.W. Jackson writes, “Rousseau...suggest[s] that the true hero’s objective is the happiness of other men...social utility is the standard of heroism...A hero must earn his precedence by benefiting others” (437). Heroism and masculinity, according to Rousseau, are linked to acting in the interest of others rather than one’s self. Rousseau’s ideal masculinity shares characteristics with Rutherford’s “New Man”, which is defined by more emotional and nurturing qualities. Rousseau does not only refuse to associate those traditional masculine traits – violence, dominance, arrogance – with heroism, but critiques them altogether. While many associate the warrior with heroism, due to his strength and courage, Rousseau argues that this is not necessarily the case (Jackson 438). According to Rousseau, “courage...is not the virtue of heroism and the warrior (even if courageous) is not the hero” (qtd. in Jackson 438). Jackson writes:

The warrior’s courage is a quality of greatness only in some circumstances....For Rousseau virtuous men would act for the benefit of others but many so-called heroes act only for their own selfish glory. Heroic character, Rousseau concludes, is something more complicated than the fearless courage that bedazzles the commons...Rousseau contends that ‘the brave man proves himself

only on the days of battle. The true hero shows his virtues
everyday.’ (438)

Again, the key factor appears to be for whose benefit one is acting: themselves or others. Rousseau dismisses those who act only for their own benefit, no matter how courageous, strong, or dominant they may be, as possible heroes. Furthermore, he highlights the importance of consistency. Is this potential hero displaying his qualities at specific moments – such as during a battle – or are they virtues that live within him at all times? According to Rousseau, only the latter would be considered a true hero.

Austen’s depictions of masculinity in her novels recall Rousseau’s arguments on the true qualities of masculinity and heroism. In *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as other novels such as *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, the male love interests, even if they at first display a cold or reserved exterior, are ultimately men who act for the benefit of others, a tendency highlighted by their differences with the more flawed male characters in the novels. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy eventually turns into a man who shows care and consideration for others, helping them with no expectation of receiving anything in return. Mr. Collins, however, is a man who acts only with his own self-interest in mind. The two, respectively, reflect what Austen would consider ideal versus flawed masculinity. Hobbs writes:

While flawed male protagonists are only flawed compared to a reader’s notion of socially prevalent hegemonic ideals, the very fact that such a character is the protagonist of the novel instead of a more traditional hero-type could suggest that literature champions a different model of masculinity. (387)

Therefore, choosing a particular character as the protagonist or love interest in a novel could reflect the kind of masculinity or heroism the author is trying to promote. The main characteristics of the love interests in Austen's novels are not limited to those traditionally associated with masculinity, such as physical strength, dominance, courage, etc. The male characters who abide strictly by those qualities would fall under what Austen would consider 'flawed' masculinity. Instead, Austen's 'ideal' masculinity – reflected in the male partners her protagonists ultimately choose – hold virtues that go beyond those characteristics. Most notably, they do not try to assert their dominance or superiority over the woman they pursue, and they are not merely driven by their own self-interest.

It is worth noting that Darcy does not serve as Elizabeth's sole potential spouse: she is faced with a multitude of contenders, with each of whom she has a different relationship. Prior to her first rejection of Mr. Darcy, she rejects a marriage proposal from Mr. Collins. It is clear that her rejection of him does not result purely from a lack of romantic interest, but a genuine dislike, proven in her reaction to his eventual engagement to her best friend, Charlotte Lucas. Upon learning they are engaged, Elizabeth has a less than positive response as she thinks, "Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins was a most humiliating picture! And to the pang of a friend disgracing herself... was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen" (63). Had Elizabeth rejected him simply because she did not love him, she would not have had such a marked adverse reaction to his engagement to Charlotte, but Elizabeth makes clear her belief that Charlotte should not have accepted the engagement either. Her reasoning goes beyond the fact that Charlotte does not love Mr. Collins. In fact, for Elizabeth, the absence of love is overpowered by her distaste of him. She believes to be his wife would not only guarantee unhappiness but would also be "humiliating," as if he is so

repulsive that the mere association with him would reflect negatively on one's self. In addition to Charlotte's lack of romantic feelings, then, Elizabeth has an issue with Mr. Collins' character in general; she does not see him as someone who could bring a sensible woman happiness. The situation with Charlotte and Mr. Collins leads Elizabeth to reevaluate her own views on marriage. As Moe argues, "It is Charlotte's equanimity in the face of marrying Mr. Collins that most disturbs Elizabeth and helps her clarify her own expectation that a woman's internal well-being should be either jeopardized or affirmed by marriage" (1086).

Elizabeth's careful assessments of potential male suitors is evident in her evaluation of Mr. Wickham. He is the first gentleman to truly capture Elizabeth's attention, and her thoughts, as outlined in the following passage, demonstrate her fondness for him:

Mr. Wickham was the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned, and Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he finally seated himself; and the agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on it being a wet night, made her feel the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker. (38)

Here, Elizabeth displays a warm opinion toward Mr. Wickham that she has yet to form of Mr. Darcy. Mr. Wickham is referred to as "happy" and "agreeable," qualities of which Elizabeth approves as she is pleased to be the one to whom he turns his attention. She observes in him no flaws, as she consistently does with Mr. Darcy. This scene is almost a direct contrast to Darcy's introduction in the novel. Much like Wickham, Darcy is at first received with interest: "Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble

mien, and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year” (4). However, his positive impression lasts only briefly as his character is then criticized. He is, we read, viewed “...with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud; to be above his company, and above being pleased...” (4). Darcy’s inability to be pleased, as well as his pride distinguish him from the “happy” and “agreeable” person Elizabeth first understands Mr. Wickham to be. Whether it be her assessment of Mr. Collins, Mr. Darcy, Mr. Wickham, or Colonel Fitzwilliam, Elizabeth does not shy away from sharing her honest thoughts with herself or readers. As Bander points out, while Austen describes Darcy’s increasing attraction to Elizabeth, Elizabeth is not described as returning the sentiment. Although she “clearly experiences an immediate, visceral sexual interest in Wickham...Elizabeth is aware of Darcy only as an annoying distraction from these favorites. Even worse, she sometimes views him, like Mr. Collins, as an object of derision” (Bander 26). Therefore, if Elizabeth does not fail to admit when she likes Mr. Wickham or Colonel Fitzwilliam, why would she show resistance in expressing her attraction to Mr. Darcy? Her openness in admiring other men would suggest that her dislike of Mr. Darcy is not hiding any secret affections. She indeed seems capable of admitting when she finds a man agreeable. As such, her initial aversion to him, even if based partly on false assumptions, is genuine.

Two connected events in the novel show a clear trajectory of Elizabeth’s evolving feelings toward Mr. Darcy: his marriage proposals to Elizabeth – the first unsuccessful, the second successful. Austen’s decision to include two proposals by the same man to the same woman, each with different results, allows for an examination of changes in these characters and their relationship without the confusion of other confounding variables. Through this model,

Austen demonstrates the correct circumstances under which a proposal should be accepted, and Elizabeth's particular financial situation is a crucial element in this respect. When compared to the protagonist in Austen's *Emma*, it becomes increasingly evident how Elizabeth's financial circumstances heighten the pressure she feels to get married. In *Emma*, the protagonist, Emma, is described as "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence" (*Emma* 1). Emma, then, is a wealthy woman with little concern for the security of her future. When Mr. Elton confesses his feelings for her, she refuses his advances. Her rejection of him is unsurprising and of no cost: for one, he is below her station, and her wealth means she does not need to marry for financial security. In other words, there is no risk – at least to Emma – in refusing Mr. Elton. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's situation is vastly different; she does not come from a wealthy family, and her father's estate is entailed to the next male heir:

Mr. Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed, in default of heirs male, on a distant relation; and their mother's fortune, though ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of his. (*Pride and Prejudice* 13)

As such, upon their father's death, the Bennet daughters will be without a home. Austen creates a different playing field for Elizabeth than she does for Emma: Emma can afford to marry whomever she pleases, but Elizabeth does not have that luxury as her situation places a strict time limit on her marriage. In short, there will be severe consequences if she does not get married before her father's death. Elizabeth does not have the wealth or social status that would

guarantee her a safe future; like her sisters, her future safety and financial security will be dependent on her marrying wisely.

Despite the severity and urgency of her situation, Elizabeth rejects not one, but two marriage proposals from men who could have provided her with the financial stability she needs. She first rejects Mr. Collins, and her mother is quick to remind her of the possible consequences of her decision: “if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead” (57). Despite this warning, not only does Elizabeth refuse to return and accept Mr. Collins, but she also rebuffs the next proposal made to her – by Mr. Darcy. Under any other circumstance, a character in such a dire situation might be portrayed as foolish for turning down opportunities that would save them from potential ruin. However, Austen does not depict her heroine as foolish; Elizabeth, rather, is considered the most sensible member of her family. Therefore, Austen must be pointing to a legitimate reason for which she refuses these proposals, despite the risks posed by the refusals. What do those proposals lack that make it reasonable for Elizabeth to avoid attaching herself to such men and risk a future of financial insecurity? The answer is complex, but of critical importance in underscoring the qualities of Austen’s ideal romantic partner.

The use of multiple proposals in her narrative allows Austen to comment on a question central to her society: whether marriage should prioritize pragmatic purposes, or love. It is evident that Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy each propose for different reasons: the former asks for Elizabeth’s hand purely for practical purposes, as he himself admits:

My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the

example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly – which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. (53)

Mr. Collins' speech is utterly unromantic, and there appears to be no emotional impetus to his proposal. He shows more concern for his own status and wellbeing than for any romantic displays of affection. His emphasis on the importance of setting a good "example," and his apparent lack of attachment to Elizabeth demonstrates that, for him, marriage is a pragmatic arrangement. While he admits that the union will make him happy, he stresses that he is following the advice of his patroness rather than his own heart. His lack of attachment to Elizabeth is confirmed as he recovers quickly from her rejection and moves on to Charlotte Lucas. In the case of Mr. Darcy, the reverse is true: he proposes purely because of his romantic affection for Elizabeth. In fact, his feelings are described as a kind of inconvenience:

His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand. (94)

Darcy points to Elizabeth's social inferiority and explains how "family obstacles" should discourage his pursuit of her. Unlike Mr. Collins, Darcy is not trying to set a good "example" or following the advice of anybody but himself; in fact, his proposal suggests quite the opposite. The status gap between him and Elizabeth would in all likelihood result in criticism, or even overt resistance, from those in his social circle, which is proven true through the response of Lady Catherine De Bourgh. In contrast to Mr. Collins, Darcy does not propose for practical reasons, and is willing to sacrifice propriety to pursue his heart's desire.

While Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins because he is odious to her, and because he could never make her happy, Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Darcy is layered. For one, she lacks any sort of attraction toward him upon his first proposal; she also holds him responsible for the unhappiness of Mr. Wickham and her sister, Jane (94). Furthermore, she cannot forgive his disrespect toward her and her family. For these reasons, she states outwardly that she could never accept his proposal, and, in this way, she does not merely stand up for her sister, but for herself as well. Elizabeth does not shy away from pointing out the underhanded insults aimed at her during his declaration. "Why," she asks Darcy, "with so evident a desire of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?" (94). For Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy's elevated social status and financial security are not as important as his character, which she judges based on his actions against Jane and Mr. Wickham. Furthermore, she cannot forgive his declaration with regards to her and her family's alleged inferiority. In her critique of Mr. Collins, Mr. Darcy, and their proposals, Austen demonstrates what qualities Elizabeth would value in a potential husband: a respectable character, someone she respects, but also someone who respects her.

However, Austen does not merely suggest that Elizabeth is without fault. While her evaluation of Mr. Collins may be accurate, her prejudice and quick judgment are contributing factors to her tense relationship with Mr. Darcy. When Elizabeth eventually comes to learn the truth behind Mr. Darcy's and Mr. Wickham's pasts, and thus realizes the mistakes she has made with regards to the former's character, her opinion of Darcy begins to change. However, this does not mean her feelings turn instantly romantic. Greenfield attributes Elizabeth's growing romantic feelings toward Mr. Darcy to his absence, which allows her to "enlarge her mind" and reform her opinion of him as she learns she misjudged his character (337). Such a position suggests, perhaps misleadingly, that Elizabeth is solely responsible for her initial failed relationship with Mr. Darcy. Although she is initially mistaken concerning much of his character, she is correct in certain respects: there is no misunderstanding his insulting comments regarding her family and class status when he first proposes. But Darcy's understanding of the social gap he initially describes changes from the beginning to the end of the novel, allowing Elizabeth to agree to marry him. Darcy, much like Elizabeth, changes throughout the novel. The evolution of his character is necessary for Elizabeth to come to love him.

Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy not only differ in their reasons for proposing to Elizabeth, but in the ways they respond to her rejection. When Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins, he does not take her rejection seriously; instead, he accuses her of playing hard to get:

It is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour... I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long. (54)

His assurance of her eventual acceptance of him demonstrates not only his arrogance but also his clear disregard for the integrity of her words and desires. Rather than attribute some concern and interest to her thoughts, Mr. Collins reduces her to a female stereotype in an attempt to rationalize her rejection. Austen criticizes this failure to recognize a woman's personhood through Elizabeth's reply to Mr. Collins: "You must give me leave to judge for myself, and pay me the compliment of believing what I say" (54). Again, Elizabeth takes issue with the lack of respect shown to her from her suitor. In contrast, Mr. Darcy's response to Elizabeth's rejection, while angry, shows an underlying respect for her character. He is visibly surprised and indignant, but this is, clearly, because he takes her rejection seriously. He knows she means what she says, and he does not disrespect her by twisting her words to soothe his ego. Furthermore, he pays attention to the reasons for her rejection: "he listened without attempting to interrupt her while she continued" (94). He does not simply hear her, but actively listens, stopping himself from interrupting her to defend himself. The only time he comes to his own defense is with regards to the points upon which she is mistaken, such as her beliefs around Mr. Wickham. In this way, he shows her far more respect than Mr. Collins had.

Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy also differ in their responses to Elizabeth following her rejection. When Mrs. Bennet encourages Mr. Collins by suggesting that Elizabeth will change her mind about his proposal, he says, "Pardon me for interrupting you, madam...but if she is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether she would altogether be a very desirable wife to a man in my situation, who naturally looks for happiness in the marriage" (55). Elizabeth's strong character and opinion dissuade Mr. Collins from wanting to marry her, and he easily and swiftly moves on to Charlotte Lucas. While his heart has not been wounded by Elizabeth's refusal of him, the same cannot be said for his ego. It is obvious that he continues to resent her

rejection as he strives to make her regret refusing him, as Elizabeth herself recognizes: “she could not help in fancying that in displaying the good proportion of the room, its aspect and its furniture, he [Mr. Collins] addressed himself particularly to her, as if wishing to make her feel what she had lost in refusing him” (77). His desire to ignite her regret suggests that his ego is still bruised by her rejection; he does not respect her decision, as Darcy does, but rather wants to punish her for it. In associating this behavior with an unlikeable character such as Mr. Collins, Austen condemns this type of response in the face of a woman’s rejection. Certainly, Darcy makes his own mistakes, but the underlying respect he shows in response to Elizabeth’s refusal is what allows him to change and to grow into Austen’s ideal man.

While Austen uses Mr. Collins to censure disrespectful behavior towards women, she uses Darcy to highlight the proper way to behave and thus stresses the qualities of her ideal man. Unlike Mr. Collins, following Elizabeth’s rejection of his proposal, Darcy does not give Elizabeth the cold shoulder, nor does he attempt to make her regret refusing him. Instead, he writes her a letter, describing the situation with Mr. Wickham, explaining why he interfered with Jane and Bingley, and even admitting he was wrong in the latter instance (97). This is another point on which he differs from Mr. Collins: Darcy is willing to self-reflect and admit his faults in response to Elizabeth’s views of him. Elizabeth notices this, as she recognizes that she had, as Bander argues, “constructed an entirely false character for Darcy” (35). She learns that he is in fact “a man of honor and principle, even admitting that his inferences about Jane’s feelings for Bingley, although wrong, were in some measure justified” (Bander 35). After reading the letter and upon arriving at Pemberley, Elizabeth’s opinion of Darcy begins to change; she does not show any signs of romantic interest in him, but she begins to see him as a respectable, rather than as an odious, man. “By the time Elizabeth arrives at Pemberley,” Bander contends, “she knows

that Darcy is a good man, she respects his understanding and principles...but she still does not like Darcy, nor does she feel any personal attraction to him” (35). While she still lacks romantic feelings for him, her newfound ability to view him with respect is the first step toward her willingness to see him as a love interest. Austen thus underscores what she seems to see as a crucial circumstance under which a proposal should be accepted: a woman’s respect for her potential suitor. This is further demonstrated when observing Elizabeth’s contrasting responses as she imagines what it would be like to be Mr. Collins’, versus Mr. Darcy’s, wife. Expressing her views of Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins’ union, Elizabeth thinks, “Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins was a most humiliating picture! ...it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen” (63). However, in light of what she learns of Mr. Darcy, she thinks quite differently of him as a potential husband. She abstains from using the strong language she applies to Mr. Collins, and she is almost wistful in her thoughts as she considers the future Mrs. Darcy: “she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!” (119). While she herself does not view him romantically at this point, she thinks well enough of his character that she does not pity his future wife, as she does Mr. Collins’. Mr. Darcy now has the one thing Mr. Collins never did – her respect – thus allowing for the development of her romantic attraction.

The change in Elizabeth and Darcy’s relationship is not due merely to Elizabeth’s changing awareness of Darcy’s assets. Certainly, her new perspective allows her to see him in a more respectable manner, but the shift from respect to love requires changes in Mr. Darcy as well. As suggested above, it is Darcy’s absence that allows Elizabeth to fall in love with him. As Greenfield argues, “when Elizabeth next sees Darcy in September she is sure of her attachment. She is so, we are meant to understand, because Darcy's absence has ignited new thoughts- because, thanks to his body's disappearance, her own mind is enlarged” (337). Although

Greenfield is certainly right to suggest that Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy change during his absence, the importance of Darcy's own growth is also a crucial factor in Elizabeth's evolving feelings. Elizabeth learns to respect Darcy during their time apart, having learned through his letters the truth of his history with Mr. Wickham, and internalized the praise of him by his house staff; this in turn enlarges her mind, and she realizes that her judgment has been impaired by her affection for Mr. Wickham. As Elaine Bander argues,

Darcy's proposal and subsequent letter begin Elizabeth's long process of revision. In accepting Darcy's version of events as truth, she recognizes that her romantic attraction to Wickham had overcome her critical judgment. She also acknowledges that her valorization of Wickham was influenced by her own attraction to him without further substance or evidence. (34)

Elizabeth reflects on her lack of judgment, and is, consequently, more open-minded going forward, which, in turn, contributes to her growth while Mr. Darcy is away. This leads to her newfound respect for Darcy, but it does not mean she has grown to love him.

Elizabeth is disabused of her initial misconception of the situation surrounding Mr. Wickham, "even" as Bander notes, "admitting that his inferences about Jane's feelings for Bingley, although wrong, were in some measure justified reasons for interfering" – but there is still the matter of the insults directed at her family during his proposal (Bander 35). As far as Elizabeth is concerned, Darcy still believes in the inferiority of her family, and this is not something she can overlook. Upon her first visit to Pemberley, Elizabeth is enamoured by the estate and briefly entertains the thought of being its mistress, but she quickly dismisses the idea upon thinking that she might not be able to see her family: "And of this place," thought she, "I

might have been mistress!...But no,'— recollecting herself — 'that could never be; my uncle and aunt would have been lost to me; I should not have been allowed to invite them'" (119). She still believes Darcy views her family as inferior, to the extent that she would not be allowed to have them visit. This is enough to divert her from any further thought of being the mistress of Pemberley: "This was a lucky recollection—it saved her from something very like regret" (120). It is worth noting that it is not Darcy who makes her reconsider what she has given up, but Pemberley itself; at this point, she is drawn to the estate, rather than to Darcy himself.

Contrary to Greenfield, I would argue that it is during Darcy's renewed presence – rather than during his absence – that Elizabeth falls in love with him. His absence allows her to realize her mistakes and overcome her prejudice; however, it is after Darcy's return that she witnesses *his* changes – changes that allow her to fall in love with him. Elizabeth first expects Darcy to react to her presence at Pemberley in much the same way as Mr. Collins had received her: with lingering bitterness to her previous rejection. She thinks to herself, "How strange it must appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man! It might seem as if she had purposely thrown herself in his way again!" (122). She still sees him as a vain person likely to be displeased with her presence, and she is therefore surprised by his subsequent hospitality. His kindness toward her aunt and uncle, in particular, captures her attention. She realizes something about him has changed, as she wonders "Why is he so altered? From what can it proceed? It cannot be for me— it cannot be for my sake that his manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hunsford could not work such a change as this. It is impossible that he should still love me?" (124). Mr. Collins was quick to move on from her, and she has perhaps assumed the same of Darcy; she cannot imagine that her harsh words might have provoked a transformation in him. And yet, the thought crosses her mind. While previously, she had remained oblivious to Darcy's

feelings for her, she now briefly considers whether she had a role in his change of behavior. She is gratified when Darcy invites her uncle fishing, believing “the compliment must be all for herself” (124). She is also “flattered and pleased” when he asks her to meet his younger sister, Georgiana, and thinks “it was gratifying to know that his resentment had not made him think really ill of her” (125). Darcy’s developing generosity and openness allow Elizabeth to fall in love with him. Austen’s portrayal of Darcy’s admirable willingness to change points to an aspect of what she deems the ideal man. Darcy does not seek to punish Elizabeth for her rejection, nor does he attempt to make her regret her decision, but he strives to become a better man, based on her critique of his character. In portraying the differences between Darcy and Mr. Collins, Austen manages to highlight her vision of the ideal man, while denouncing a version of masculinity she deems as flawed.

The significant change in Darcy’s character is integral to Elizabeth’s ability to see him in a new light, which in turn eventually allows her to see him as a love interest. Had Darcy received her rudely, like Mr. Collins had, Elizabeth would not have thought well enough of him to fall in love. However, his hospitality and desire for her to meet his sister incite a new set of feelings in Elizabeth. As Bander argues, “just as Colonel Fitzwilliam had once fluttered her spirits, now Darcy does” (36). As exemplified in the following passage, she continues to appreciate the changes in his behaviour:

When she saw him thus seeking the acquaintance and courting the good opinion of people with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace—when she saw him thus civil, not only to herself, but to the very relations whom he had openly disdained, and recollected their last lively scene in Hunsford

Parsonage—the difference, the change was so great, and struck so forcibly on her mind, that she could hardly restrain her astonishment from being visible. (128)

Elizabeth immediately notices the stark contrast between his previous and his current behavior toward her and others. He now seeks the company and “good opinion” of people he had previously believed inferior and whose judgment had meant very little to him. He no longer appears to believe he is above conversing with those around him, and the difference in him is not subtle, for, as Elizabeth suggests, his behaviour has altered so significantly she has trouble hiding her astonishment. Her initial reasons for rejecting him, notably his pride and disdain for people of a lower social class, have now dissolved. Thus, the only remaining barrier that keeps Elizabeth from viewing Darcy as a potential love interest is removed. “Elizabeth,” Bander explains, “now adds gratitude to the respect that she already feels for Darcy. This...is the crucial moment when she begins to feel something like tenderness and an erotic attraction for Darcy, to respond to him as a man and as a potential mate” (36). Although she has not yet fallen in love with him, she reconsiders her feelings in attempt to discover what exactly she feels for him.

The fact that Elizabeth feels the need to sort out her feelings means there are, in fact, feelings to sort out. She is so conflicted in her feelings that “she lay awake two whole hours endeavouring to make them out” (129). “She certainly did not hate him,” she acknowledges, “No; hatred had vanished long ago, and she had almost as long been ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him” (129). In addition to what she now knows about him, Darcy’s own changes cause Elizabeth to reevaluate how she feels about him. It is only when she learns of Lydia’s elopement with Mr. Wickham, and the realization that this would affect any future with Darcy, that Elizabeth realizes that she truly could have come to love him. Commenting on this incident,

Greenfield again attributes Elizabeth's feelings to Darcy's absence, or, more specifically, his future absence. Any potential romantic relationship between him and Elizabeth appears impossible due to Lydia's actions. As Greenfield argues, "it is also finally thanks to Lydia's pursuit of Wickham and to her own continued separation from Darcy that she completes the mental work of loving him" (346). It is certainly true that the sudden impossibility of a future with Darcy leads her to realize she could have loved him. She thinks, "never before had she so honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be in vain" (135). However, Elizabeth's realization that she *could* have loved him means she does not love him *yet*; it only suggests that there was such a possibility. As such, she does not yet complete "the mental work of loving him" (Greenfield 346). She merely acknowledges that the barriers that prevented her from loving him before are no longer in place. She also concludes that Mr. Darcy's character would be well-suited to her now as she begins "now to comprehend that he was exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her" (152). While she is not in love with him yet, this realization is still a significant step in the direction of love.

Greenfield is certainly correct in her argument that Lydia and Wickham's relationship helps to encourage Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy, but her position oversimplifies the complex reasons for Elizabeth's developing attachment to Darcy. Greenfield argues that the event "secures [Elizabeth's] final evidence of Darcy's virtue when she learns about his success in arranging Lydia's marriage" (346). "For Elizabeth" Greenfield continues, "male absence is a prerequisite for love...she must think about his absence to desire him. For a woman like Elizabeth (and also Jane) to love is to fixate on a missing man; to love is the consummation of missing that man" (346). I would reiterate that Darcy's absence is not obviously necessary for Elizabeth to fall in love with him. While the risk of losing Darcy certainly provokes Elizabeth to

discover the potential of her feelings, the basis of her eventual love for him transcends the feeling of wanting what she cannot have. She does not begin to yearn for him because of his absence; it just so happens she learns the truth about certain misunderstandings during that absence, and these discoveries allow her to look inward at her own flawed judgment and prejudice, which, in turn, prompt her to grow. Austen seems, therefore, to highlight the need for a person – especially a woman – to grow as an individual before entering into a partnership with a spouse. Elizabeth’s internal growth is necessary not only for her to begin to see the true Darcy, but also for preparing her to enter a successful marriage as a more mature individual. This is the major development in her character during Mr. Darcy’s absence, and it is later, during his actual presence, that she begins to fall in love with him.

As I have been arguing, there are multiple factors that initially prevent Elizabeth from falling in love with Darcy. One involves the misconceptions about his character surrounding events concerning Mr. Wickham and Mr. Bingley. Another relates to his pride, his disdain toward the Bennet family, and his blatant disregard for anyone outside of his social circle. During his absence, Elizabeth learns the truth behind his history with Mr. Wickham and Mr. Bingley, and this removes the first barrier. However, in order for the second barrier to be removed, Elizabeth must witness the changes in Darcy’s behavior, which can only be done in his presence. In fact, it is when Elizabeth notices Darcy’s altered behavior in his interactions with others that her feelings move from respect to something warmer. As Bander states, “as she [Elizabeth] struggles to know - and to perform - her own feelings, her heightened awareness of his presence is surely an indication that she is at last responding to him both emotionally and physically” (37). Darcy’s presence is therefore required for Elizabeth not only to witness the change in him, but also to be affected by it. It is when she learns of what Darcy has done for her

family, notably his arrangement of the marriage between Lydia and Wickham, that her affections begin to grow and there is that “first clear sign of love” (Bander 34). Initially, his disrespect toward her family damaged Elizabeth’s opinion of him, but now “he was the person to whom the whole family were indebted for the first of benefits, and whom she regarded herself with an interest, if not quite so tender, at least as reasonable and just as what Jane felt for Bingley” (*Pride and Prejudice* 164). In addition to an inward change in her feelings toward him, Elizabeth displays a physical reaction to his presence:

Her astonishment at his coming... and voluntarily seeking her again, was almost equal to what she had known on first witnessing his altered behaviour in Derbyshire. The colour which had been driven from her face, returned for half a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added lustre to her eyes, as she thought for that space of time that his affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But she would not be secure. (164)

The “additional glow” to her features as well as the “smile of delight,” which add “lustre to her eyes” point to her newfound physical attraction to him. Furthermore, she is pleased to consider the fact that Darcy may still be interested in her. She here reacts to him much the way she did when she first experienced an attraction to Mr. Wickham, expressing a similar pleasure at the thought of Darcy’s unchanged affection to her as when Mr. Wickham chose her company over that of other women. As Bander argues, “Austen has drawn the trajectory of Elizabeth's feelings with precision: first respect, then esteem, then gratitude, and only later (‘when all love must be vain’) and only in the conditional tense and the subjunctive mood, love” (38). Depicting this

trajectory is enabled in part by Austen's use of two proposals, each of which consist of important turning points in Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship.

Nonetheless, one might ask why Austen would have Darcy propose twice: why not only have one proposal at the end of the novel, when Elizabeth is in a place to accept the proposal? Lady Catherine's eventual confrontation with Elizabeth results in the catalyst that prompts Darcy's second proposal. Upon discovering that Elizabeth refused Lady Catherine's request to reject Darcy should he propose again, he gains hope that her feelings toward him have changed. Darcy tells Elizabeth, "I knew enough of your disposition to be certain that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly" (181). This time, when he proposes, Elizabeth accepts. This begs the question, again, of why Austen felt the need to introduce two proposals. Gao argues that Elizabeth serves as the lens through which readers can understand Austen's ideal man, and she compares Darcy's two proposals to analyse their differences and to attempt to understand why one leads to an acceptance while the other does not. She thus explores the question of what qualities Elizabeth – and by extension Austen – attributes to the ideal man. The first factor Gao highlights as a necessity is love. "These external material conditions such as wealth and social status," writes Gao, "can't win Elizabeth's heart. Elizabeth, actually Austen, insists that love is the fundamental base of her ideal man" (386). Gao goes on to argue that Austen uses Darcy's first and second proposals to underline how love is the main factor that changes Elizabeth's response from a rejection to an acceptance. "Elizabeth," Gao continues, "still rejects his proposal...the first time because she didn't fall in love with him... Elizabeth does not want to marry a man whom she dislikes" (386). Gao underscores the ways in which Darcy's transformation throughout the novel demonstrates his true love for Elizabeth. He becomes a man

Elizabeth can fall in love with; as Gao explains, “Love is the magical power to alter Elizabeth’s attitude toward Darcy’s second proposal” (386). Therefore, Austen introduces two proposals – one to be accepted, and one to be refused – in part because the initial rejection is what prompts the change in Darcy’s character. I would add that the proposals serve as a test for Elizabeth’s character, perhaps allowing Austen to protect her protagonist from criticism. Had Elizabeth accepted Darcy’s first proposal, it would have reflected badly on her character. Much as Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins because his character is repulsive to her – and criticizes Charlotte for accepting Mr. Collins for the same reason – it would be hypocritical of her to then accept Darcy’s proposal when she does not love or respect him either. Had Elizabeth accepted him the first time, when she clearly disliked him, it would have suggested that she accepted him merely for his wealth and status. By having Elizabeth reject Darcy, Austen underlines that Elizabeth will not allow economic matters to take precedence over her feelings, nor will she, Austen suggests, stray from her principles.

While love is clearly an important factor for Elizabeth – and therefore Austen – when it comes to marriage, the change in Darcy’s character demonstrates other important qualities that prompt Elizabeth to fall in love. In addition to love, Austen values certain characteristics and qualities in men – most notably virtue – which she demonstrates through Darcy. Indeed, as Gao notes, “Austen fixes these plots to make Elizabeth be moved by Darcy’s virtues. Actually, Darcy wins Elizabeth’s heart with his virtues. Virtue is one of requisite standards of Austen’s ideal man” (Gao 388). Certainly, Darcy’s virtue is an important feature in Austen’s eyes. However, I would add that the two proposals serve to test Darcy’s ability to respond to Elizabeth’s rejection, revealing another of Austen’s qualities of the ideal man: the ability to resist succumbing to problematic masculine behavior, or ‘flawed’ masculinity. Had Austen only wanted to highlight

her ideal man, she could have made Darcy such a person from the beginning and compared him to the more flawed characters such as Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins. Instead, Austen chooses to give readers an initially-flawed love interest in order to later underline the rightful critique of his person as well as his response to his inevitable rejection. During the scene of Darcy's second proposal, Austen's vision of the ideal man crystallizes as she uses Darcy to critique flawed masculinity. In introducing a first proposal which is rejected, Austen sets the scene so that Darcy can respond to the rejection in two ways: one which strays from the behaviors attached to flawed masculinity, and one which reinforces them. Darcy, of course, responds in a way that aligns with the former.

Darcy's response and actions following Elizabeth's rejection is especially telling of his character. He never insults Elizabeth nor is he abusive toward her in any way after her rejection; in fact, he is surprised when she voices her concerns that he might have hated her after her refusal of him. "Hate you!" he says, "I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction" (182). Not only does Darcy agree that her criticism of him was appropriate, he also allows this criticism to provoke a significant change in him (181). Nonetheless, as Greenfield wonders, "we might ask whether Darcy's heroism marks the emergence of his fixed and essential goodness (which Elizabeth simply needed to discover) or whether time has altered him" (347). Perhaps we have a combination of both factors. In order for Darcy to respond in the way he does to Elizabeth's rejection, there must be some goodness within him to begin with. Otherwise, he would likely have reacted to the rejection in much the same way as Mr. Collins. However, his pride seems to have largely overshadowed that noble trait in him, as he himself suggests:

I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son... I was spoilt by my parents, who, though good themselves...allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to care for none beyond my own family circle...Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth!...By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. (182)

Darcy does not place any of the blame on Elizabeth; he takes full responsibility for his behavior and acknowledges that, considering his former ways, she was right to reject him. Austen attacks flawed masculine behavior by having Darcy respond to Elizabeth's rejection with respect and reflection, and by working to become a better man worthy of the woman he loves. Austen seems to encourage straying from a version of masculinity – 'flawed masculinity' – that revolves around ego and emphasizes a difference between the sexes exemplified in the way in which Mr. Collins displays arrogance during his proposal and reduces Elizabeth to a female stereotype when he fails to grasp the reality of her rejection. On the other hand, Darcy does not diminish the value of Elizabeth's words because she is a woman, nor does he let his ego overpower his ability to listen to her criticism and actively change.

Another way in which Darcy's character serves to denounce a version of masculinity of which Austen disapproves is his awareness of the importance of Elizabeth's consent. Not once does he try to manipulate her affection or assert his dominance; for example, he refrains from

telling her he is the one to have arranged Lydia's marriage with Mr. Wickham, even if it could have meant winning her favor (*Pride and Prejudice* 180). He also affirms the importance of her consent when he tells her he will drop the subject of his affections at her request. "If your feelings are still what they were last April," he says to her, "tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever" (181). Such respect for a woman's wishes is another quality Austen envisions in her ideal man, as she, indeed, "recognized the importance of female choice" (Kruger et al. 114). Unlike Mr. Collins, who reacts to Elizabeth's rejection poorly, Darcy does not occupy a pitiable or manipulative model of masculinity, but rather treats Elizabeth with respect and even acts kindly behind her back, with no expectations in return. During his second proposal, he says he will not resent her if she rejects him again. In this way, Darcy shows respect for Elizabeth, and waits for obvious signs of her acquiescence, both characteristics of Austen's ideal man.

In including two proposals in her novel, Austen traces how particular circumstances and characters change from the first proposal to the second. Darcy's character is transformed into Austen's vision of the ideal man – one who is willing to listen and respect a woman, as well as acknowledge his privilege and overcome the more commonplace, ego-driven aspects of masculine behavior to become a better version of himself. Similarly, the use of two proposals allows Austen to demonstrate Elizabeth's internal growth, and to stress the importance of female independence. Finally, as Brontë will in *Jane Eyre*, Austen demonstrates the importance of personal growth and maturity before entering into marriage. When Elizabeth finally comes to accept Darcy's proposal, the narrator announces, "The feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then," thus implying that both Elizabeth and Darcy have grown and are now ready to be together (182). Austen thus

underlines the importance of individuality and independence. She does not have her plot revolve solely around Elizabeth finding a husband, nor does she depict Darcy as the only one needing to grow throughout the novel. She has her heroine undertake an emotional journey which turns her into a more self-aware and mature character, which is stressed as a precursor to and a necessity for her marriage to Darcy. In this way, Austen demonstrates that, even though women's situation at the time pressured them into getting married, Elizabeth's importance and personhood is not contingent on whether she has a husband. Her independence and growth as an individual are important and necessary foundations to the partnership of marriage.

Chapter Two

Proposals and Female Independence in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Written during the Victorian period, *Jane Eyre* takes place during a time in which society was “man-controlled and man-dominated, and women [we]re subject to the voice of men” (Gao 927). It is unsurprising, then, that female writers used their work to demonstrate the injustice of the patriarchy and the oppression of women. “In this period,” writes Hayan Gao, “female writers t[ook]... [their] pens to speak for the oppressed women and *Jane Eyre* c[ame] to be the most influential novel” (927). While Gao’s reference to Brontë’s novel as ‘the most influential’ might be considered an overstatement, it is certainly true that *Jane Eyre* had – and continues to have – a great impact on readers. Through her novel, Brontë critiques the hardships women, especially women of the lower classes, were forced to endure. Zheng Kelu writes, “Women were discriminated against by men at the time. However, the ahead-of-age female consciousness of *Jane Eyre* ... challenges men’s authority” (qtd. in Gao 926). Indeed, Jane proves herself to be ahead of her time. As Austen does in *Pride and Prejudice*, Brontë places her protagonist in a disadvantageous position that requires her to play by the rules of her society if she wishes to survive. Moreover, Jane – like Elizabeth – quickly demonstrates her refusal to play by societal rules if it means compromising her beliefs. “[Jane] is threateningly intelligent,” Millicent Bell writes, “forthright to the point of bluntness, submitting herself to no one... Her unsubmitiveness, her independence is her social fault” (np). Also like Elizabeth, Jane gains the attention of a suitor above her social class, and she too rejects this love interest once before ultimately accepting to marry him later in the novel. Despite the similarities between these female protagonists, the reasons for which they at first reject their respective eventual husbands

are quite different – as are the reasons they ultimately accept them. Bell writes that “*Jane Eyre* is a love story that ends in a marriage” (np). While some scholars would agree with Bell on this point¹, others would not highlight love as the main theme of the novel². I concur with the latter group and argue in the following pages that *Jane Eyre* is not a love story per se. Rather, it is a story that explores a heroine’s journey to self-fulfillment and independence. It just so happens that a romantic element is introduced later in the plot as part of this journey. Indeed, many scholars approach the novel from an angle that does not dwell on the romantic plot. Indah Miftah Awaliah highlights gender issues and women’s autonomy as the main themes of *Jane Eyre* (109). Similarly, Öztop Haner examines how Brontë’s purpose in “*Jane Eyre* is to articulate displeasure against gender and class inequality in England” (173). Aubrey L. Mishou sees the novel as “a Darwinian exploration of sex and gender and the evolutionary competition of nineteenth-century courtship” (255). While I study the importance of multiple proposals in *Jane Eyre*, I intend to build on the work of such scholars as I pay particular attention to the role of gender, class, and power dynamics in the novel. Furthermore, while many scholars have already studied the importance of female independence in *Jane Eyre*, I intend to enlarge this approach by examining not only how a patriarchal system serves as a threat to Jane’s independence, but also how men as individuals operating within this system serve as a threat. To do so, I explore how Brontë condemns a particular version of ‘flawed masculinity’ – a concept elaborated in Chapter 1 – through her male characters and their marriage proposals.

¹Gao, for example, while acknowledging the novel’s other themes, says the more significant one is true love (926).

²Aubrey L. Mishou writes that *Jane Eyre* is “far from a love story intended to support Victorian principles” (255).

This chapter argues that Brontë depicts Jane's responses in the face of multiple proposals to demonstrate her protagonist's dedication to her principles, to highlight the importance of independence and morality over passionate love and marriage, and to emphasize the importance of equality between partners in marriage. Through the character of Jane, Brontë, rather than focusing on the value of love and romance, emphasizes the importance of morality, interiority, individuality, and the development of the self. These are values to which Jane is dedicated first and foremost, and thus it is only once these are achieved that she can give herself to romantic love, with no threat to the integrity of her personhood.

Pride and Prejudice establishes from its famous opening passage that a marriage plot is at its core. While Elizabeth is, certainly, the protagonist, the novel focuses on a multitude of characters, and because the narrative voice often shifts, readers have access to other characters' minds. And, of course, it examines Elizabeth and Darcy's mutual growth and other factors that ultimately allow them to end up together in the perfect marriage. In *Jane Eyre*, by contrast, the notion of marriage as a means to self-realization does not become an issue until later in the novel. The novel does not present a story of how the heroine and her love interest evolve together, culminating in a perfect relationship. Rather, the focus is solely on Jane. The novel is told in the first person, and therefore relayed entirely from Jane's point of view. By the time she meets Rochester – her future husband – Jane has endured multiple hardships that have developed and strengthened her principles. She later sees that to marry Rochester – a man whom she loves – would go against her principles and morals. Brontë stresses the importance of independence and morality in Jane's life by beginning the novel when the protagonist is merely a child. In tracing

Jane through her early years, Brontë is able to outline clearly the principles by which Jane chooses to live.

The absence of independence, freedom, and equality from Jane's experience as a child is what leads her to treasure and seek these very attributes. "Dependence," Bell writes, "is the essence of her condition in the economic meaning of the word when, as a little girl, she is orphaned and sent to live with unsympathetic relatives" (np). In her depiction of Jane's living conditions with her unkind family members, Brontë brings two issues to the fore: economic dependence and the inequality between social classes. Jane's cousin John is keen to point out the difference in social class between them. "You have no business to take our books," he tells Jane, "you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense" (5). John's comments highlight the multiple obstacles Jane faces. For instance, he highlights her lack of wealth and therefore economic dependence on their family. Her health and safety depend on her Aunt Reed keeping her at Gateshead Hall, for indeed, without her aunt, Jane would be driven to begging. As Bell states, "[Jane] suffers not only from the weakness of femalehood but from the further insecurity of the poor person always threatened with a pauper's helplessness" (np). John also points to her lack of a status. Finally, he argues that this lack of status signifies she is not deserving of the same benefits as "gentlemen's children." Jane is dismissive of the idea that only members of a certain social class are entitled to certain things. Brontë, too, clearly demonstrates her adamant disagreement with John's elitist opinions in her unfavourable portrayal of him.

Brontë challenges the notion that one's social status is a reflection of their inner life or their true character. One way in which she does this is by contrasting Jane – a seemingly

unimportant member of society – and her cousins, members of a higher social class. Despite their cruel ways, her cousins – Eliza, Georgiana, and John – are not reprimanded, but rather repeatedly praised by their mother and the house staff. By contrast, Jane, due to her social position, is scolded and looked down upon regardless of her actions. Even at a young age, she recognizes the injustice in the diverging ways she and her cousins are treated:

Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? ...Eliza, who was headstrong and selfish, was respected. Georgiana, who had a spoiled temper, a very acrid spite, a captious and insolent carriage, was universally indulged. Her beauty, her pink cheeks and golden curls, seemed to give delight to all who looked at her, and to purchase indemnity for every fault. John no one thwarted, much less punished; though he twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks, set the dogs at the sheep, stripped the hothouse vines of their fruit, and broke the buds off the choicest plants in the conservatory... I dared commit no fault: I strove to fulfil every duty; and I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night. (7)

Jane – and by extension Brontë – highlights a distinction between the interior worth and the more superficial qualities of these characters. Her cousins' social status and beauty – superficial traits – grant them respect and absolve them of any flaws, at least in the eyes of their mother. In contrast, Jane, who lacks such superficial assets, but who strives to accomplish her duties and behave appropriately – traits that could be seen to reflect her inner worth – is punished because

she lacks her cousins' good looks and status. Brontë thus criticizes a societal tendency to focus on exteriority rather than interiority. "People in [the] Victorian age ha[d] the idea that people [we]re not born equally" Gao writes, "people in high rank despise[d] people in low rank and men [we]re superior to women" (927). In having a protagonist who seems socially unimportant and lacks any sort of status but has a rich inner life, Brontë argues that a person's inner qualities are what make them a worthy, morally upright individual. Jane's interiority is quite different than the identity others impose upon her based on what they see of her exterior. In other words, Brontë argues that interiority, rather than an assigned social role, is what should determine a person's worth.

However, this does not mean that Brontë – and therefore Jane – believes that superficial impressions and economic status are inconsequential. Jane is very much aware of how the real world works, which is why she reacts to the threat of poverty. When asked if she would like to find her other relatives, whom she is told are poor, Jane responds negatively. "I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind," she thinks, "to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (13). Despite the injustice and cruelty she experiences at Gateshead, Jane would rather remain there than live as a poor person typically did. Bell writes, "[Jane] suffers precisely because she knows the value of caste; she may be poor, but she does not want to belong to the Poor" (np). That being said, this does not discourage Jane from standing up for herself and risking her relationship with her rich relatives. Jane's situation is not unlike that of Fanny Price in Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Fanny – like Jane – is sent to live with wealthy relatives who mistreat her partly because of her poor background. However, here, as elsewhere, Brontë

presents a more radical social message than Austen, for while Fanny quietly accepts abuse from her family members, Jane is an outspoken heroine who firmly challenges the injustice she faces at her relatives' hands. For example, she fights back against her cousin John when he attacks her, and she is outspoken about the injustices she suffers. While Jane does not want to belong to the "poor people," this fear does not stop her from standing up for herself. Brontë creates a protagonist who must learn to understand and even accept how the world functions, in all of its wrongs, but not succumb to the extent that she disregards the injustices such a world creates.

Another factor that shapes Jane's sense of self both leading up to and following her introduction to Rochester is the absence of a clear social circle to which she belongs. Throughout her life, she is in a unique position in that she never quite fits into a specific group. At Gateshead Hall, she is not accepted into the family as an equal, nor is she fully respected by the other members of the household. After she attacks John in self-defence, the maids are quick to remind her of her inferior status. "What a shocking conduct, Miss Eyre," the lady's-maid scolds her, "to strike a young gentleman, your benefactress' son! Your young master" (5). The maid here does not only point to John's status, but to his superior position as Jane's 'master' – a fact which Jane aggressively protests as she asks, "Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?" (5). Jane's lack of a specific role is further highlighted in the maid's response: "No," she announces, "you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There, sit down, and think over your wickedness" (5). The maid reminds Jane that she is below not only her cousins, but also the house staff. She is a decided outsider in her inferior social status, but she does not accept, and in fact resists this position. Gao credits Jane's mistreatment and confinement to the red room to the early rise of her feminism (929). "In the face of Mrs. Reed," writes Gao, "Jane refuses to be treated as an inferior being and finally speaks out against discriminations to her with sharp and

cold exposure” (930). She adds, “Jane’s rebellion against Mrs. Reed and John represents her feminist consciousness in getting esteem from other people as a decent and respectable person” (930). Certainly, Jane’s mistreatment opens her eyes to the injustice of inequality.

Furthermore, her speech to Mrs. Reed before she leaves for Lockwood reinforces Jane’s conviction that the cultivation of one’s inner life – as opposed to appearances and status – is crucially important. After Mrs. Reed once again calls her deceitful, Jane loses her temper and defends her character while attacking her aunt’s. When Mrs. Reed questions her audacity, asking, “how dare you?”, Jane’s fury propels her to continue her rant (19). “How dare I, Mrs. Reed?” Jane asks, “How dare I? Because it is the *truth* [emphasis added]. You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so” (20). Here, Jane draws attention to her inner life; she reminds Mrs. Reed that, despite her lack of status, she still has feelings and emotional needs, such as love and kindness. Furthermore, she points to Mrs. Reed’s utter disregard for such qualities:

You have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back—
roughly and violently thrust me back—into the red-room, and
locked me up there, to my dying day; though I was in agony;
though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, ‘Have mercy!
Have mercy, Aunt Reed!’...I will tell anybody who asks me
questions, this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you
are bad, hard-hearted. You are deceitful! (20)

Mrs. Reed – despite her high social status and reputation – shows a lack of compassion and empathy, qualities that are, by contrast, visibly present in Jane. Not only does Mrs. Reed lack such qualities, but she is, in Jane’s words, “bad” and “hard-hearted.” Therefore, while her status

may suggest otherwise to the larger world, Mrs. Reed in fact represents the wickedness of which Jane is often accused. Jane once again dismisses the importance of appearance and propriety when justifying her rebellion against Mrs. Reed, asserting that she speaks the truth while Mrs. Reed is deceitful. In the cases of Jane and her aunt, outward appearance and social standing do not reflect inner worth. Brontë works to represent the psychological landscape of her slighted and mistreated heroine, while also representing her social plight as a young woman with no financial support.

While her time at Gateshead awakens Jane's belief in equality and independence (as well as, arguably, her feminism), religion and morality are additional important elements that begin to factor into her growing sense of herself, especially when she arrives at Lowood. Jane's experience with religion is similar to that of Brontë, who, Emily Griesinger explains, "doubted and frequently questioned but did not finally reject her Christian faith" (47). Griesinger examines the role of religion in *Jane Eyre* and notes that there are two important factors to consider. She writes:

First, the protagonist's growing awareness of the importance of faith and Christian belief in strengthening and empowering her as a woman; and second, her growing ability to discern possible dangers, abuses, and misappropriations of Christian teachings and doctrines, specifically those that impact her capacity to know and follow God. (47)

The second factor, Griesinger explains, is foreshadowed when Jane is at Gateshead. Her feminism and Christian faith come together as she begins to fight injustice for the sake not only of equality, but also of morality. Griesinger argues that Jane learns that "in the face of injustice,

she must take a stand. She must speak the truth...even if it means spending time in the Red Room, even if it means being called a liar by people in authority, even if it means being consigned to hell” (47). In other words, Jane must do what is right and morally upstanding above all else, a position which creates for her a dilemma, of course, when Rochester asks her to stay with him after their failed wedding.

It is at Lowood that her views on Christianity – and its effects on her life – begin to evolve. Here, Jane witnesses different versions of Christianity. One character who has a particular impact on her is Helen Burns, who is, in Griesinger’s words, “a real Christian martyr” (47). As seen in her responses to her cousin John’s and her Aunt Reed’s cruelty, Jane does not shy away from passionately defending herself and calling out the evil in others. The devout Helen Burns serves as a visible foil to Jane’s relatives, but Jane’s views diverge subtly from hers nonetheless. This is made clear when Helen and Jane engage in a theological discussion on how to deal with unkind and wicked people. Helen suggests meeting such people with love and kindness, stating, “It is not violence that best overcomes hate – nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury...Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you” (32). Helen’s words of advice come from the New Testament, and, as Griesinger argues, “many readers don’t like this character who seems to advocate a kind of non-violent passivity in the face of injustice” (47). Griesinger adds, however, that “the novel’s portrayal of Christianity cannot be reduced to Helen’s understanding of it” (47). This is in part because Jane takes issue with Helen’s beliefs and behaviors, asserting that her deference merely encourages wicked actions. She says to Helen:

You are good to those who are good to you. It is all I ever desire to be. If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel

and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should—so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again. (32)

While Helen refers to the New Testament and seems to be speaking purely from a religious perspective, Jane's words reveal a belief system that brings together social justice and Christianity. She concerns herself not only with the need for equal treatment, but also with the importance of consequences for evil deeds. While Helen believes the unjust deserve compassion, Jane notes that to ignore their cruelty would only result in encouraging or aggravating their destructive behavior. She states that if people were "always kind and obedient," then the "wicked people would have it all their own way." This position is clearly formed by the injustice she has suffered at Gateshead at the hands of her relatives, whom she never succeeded in pleasing. Her words reinforce her conviction in the importance of standing up against injustice rather than allowing it to persist merely for the sake of propriety.

Jane's own views on Christianity develop as the story progresses. "In the second half of the novel especially," writes Griesinger, "we can detect Brontë's interrogation of evangelical Christianity and in the latter stages of Jane's spiritual journey what I would call an emerging 'biblical feminism'" (47). Her time at Lowood is textually abbreviated as she jumps several years into the future. She states, "I am only bound to invoke Memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection" (46). Despite her

expressed desire to limit herself to the narration of stories she believes will interest the reader, some scholars criticize Brontë's decision to fast forward over a time so significant in Jane's developing view of Christianity. Barbara Hardy is one such scholar; for her, "the growth of Jane's religious feeling, which we expect in a religious *bildungsroman*, is something Brontë 'takes for granted and does not demonstrate'" (Hardy qtd. in Griesinger 48). Griesinger, however, disagrees with this assessment, arguing, "it is true that Jane does not have a Damascus Road conversion, or if it takes place in these eight years, we never hear the details. But we can infer that something has changed in Jane by the time she reaches Thornfield" (48). Certainly, as Griesinger suggests, witnessing Jane's development firsthand is not necessary to understanding her growth. In fact, one might argue that to witness the subtle changes in her throughout those eight years would be less impactful than presenting a fully-grown and changed heroine after this span of time has elapsed.

As Jane summarizes the events of the past eight years, it becomes clear that her emerging personality traits intermingle with characteristics that date back to her childhood. She credits Miss Temple, especially, for the changes within her:

I had imbibed from her [Miss Temple] something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character. (46-47)

Clearly, this is an altered Jane compared to the one who first arrived at Lowood. She now has "harmonious thoughts," which are in marked contrast to the anger and resentment she held

toward her relatives. She has accepted “duty and order” rather than rebellion, and she is quiet rather than passionate and outspoken. However, as she herself states, all of this merely gives off the appearance of contentment. When Miss Temple leaves, her influence over Jane fades. “[Miss Temple] had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity,” Jane explains, “now I was left in my natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions” (46). Indeed, despite her ability to conform to her environment, her need for independence and freedom resurface as she gazes outside the window:

I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer;
it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned
it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that
petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: “Then,” I cried,
half desperate, “grant me at least a new servitude!” (47)

Despite the ten years spent at Lowood and the positive influence of Miss Temple, Brontë demonstrates in this passage that Jane’s true self, notably her desire for freedom, cannot forever be contained. Jane’s ability to adapt to her environment does not negate her fierce passion and desire for independence. It is significant that Jane holds on to her aspirations for freedom and autonomy as she makes her way to Thornfield. Additionally, Lowood – though it may calm her character – also provides her with the means to gain the independence she craves. “Such education as Lowood provides,” Bell writes, “makes possible a way of independence through self-support” (np). It is that very education that allows her to secure a position as governess at Thornfield.

Thornfield serves as the ultimate test for Jane’s commitment to her convictions. Her arrival at Thornfield demonstrates how her growth and religious development have become

intertwined with her more longstanding beliefs and principals. Her new home and position challenge her in multiple ways. Firstly, as a nineteenth-century governess, Jane finds herself once again without a specific social rank. Bell writes, “throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and to a degree even in later decades, a governess was likely to be someone who suffered what modern sociologists call ‘status incongruity’ in being neither a member of her employer’s class nor exactly a servant” (np). The elusive nature of Jane’s social rank serves as an obstacle to her romantic feelings and relationship with Rochester, her employer. Again, although Jane believes in equality and rejects the notion that social rank reflects an individual’s inner worth, she is nonetheless cognisant of the realities of the society in which she lives. Therefore, even as her romantic feelings for Rochester develop, she remains aware of the differences in rank between them. She thinks to herself, “He is not of your order: keep to your caste, and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised” (90). It is significant that even as she acknowledges Rochester’s superior rank, she insists on maintaining her own self-respect. Regardless of her lack of social status, Jane insists upon her worth and the importance of her own feelings; she will not waste her “heart, soul, and strength” on someone – even if he is of a higher social rank – who does not appreciate and respect her. Rather than allowing herself to feel intimidated by Rochester’s status, she thinks of her own dignity and well-being.

This sense of self-respect influences Jane in other instances; eventually, her developing sense of self-worth leads her to believe that class differences do not make her unworthy of Rochester and need not separate them. As she watches his encounter with other women, she thinks to herself:

He is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;— I am sure he is—I *feel* [emphasis added] akin to him—I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him. (97)

Here, Jane disregards superficial factors – notably social status – as obstacles to a romantic partnership. Rather, she highlights the importance of a deeper, internal union: she “feels” a connection to and understands Rochester, and, as she puts it, something in her “brain and heart” connects her to him. These feelings are untainted by outside perceptions or expectations. For Jane – as for Brontë – emotional and mental connections, rather than social ranks and roles, form true feelings and relationships. It is for this reason that Jane and Rochester’s relationship initially fails. Rochester, unlike Jane, appears to accord more importance to the external than the internal, and his arrogance leads him to cling to his status. This is demonstrated in his attempt to cover Jane with jewels, and in his repeated references to the different ways in which he is above her. While Rochester (like Darcy) eventually confesses his love to a woman below his social rank this does not lead to an immediate happily ever after for Jane (nor does it for Elizabeth). While Jane first accepts Rochester’s proposal, the truth of his marriage to another woman, Bertha Mason, reveals itself just before they are officially wed. Despite his attempts to convince Jane to stay with him, she – while in love with Rochester – refuses him. The question one might pose is why Brontë reveals the truth of Bertha when she does. Why not reveal her existence sooner, or later? Why at the very moment Jane is to be married? More than a mere sensationalist plot turn, Brontë purposefully puts Jane in this specific position in order to test her: she gives her two choices – one will cost the heroine her heart, the other her principles and independence. Brontë

uses the relationship between Jane and Rochester to highlight Jane's struggle to reconcile love and morality.

While it is ultimately the truth of Bertha's existence that temporarily thwarts Jane and Rochester's relationship, other issues foreshadow their incompatibility. The biggest obstacle to their relationship is the power imbalance between them, which transcends differences in social status. There is, for instance, the obvious power differential caused by gender: as stated above, the Victorian period was a "man-dominated society," and Jane would be at an immediate disadvantage merely because of her sex (Gao 926). There is also a significant age gap between Jane and Rochester, and Rochester himself notes that he is old enough to be her father (74). The biggest – and most obvious – cause of this power imbalance is the fact that Rochester is (at least initially) Jane's employer. As her father left her no money, Jane is without financial security. Therefore, Jane must work in order to provide for herself, and thus she must respect Rochester as her employer or risk losing her source of income. Godfrey stresses the position of power Rochester holds over her:

Jane must bear Rochester's orders of when to stay and when to go and when to speak and when to be silent. He is clearly her "master," and she responds to him with the deference expected by one in his position. "Yes, sir" and "no, sir" become abundant refrains throughout the text, persistently, and perhaps subversively, reminding the reader of the gross inequalities in their economic situations as their attraction grows. (865)

The power differential is evidenced not only in their respective titles, but in Jane's deferential behavior in response to Rochester's orders, as well as in her commitment to addressing him as

“sir” and “master.” At least initially, their respective circumstances – at least with regards to gender, age, wealth, status – places Rochester above Jane.

It is important to note the power dynamic between Jane and Rochester from the beginning as it does not change simply because their relationship becomes romantic. As he proposes to her, he lists her flaws: “You—you strange, you almost unearthly thing!— I love as my own flesh. You—poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are—I entreat to accept me as a husband” (144). The way in which he catalogues her weak points is reminiscent of Darcy’s proposal to Elizabeth; he, too, reminds his alleged wife of her lack of wealth as he asks for her hand in marriage. The difference lies in the fact that Elizabeth – offended by his words toward her and her family – refuses him. Jane, however, whether it is because she is blinded by her love for Rochester or already accepting of the truth of his words, does not let such comments deter her from accepting him. Furthermore, similar to his tendency to infantilize her, throughout his proposal Rochester treats her as a possession or an employee under his command. He declares, “Jane, I summon you as my wife: it is you only I intend to marry” (143). His use of the word ‘summon’ is suggestive of the issue of a command. When Jane doubts his intentions, he continues:

Little [emphasis added] sceptic, you shall be convinced... I entreat to accept me as a husband... You, Jane, I must have you for my own—entirely my own. Will you be mine? Say yes, quickly... accept me quickly. Say, Edward—give me my name—Edward—I will marry you... Come to me—come to me entirely now... Make my happiness—I will make yours. (143-45)

Again, Rochester infantilizes Jane as he calls her 'little'. Furthermore, throughout the passage, he makes demands of her, declaring, "you shall be convinced," "come to me," "say yes," "accept me," and "make my happiness." He even gives her the words with which he expects her to accept him. In addition to these orders, his treatment of her suggests that he deems her his possession, as when he announces, "I must *have you* [emphasis added] for my own," and then asks her, "will you *be mine* [emphasis added]?" The proposal seems largely motivated by a feeling of desperation and a desire to possess. Rochester, moreover, seems to prioritize his own feelings over Jane's. "Make my happiness," he tells her, "I will make yours" (145). The order of these utterances suggests that the latter possibility is conditional on the former: he will make her happiness, but she has to make his first. These problematic factors continue to affect their relationship, following the proposal, as the power discrepancy between them lingers. Jane continues to refer to Rochester as "sir" and "master," even after they become engaged, and Rochester must remind her to call him by his first name when she refers to him as "sir": "Edward," he tells her, "my little wife" (145). It must be noted that even as he permits her to speak to him informally, he calls her *his* "little" wife, subtly infantilizing her, declaring her as his possession, and re-establishing a hierarchy. They are united in marriage, but a power gap lingers.

While Jane and Rochester's engagement undercuts the power dynamic inevitably engendered between employer and employee, the matter of sex and age perpetuates a hierarchical imbalance. Rochester himself notes that their age difference works in his favor. "I don't wish to treat you like an inferior," he tells Jane, "I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience" (75). The potential problem of their age gap is stressed during a conversation between Jane and Mrs. Fairfax, as they discuss the possibility of Rochester's engagement to Blanche Ingram. "But you

see,” Mrs. Fairfax tells Jane, “there is a considerable difference in age: Mr. Rochester is nearly forty; she [Blanche Ingram] is but twenty-five” (89). Mrs. Fairfax goes on to explain that she sees this as a problem. Esther Godfrey writes of this passage:

Though she avoids articulating her rationale, Mrs. Fairfax is quick to recognize the dangerous potential of a marriage between partners of such different ages, even among members of the same class. She reassures herself, perhaps blindly, that her master would not think of such a union that could threaten normative power relations between husband and wife. (862)

The age gap between Jane and Rochester is even wider. Furthermore, Blanche Ingram, unlike Jane, is of the same social class as Rochester. As such, the power imbalance between Jane and Rochester is socially unacceptable, perhaps even insurmountable, and therefore a potential threat to the normative power relations between a married couple. Godfrey explains that “Rochester's twenty years' difference" further polarizes the already-noteworthy Victorian double standard of access to power and knowledge regarding sex between men and women” (864). While getting engaged – and eventually married – may bridge the class gap to some extent, the difference in age between them is, of course, static, thus creating an obvious obstacle in Jane’s quest for equality and self-fulfillment.

As suggested above, another factor that poses a threat to the equality of Jane and Rochester’s relationship is the difference in their sexes. As Brontë’s novel suggests, the patriarchal system in place during the Victorian period perpetuated women’s oppression. Rochester – as a result of his status as a man – benefits from this system, and Jane’s constant resistance to societal norms creates some friction in their relationship. In other words, while

Rochester revels in the various power gaps between them, these gaps threaten Jane's autonomy, and Jane's resistance in turn threatens Rochester's position of dominance over her. As Bell writes, "with Rochester as with everyone an urge to independence of mind possesses [Jane] to a degree that would be a handicap to the conventional Victorian marriage. Such independence is a threat to the literary tradition of masculine heroism" (np). Bell's position on masculinity circles back to the notions of 'ideal' and 'flawed' masculinity, as they are elaborated in the previous chapter. Jane's independent and passionate nature would be considered a threat to a man like Rochester, who (at least initially) falls within the category of 'flawed' or traditional masculinity. This is demonstrated, for instance, in the numerous ways he attempts to manipulate Jane emotionally, as when he falsely leads her to believe he intends to wed Blanche Ingram, or as he uses deceit to acquire information as to the state of her heart and disguises himself as a fortune teller in order to question her about her feelings toward him. Rather than allowing himself to be vulnerable, confessing his feelings for Jane, and risking rejection, Rochester uses manipulation tactics to gauge Jane's feelings before confessing his own. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy, unlike Rochester, does not resort to this kind of manipulation toward Elizabeth and in this way fits with more certainty into the category of 'ideal' man.

Even after Jane and Rochester's engagement, there are consequences to Rochester's occupation of the role of the traditional man. Rochester's desire to provide and rescue Jane, for instance, seems to benefit him rather than his fiancé, and Jane sees this. He longs to buy Jane clothes and jewelry, but she objects to this. "Oh, sir!—never rain jewels," she tells him, "I don't like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them" (147). She directly states not only that she does not want them, but that it would be unnatural to have them, for such riches do not fit her character. Rochester, however, dismisses

her words, responding, “I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead,—which it will become: for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists” (147). As Rochester describes the jewels in which he plans to adorn her, he draws on the language of confinement. He speaks of placing a diamond “chain” around her neck, and of clasping bracelets on her wrists, as if he is chaining or cuffing her to him – even imprisoning her – as opposed to offering her gifts. To a character such as Jane, who has always desired independence and freedom, this is especially alarming. She tells him:

And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket—a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr. Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady's robe; and I don't call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly: far too dearly to flatter you. (147)

Jane repeats that such jewels and clothes do not fit her character, and that he would effectively be changing her in forcing such gifts upon her. Incidentally, in this passage, Brontë highlights the importance of inner worth over appearances as Jane reminds Rochester that she does not find him physically attractive, and yet loves him anyway; she expects the same from him, she implies. Beyond matters of gender, the passage also reminds readers of the differences in class between the eventual spouses. Rochester is here acting on his responsibilities as a future husband – and as a man – to provide for his wife, but it is *what* he seeks to provide that is most telling. He seeks to decorate her with riches and jewels of the sorts usually worn by women of high status. This is particularly evident when he offers her the circlet, claiming that nature has stamped Jane's brow

with the patent of nobility. Jane's refusal to accept these gifts is an assertion not only of her independence, but of her resistance to performing a role she clearly does not believe in. Her priority is, above all, to be herself rather than pretend to be member of a higher class; that holds no true value for her. This position, again, will prove to be a source of friction, as Rochester clearly feels a deep pride in his status. Despite her resistance, Jane notes that Rochester seems unmoved by her words, stating, "He pursued his theme, however, without noticing my deprecation" (147). The ease with which he dismisses her displays a certain lack of respect for his future wife and reminds readers of his tendency to infantilize her.

Rochester's behavior should be distinguished from that of Austen's Darcy, who actively listens and changes as a result of Elizabeth's words, even after she rejects him. Rochester, by contrast, often treats Jane like a doll, and perhaps sees himself as rescuing her by providing her with finery. Had he listened to Jane and taken her words seriously, he would have known Jane did not want to be rescued. Many factors, then, alert readers to the possibility that Rochester and Jane's relationship does not begin on stable ground. Jane, however, appears to forgive Rochester his flaws, as when she thinks to herself, "But I believed that his moodiness, his harshness, and his former faults of morality...had their source in some cruel cross of fate. I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles" (82). Perhaps it is her love for him that prompts her to give him the benefit of the doubt, or perhaps she is at least partially correct in her assessment of him as a suitable partner. Yet, they reach a point where Jane can no longer excuse his behavior.

While Brontë displays how the inequality in Jane and Rochester's relationship could serve as a problem, it is ultimately the threat to Jane's morality (and to larger social moral codes) that causes her to reject Rochester. Their wedding is interrupted when proof that Rochester is

already married is announced. Devasted by the news, Jane no longer sees a future with Rochester, despite his attempts to persuade her otherwise. His pleas range from earnest appeals to gain her sympathy, to threats of aggression. “Jane! Will you hear reason?” he asks her, “because, if you won’t, I’ll try violence” (172). Such intimidation tactics are clearly means to assert his dominance. Furthermore, as he states that he does not care for his niece nor for his wife, and that his only concern is to be with Jane, he betrays his flawed masculine nature. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues (as explored in Chapter 1), that true manliness does not coincide with traditional traits of masculinity. The true hero, Rousseau insists, does not act selfishly but acts for the benefit of others. Rochester is in some ways the antithesis of this true hero as he displays traits of traditional masculinity – such as dominance, aggression, and selfishness – in order to try and gain what he wants, with little concern for others. Through her portrayal of the initial failure of Jane and Rochester’s union, Brontë shows how such traits can be an obstacle not merely to a successful relationship, but to a woman’s autonomy – especially when it concerns a woman as independent and passionate as Jane Eyre.

The revelation of Bertha’s existence serves as a turning point not only in Jane and Rochester’s relationship, but also in Jane’s self-actualization. It causes her to rethink her attachment to Rochester and a potential life with him, and to re-evaluate her own self-worth and principles as they relate to the situation. As Rochester begs her to stay with him, Jane briefly considers giving in to her love for him. “My very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him,” Jane thinks to herself, “soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for you? or who will be injured by what you do?” (180). Again, the occupation of stereotypical gender roles proves to be a problem in their relationship. While Rochester’s desire to provide for her as a conventional

man and husband creates tension when he attempts to give her jewels she does not want, Jane nearly traps herself in traditional feminine roles – that is being a caretaker and nurturing others – even at her own expense. She initially stresses her concern for him: she thinks of saving him, of reassuring him of her love, and of agreeing to be his. As she concerns herself with his needs, she disregards her own, asking herself, “who in the world cares for you?” (180). Most significant, however, is the moment in which she considers the consequences of her actions, wondering, “who will be injured by what you do?” (180). In other words, she briefly wonders if staying with him could be wrong if nobody is hurt by her decision. Are one’s actions deemed good or bad based solely on whether they cause harm? This is the logic Jane momentarily clings to as she considers forgetting all else in order to be with the man she loves. However, she soon realizes that she cannot follow through with such actions:

Still indomitable was the reply—“I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?”

(180)

Jane thus abandons her concern for saving Rochester. Instead, she turns her attention inward. Her worth is not calculated by whether anyone cares for her, but rather by whether she cares for and

respects herself. Jane acknowledges this attention to her own self-worth as of crucial importance. Brontë thus returns to her recurring emphasis on the importance of her heroine's respect for her own inner life and her cultivation of independence – attributes she developed as a child. Similarly, Jane turns to her relationship to God, as she did at Lowood. She acknowledges that she still values religious beliefs, those which she came to cherish when she was not swayed by passionate love. To abandon such beliefs in the face of temptation is almost unthinkable. “It is the moral law of God after all that constrains Jane from becoming Rochester's mistress,” argues Griesinger, “and it is Rochester's violation of that law that causes him to lose Jane, and later on...to lose his hand and eye” (53).

Brontë sets the scene in such a way that readers are made to understand the strength of Jane's convictions. In choosing her principles over love, Jane runs away and loses not only Rochester, but also the security she felt under him – first as his employee, then as his fiancé. Bell writes, “That abject poverty is a conceivable danger for Jane [as] shown in those astonishing pages...during which, in flight from Thornfield, she wanders in the countryside for three days, starving, unable to find work or charity” (np). Jane, who once feared poverty and did not wish to go live with her poor relatives, now chooses poverty over sacrificing her principles to security and love. While initially burdened with many hardships, her encounter with the members of the Rivers family – whom Jane later discovers are her relatives – sets her on a new path. She meets the man from whom she will receive her second proposal: St. John Rivers. While Rochester is a man of passion and of questionable morals, St. John is a man who believes in Christian obligation and in doing good, to the point that he suppresses his feelings for the woman he actually loves and proposes to Jane out of duty. His principles are much closer to Jane's than Rochester's were, and yet, she refuses him. As Gao notes, “[Jane] does not want an affectionless

love. [As] decent and handsome [a] man as John is, Jane Eyre cannot accept him because his love would be ‘one of duty, not of passion’” (930). Therefore, for Jane, love is a crucial element in marriage – but it must be complemented by righteousness and morality.

Rochester’s final proposal to Jane demonstrates clearly how the tables have turned. Her newfound wealth and his new position as a crippled, maimed, and blinded man, certainly shifts the balance of power between them. While his first proposal was laced with desperation and possessiveness, Rochester now speaks to her as though they are on more equal ground. He says to her, “I will abide by your decision...Jane, will you marry me?” (254). Unlike his behavior during the first proposal scene, he no longer issues commands, but rather respectfully and clearly offers her a choice. Furthermore, while during his first proposal he listed her flaws, in this instance he lists his own. When she accepts his proposal, he tests her by reminding her of his condition: “A poor blind man, whom you will have to lead about by the hand?...A crippled man, twenty years older than you, whom you will have to wait on?” (254). He realizes that, now, he is the one in the disadvantaged position. He is, of course, overjoyed when this does not deter her from accepting him. Significantly, their conversation continues to demonstrate how, despite their newfound equality in status, gender conventions continue to determine their interactions and behaviors. Jane delights that she will now be able to take care of him, stating, “I love you better, now when I can be really be useful to you” (245). She thus returns to the traditionally feminine role of being the nurturing caretaker. Nonetheless, she highlights the traditional masculine – or ‘flawed’ – traits that Rochester previously possessed, that were a threat to their relationship, and that have now largely evaporated. “I love you better now,” she tells him, “than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector” (254). She refers here to the typical traits of masculinity: his pride, as well as his desire to be the

provider and protector. These are the traits typically associated with heroism that Rousseau rejects. It is, also, the traits that Jane confesses she least appreciated. Brontë must have also seen this ‘flawed’ type of masculinity as a threat to a woman’s independence as she has Jane directly state she is happier now that Rochester is without them.

Brontë’s use of proposals in *Jane Eyre* allows her not only to put forth what she deems the ideal circumstances for marriage, but also to stress the importance of a woman’s self-actualization and independence. While Jane initially accepts Rochester, and loves him to the point that she overlooks his flaws, the truth of his marriage to Bertha leads her to reject his second proposal when he attempts to win her back. Having shown the many hardships Jane suffers and the principles she gains from such suffering, Brontë makes clear what is at stake as Jane struggles to choose between her love and her principles. To accept Rochester’s first proposal would have meant sacrificing her morals and convictions; yet, in refusing him, she risks losing the man she loves and condemning herself to a life of poverty. Jane’s decision to walk away from the love of her life – and the security he provides – demonstrates the strength of her convictions. She refuses to enter into an ethically compromised marriage or to go “against the law given by God” (*Jane Eyre* 180). Through Jane’s choice, certainly, Brontë emphasizes the supreme importance of morality, and it is thus only after Bertha’s death that Jane can finally accept Rochester’s proposal. “Jane finds true freedom and equality in a marriage sanctioned by the same teachings that prompted her earlier to leave Rochester,” writes Griesinger. “These are Christian teachings,” she continues, “and the only reason she can marry Rochester and hold [her]self supremely blest with him at Ferndean is that Bertha is dead and God has seemingly drawn them together” (53). However, morality is not the only thing at stake. From the beginning of their relationship, Brontë subtly demonstrates the different ways in which Rochester holds

power over Jane, suggesting that such an imbalance of power between a couple might lead to a problematic and troubled marriage. Before Jane can accept Rochester, such imbalances must be rectified. “It is not surprising that when [Jane] does marry [Rochester], he is literally a cripple, reduced in manly strength, maimed and blind, forced to lean on her, to accept her guiding hand,” Bell writes, “Brontë herself could not conceive of male heroism surviving in its full splendor at the side of such a mate” (np). Indeed, even with Bertha’s death, had Rochester clung to his ‘flawed’ notion of masculinity, his relationship with Jane could not have succeeded. With a renewed and strengthened sense of self, and possessed with her newfound wealth, Jane would not have allowed him to treat her as he previously had. Brontë’s depiction of her heroine’s responses to marriage proposals demonstrates how ‘flawed’ or traditional masculinity can serve as a threat to a healthy relationship. Rochester’s eschewal of such a role is crucial to their success of his marriage to Jane, and it is imperative that Rochester submit, as Bell remarks, “to that necessary chastisement that has purged him of class and gender arrogance” (np). Jane marries a version of Rochester who is no longer in a position of dominance over her, and she accepts him only once they are on equal ground. She has gained a substantial inheritance, which means she is economically secure and need not rely on him financially. Moreover, Rochester – in his diminished state following the fire – will now be the one who will have to rely on her. Of course, one of Brontë’s most significant themes is the importance of female independence and personhood. She does not allow her heroine to enter a marriage based on inequality that would require her to sacrifice her principles, nor does she have her enter a loveless marriage out of a sense of duty. Brontë’s primary goal does not appear to be to attach her heroine to a husband, and marriage is, indeed, not what will save Jane Eyre. Rather, she yearns and needs to become a fully independent woman. Marriage is a secondary concern for Brontë’s heroine. While Austen

focuses on the simultaneous development of Elizabeth *and* Darcy protagonists, Brontë effectively abandons her depiction of Rochester once Jane leaves him. Her story is not that of Jane and Rochester – it is the story of Jane Eyre. Austen conveys with certainty the importance of valuing love above economic matters, and Brontë’s message, though very different, is equally clear and certain: morality must always prevail over passion.

Conclusion

Pride and Prejudice and *Jane Eyre* both explore marriage in the nineteenth century, especially as it affected women under a patriarchal system. Furthermore, they consider how traditional gender roles and stereotypes could lead not only to problematic relationships, but also to problems of identity and the self. Through their strong protagonists and their – at least at times – problematic male characters, both novels demonstrate, as I have argued, how female independence and traditional forms of masculinity cannot coexist together in a healthy relationship. Moreover, through their delineations of multiple marriage proposals, both authors demonstrate what they deem the appropriate and necessary terms for a woman to enter marriage. They make one thing eminently clear – that even in a period where a woman’s financial and personal security depended on marrying well, love and compatibility should overpower economic matters. Indeed, Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre each initially refuse marriage proposals simply because she does not love and adequately respect the man proposing. However, even though they prioritize love and compatibility, these authors were acutely aware of the economic dangers unmarried women faced, which is why both protagonists eventually agree to marry men who they love, *and* who are financially secure enough to provide for them. In regard to the ideal marriage, then, Austen and Brontë may prioritize love, but they acknowledge the importance of economic matters as well. Furthermore, both authors demonstrate that an ideal marriage requires the preservation of a woman’s independence, as well as respect and equality between spouses.

However, for all their similarities, Austen and Brontë reach slightly different conclusions regarding these matters. While both authors unequivocally dismiss versions of ‘flawed’

masculinity, each approaches this notion differently. Austen places special emphasis on the matter of respect and equality between spouses, and she does so by depicting Darcy's growth throughout the novel. Darcy begins as a proud and arrogant man who looks down upon those of a lower social class. Elizabeth's rejection and criticism of him prompts him to recognize his flaws and change his character. While Elizabeth's rejection is the catalyst for his growth, Darcy changes voluntarily and actively. In renouncing his pride and arrogance, he abandons the flawed and traditional traits of masculinity he once possessed. This is not the case with Rochester. Following his first proposal, Rochester appears to place little importance in Jane's words, such as when he ignores her repeated requests that he desists in buying her jewelry. While Darcy's evolution is voluntary, Rochester's is forced upon him. The fire at Thornfield – which leaves him blind and crippled – forces him to relinquish his pride and arrogance, and one wonders whether he would have reached that change left to his own devices. While Austen may place more emphasis on respect, equality, and the importance of an 'ideal' masculinity, Brontë stresses female independence. Indeed, *Jane Eyre* largely follows Jane's pursuit for independence; Jane achieves economic independence *before* she finally agrees to marry Rochester – unlike Elizabeth, whose marriage secures her financial stability. Despite its seemingly progressive elements, some feminist scholars have taken issue with the conclusion of Brontë's novel. According to them, the novel traces Jane's long journey toward independence and yet ends with her marriage to Rochester and the implication that she will take care of him to his or her death. Griesinger writes:

Jane's happy marriage seems to contradict or at least call into question her commitment to feminism. In her manifesto on the rooftop at Thornfield, Jane argues passionately that millions of

women are in "silent revolt" against the restraints and confinement of domesticity, in other words, "making puddings" and "mending socks:' Are we now to suppose Jane herself content with this role in her marriage to Rochester? (54)

Indeed, there are many ways to read Jane's end. Certainly, it may not seem very feminist for Jane to return to the very man who lied, often manipulated her, consistently tried exerting control over her, and took advantage of the power imbalance between them. Furthermore, in returning to Rochester, Jane resigns herself as his caretaker and as a woman bound to a life of domesticity. One might argue, however, that the crucial element of Jane's choice lies in the fact that it *is* a choice, for Jane makes this decision voluntarily and without any outside pressure. Also, the previous power gap between Jane and Rochester has diminished greatly, and, as Griesinger, notes, "[Jane] has an independent fortune after all which gives her other options" (54).

There are several purposes for the use of multiple proposals in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*. This device allows the authors to argue that marriage based on love and compatibility is important, and that marriage is not merely meant to secure a woman's financial future or social status. It also allows each author to delineate a trajectory from the first, rejected proposal, to the last, accepted one in order to demonstrate which particular factors each author considers necessary to create the ideal marriage and the ideal man. Lastly, it also allows female heroines to come to some form of self-realization and to achieve independence so they can enter marriage on equal ground. While each author does so differently, Austen and Brontë display that love, equality, and female independence are the necessary terms for a successful and happy marriage.

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