QUIET RESISTANCE IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL: AN EXAMINATION OF JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE*

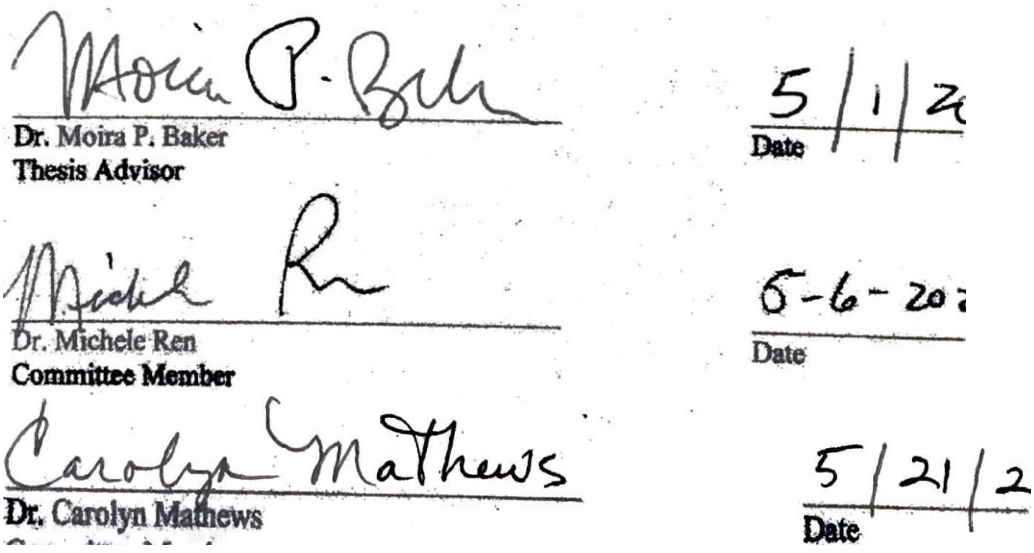
by

Elisabeth Murphy

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of English

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Moira P. Baker

May 2020



Committee Member

ABSTRACT

In both Jane Austen's and Charlotte Brontë's novels, women are faced with the choice of resisting or complying with the dominant ideology of the nineteenth century. Austen chooses to focus on the conduct books used to shape women's behavior and how they affect a woman's education, marriage, and social class. Brontë, in turn, critiques the social apparatuses of the patriarchal family, education, and religion. Each author chooses to question different aspects of the patriarchal society in which they live, and by looking at each novel side-by-side, a quiet resistance can be seen. This thesis aims to demonstrate how each author showcases quiet acts of resistance in the nineteenth century. In Austen's novel, this comes in the form of a quality education, allowing for equality between men and women. In Brontë's novel, this comes in the form of rejecting ideological state apparatuses and finding alternatives, as seen through the character Jane.

Elisabeth Murphy
Department of English, 2020
Radford University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Moira Baker for being my thesis advisor. Her time and dedication have been vital to the success of this project. She has spent countless hours working with me through each step of the process, and it is because of her that I am able to complete this thesis. She has been with me from the beginning of graduate school, and has worked with me on this project since that first semester. Once again, thank you for the numerous meetings, emails, and discussions concerning women's literature, revisions, and brainstorming; they have allowed me to create a project that I am truly proud of. Those conversations have molded me into the scholar I am today.

I would like to thank Dr. Michele Ren and Dr. Carolyn Mathews for agreeing to be a part of my thesis committee. Their support and feedback have been incredibly encouraging and have helped me throughout this project.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents. Without their faith and support, I would never have made it this far.

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INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen, an early nineteenth-century writer, tackled modern day feminist issues with subtlety and tact. In her seemingly conventional novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, she cleverly showcases how a woman's education, and thus her station in life, affects all aspects of her place in society. On the surface, the novel appears to be a novel of manners, in which is embedded a simple love story with a happy ending. However, as one takes a closer look, one can see the delicate nuances of rebellion and feminist thought aligning with the protest writing of the more radical Mary Wollstonecraft, attacking the social institutions of class, education, and marriage through satiric wit and irony. Charlotte Brontë, a mid-nineteenth-century author, was much less subtle in her approach to criticizing the ideologies of Victorian England that constrained women's lives, especially practices concerning marriage, religion, and education. While each author's approach to tackling through storytelling issues women faced differs, they both appear to desire women to have an equal place in society next to men. In their novels, each writer questions and problematizes different aspects of education, marriage, and social class to reach this principal goal.

In my chapter on *Pride and Prejudice*, I explore how a woman's education of the time affects all facets of her life and how a more fully humanizing education, where the woman is allowed the freedom to explore and is not dragged down by the conduct literature and etiquette teachings of Regency England, elevates her to a greater equality with men. Each of the female characters of the novel represents a different form of the educational ideology of the day, and Austen uses them as a way to showcase how each form of education affects women's lives, showcasing Lydia and Elizabeth Bennet as each of the extremes, allowing readers to see how education can affect a woman's social class and marriage. While creating a seemingly

conventional novel, Austen cleverly disguises feminist thought and ideals, aligning with pioneers such as Mary Wollstonecraft. Her "quiet rebellion," as scholar Barbara Horwitz calls it (135), differs from the brash and outright criticisms of Brontë.

It is the differing nature of the two authors that creates the greatest distinction between the two chapters. As Virginia Woolf describes them, Austen wrote "without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching" (73), while Brontë wrote with "indignation," "rage," and about herself when she should—in Woolf's view—have been writing about her characters (75). Austen uses irony and wit in order to question and problematize patriarchal gender ideology, the traditional aristocracy, and a class system that barred women from property inheritance. With characters like the bumbling Mr. Collins, the cousin who will eventually inherit the Bennets' property since there is no male heir, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, his condescending patroness, Austen showcases the flaws in the class system. With the plot centering on marriage and the subsequent mayhem that follows—especially with characters like Mr. Wickham, who tries to use marriage as a way of improving his status; and Lydia Bennet, a foolish girl who is a product of her education in superficial arts and "attainments"—Austen weaves a tale that has readers thinking and laughing, not realizing, possibly, how she is implementing her own agenda: men and women are equal and should be treated as such. This is primarily seen through Elizabeth Bennet's and Mr. Darcy's relationship and the examples Austen makes out of the caricatures of the other characters.

Brontë, on the other hand, is much more direct in her approach. In my second chapter, I focus on Brontë's overt criticisms in her novel, *Jane Eyre*. Unlike the first chapter, this one will focus on the character of Jane, analyzing the social apparatuses of the patriarchal family, education, and organized religion, pulling from Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State

Apparatuses, as well as Jane's resistance to interpellation, using Raymond Williams's concept of "creative practice" as a way out of the dead end resistance that Althusser's theory creates. Brontë's criticism of Victorian England can be seen by looking at Jane's education, her damaging interactions with the patriarchal household, and her rejection of organized religion.

Brontë uses Jane's time as a governess, as well as her two love interests of Rochester and St. John, to show a woman's unequal footing in Victorian society, especially for someone of lower class means. Jane is only able to marry Rochester, her original employer, at the end of the novel after he has become partially blind and an amputee. It is only after the fire that kills his first wife and leaves him permanently injured that he and Jane are on an equal footing. It is certainly a different take on the necessary humbling of a man before he is a fit partner than the one we see in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth refuses Darcy's proposal. Austen simply bruises Mr. Darcy's pride before allowing him and Elizabeth to get together. Brontë nearly kills Rochester, which is certainly a much more dramatic way to teach and humble someone into recognizing that domination is not partnership.

CHAPTER 1

CRITIQUING THE INSTITUTIONS OF EDUCATION, MARRIAGE, AND SOCIAL CLASS IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters" (Austen 1). Jane Austen was a woman ahead of her time. With subtlety and tact, along with a witty sense of humor, Austen takes on the social issues of her time. In the first two lines alone, she subverts the gender roles of man and woman by having the man becoming the "rightful property" of the woman (Austen 1). During the Regency era, women were seen as little more than the property of their husbands, brothers, and fathers. This can be seen in the conduct literature designed to restrict and control women's behavior, as well as in the laws that prevented them from inheriting property, the root of the issues of the fictional Bennet family in Austen's novel. While some may view Austen's emphasis of marriage in her novels as a way of empowering her protagonists in a time when marriage was one of the only ways women could make their way in the world, in *Pride and Prejudice,* marriage must be a mutual engagement between equals. A marriage between equals gives power and agency to Elizabeth Bennet as she chooses Darcy as a partner, having established her capacity to refuse him as an equal. Throughout the novel, Austen uses her focal characters to demonstrate the different modes of education and in some cases, indoctrination, that women received and how it affected their lives, from their marriages to their social status and standing in society. Characters like Lydia Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, and Mary Bennet represent the extreme cases of the folly of a woman's education

and the disastrous results; Miss Bingley exemplifies the wealthy socialite who follows the societal rules which excuse her catty behavior; Miss Lucas represents the young woman fearing spinsterhood—who forsakes her integrity for the sake of security; Jane Bennet represents the sweet and naïve young woman who follows the etiquette teachings and nearly loses out on marriage; Elizabeth Bennet represents the young woman allowed the freedom to think and learn, and as a result, she makes the most profitable marriage, both in terms of monetary value and in partnership. Austen suggests that men and women should be treated equally, and it is only when the social institutions of education, marriage, and the class system are built on a foundation of partnership, rather than patriarchal dominance, that women can successfully reach full personhood.

Education

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, women's behaviors were steered, guided, and shaped by conduct literature. Hester Chapone, Dr. John Gregory, and Lady Sarah Pennington were leaders in the promotion of conduct literature for women, publishing books or pamphlets aimed at the proper education of women. Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) was a popular guidebook on how women should act and be educated. Dr. John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughter* (1761) was a popular conduct book that focuses on the proper behaviors women should exalt. Lady Sarah Pennington's *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters in a Letter to Miss Pennington* (1789) was another popular advice book for the conduct of women. These writers endorsed Regency England's ideology on how women should act, which consisted of being quiet, polite, and exuding good manners and perfection in the superficial social or artistic attainments that Mary Wollstonecraft criticizes. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

addresses the unequal treatment of women and advocates for equality.[1] While Austen does not endorse in *Pride and Prejudice* the treatment and education of women advocated in the conduct literature that Wollstonecraft rejects, she includes characters that meet societal standards as articulated in these discourses, not so her novel is culturally acceptable, but rather to challenge the ideologies that are holding women back from attaining their true potential.

Austen's female characters represent the various kinds of education—or miseducation—that women in the Regency era received. She suggests an empowerment for women when they are able to freely read and learn outside the formal educational structures that so often thwarted women's intellectual and emotional growth. In contrast to the ideal education for women, she represents the outcome of the miseducation so many women received that set them up for a life of frivolity. Austen suggests that having the freedom to read and explore the written word can be more valuable than a formal education, especially in a time when the formal education was shaped by the norms for female conduct and revolved around being socially accomplished rather than intellectually powerful.[2]

Jane Bennet is one such character that has been shaped by the norms of being socially accomplished. While some critics view Jane as unoriginal, she is a perfect representation of the proper young woman.[3] Because she fits into the mold of the eighteenth-century young lady, many are willing to write her off. However, they are doing her a great disservice. She embodies the female virtues so ingrained in a woman's education by leaders like Chapone: piety, benevolence, meekness, humility, integrity, and purity (84). In all of her actions, she is gracious and kind; she is above reproach. And virtuous though she may be, she is tightly constrained by the discourse of female conduct of the Regency Era. In her portrait of Jane Bennet, Austen subtly

critiques the damaging effects of the discourse of female conduct as seen in writers like Chapone.

As the eldest of five girls, it is important for her to be a model of good behavior, not only for her younger sisters, but also for her family's reputation. At the first ball in the novel, "Mrs. Bennet had seen her eldest daughter much admired by the Netherfield party. Mr. Bingley had danced with her twice, and she had been distinguished by his sisters. Jane was as much gratified by this, as her mother could be, though in a quieter way" (Austen 7). Jane's virtues have allowed her to be recognized in society. She is pursued by Mr. Bingley, "a young man of large fortune" (Austen 1).[4] Although her sweet disposition and good manners entice Mr. Bingley, they are also the reason for Jane's heartbreak. Jane's education has taught her to be silent and to be reserved,[5] especially in the company of men, which Gregory advocates in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (25). He encourages women to be silent, claiming that "men will complain about your reserve. They will assure you that a franker behavior would make you more amiable. But, trust me, they are not sincere when they tell you so" (Gregory 25). However, it is this very reserve and inaction that cause her to nearly lose Mr. Bingley. In a letter to Elizabeth Bennet, Mr. Darcy reveals that he had encouraged Mr. Bingley to move away from Netherfield and to stop pursuing Jane, thinking Mr. Bingley has greater feelings for her than she for him since, following Dr. Gregory's counsel, she has not been open about her feelings for Bingley (Austen 134-135).

The miseducation that Jane has received, along with a shy personality, puts her at a disadvantage. While she does end up with Mr. Bingley at the end, Jane spends most of the book morose and out of the picture. By the end of the novel, she experiences personal growth and she is not so quick to trust others: "It must have been his sisters' doing. They were certainly no friends to his acquaintance of me" (Austen 234). Jane now understands that not everyone is as

kind as she or as honest, especially people like Miss Bingley. She is no longer the naïve young woman who fits into society's patriarchal ideology, but a woman full of wisdom. Even with this newfound education, she still keeps her innate views on life. Even though she is not as trusting as she once was, she is still optimistic. She sees beyond what is going on around her, and, as Morgan suggests, her "optimism has to do with her faith that there is much in life that is beyond what she knows and that certainty as to the minds and hearts of others is rare indeed" (65). Only because of her goodness, as well as the eccentric characters like her sister Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, she gets her "happily ever after." But far more significant than the attainment of marriage, Austen allows Jane to experience real emotional growth, something not necessarily afforded by women by their education in the superficial arts and attainments suggested in writings of Lady Pennington and Hester Chapone, who discouraged women from exploring ideas and learning anything beyond etiquette and morality.

Austen uses Jane's experience as an example of how a woman's education can put her at a disadvantage. Not only does Jane get her heart broken, but she foolishly trusts the wrong people. She views Miss Bingley as a friend until she no longer hears from her. Miss Bingley, although "the most accomplished girl in the neighborhood," is one of the negative characters of the novel (Austen 7). She is a "parasite," as Mooneyham suggests, because "in her desire to win Darcy, she tries to incorporate herself into all of his activities," such as reading the same kinds of books as he (54). Miss Bingley's behavior is abhorrent; she is blatantly rude to Elizabeth (Austen 24, 81) and catty in her interactions with Jane (Austen 91); yet, she is acting within societal norms for women—norms that encouraged competition and cattiness. Hester Chapone, for example, in her *Letters for the Improvement of the Mind*, encourages young ladies to laugh at others, of course not while they are in the room; this was to encourage moral superiority, for the

women being ridiculed, so Chapone reasons, have not improved their minds and instead are fools, much like the behavior exhibited by Mrs. Bennet and her two youngest daughters (87).[6] Miss Bingley does everything that Chapone expects women to do. Her behavior, even her cruelty towards the Bennets, falls directly in line with this patriarchal concept of female conduct that pits one woman against another.

Miss Bingley represents the wealthy woman who wants to get her claws into a wealthy bachelor; she is willing to do anything to secure her place in society. Her shallowness is simply a product of her education. By including Miss Bingley, and positing her as one of the villains, Austen is suggesting, just as Wollstonecraft did, that the current system of education is not effective. In the current system of education, women learned from their mothers, and as Wollstonecraft observed, a certain cunning, mildness of temper, and a façade of obedience "will obtain for them the protection of man" (27). These shallow socialites like Miss Bingley have nothing of substance and can only function when they are tearing others down. While they can dance, sing, and speak another language, they have nothing to offer society, other than to be a pretty centerpiece or eye candy on their husband's arm. With characters like Jane and Elizabeth, the antithesis of Miss Bingley, Austen shows women of substance and character and what women can offer a culture when they are allowed to learn and grow beyond the limits that the discourse of female conduct recommends.

Miss Charlotte Lucas presents another example of a woman brought up in this rigid system of etiquette training. Charlotte is older than Elizabeth, and at 27, worries that she is still single at her age (Austen 13). She is more concerned with not being a burden to her parents than her own happiness, and as such, she agrees to marry the horrid Mr. Collins, ultimately compromising her integrity and sacrificing her freedom and happiness (Austen 84-85). As

scholar Mary Poovey laments, "[s]uch institutions undoubtedly placed pressure on young girls to acquiesce in their parents' demands, perhaps even to stimulate affection for a man who could enhance the family's status…[T]he complaisance of male suitors, who took their success for granted, is a commonplace of eighteenth-century novels, as is the sad state of uncourted daughters" (13). Charlotte is another casualty to the indoctrination that marriage provides security and that unmarried daughters were a burden to their families. Perhaps receiving an intellectually rewarding education could have given Charlotte other options instead of marriage to a bumbling idiot. As it is, she is subordinated to this vapid, hypocritical social climber for life.

Lydia Bennet, on the other hand, represents a very different kind of woman in Regency society. Lydia is silly, shallow, and throws away her reputation by following the militia without a second glance. While she has "a sense of youthful playfulness, and the courage to defy authority," these, as Auerbach suggests, "are not enough unless governed by an educated mind, a loving, generous heart, and a moral conscience" (137). Austen explores Lydia as an example of what happens when women do not receive a rigorous education. As Auerbach claims, Lydia Bennet is shallow, "idle," "narrow-minded," and "frivolous" because of maternal indulgence, paternal neglect, and societal devaluation (139). The reader's introduction to Lydia comes through her father, Mr. Bennet. He writes off all of his daughters, except for his "little Lizzy:" "'They have none of them much to recommend them,' replied he; 'they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of a quickness than her sisters'" (Austen 2). Though Mr. Bennet's patriarchal smugness and misogynistic attitude towards his daughters here suggest he is in part responsible for any silliness in his children, nevertheless a recklessness marks Lydia's character throughout the novel. Much like the other coquettish girls,[7] Lydia is, as Hultquist asserts, the "most silly," and she continues that Lydia is: "vain, light or airy;

technically virtuous, but careless about her reputation; …fickle; and has capacious desire, that is, she will not choose" (122).[8] Lydia acts like this because she follows the example of her mother, who was subjugated to the same miseducation that stunts the growth of other female characters in the novel. Mrs. Bennet, in fact, encourages this frivolity in Lydia as a way to attract a husband.

Even though all five Bennet sisters are taught by their mother, it is the two youngest daughters, Lydia and Kitty, that suffer the consequences the most (Austen 112-113). These sisters suffer with a "passably noticeable" mother, meaning she has no accomplishments to speak of, and while she wants more for her daughters, Mrs. Bennet herself is silly and careless with her reputation, often acting foolishly outside of the boundaries of propriety.[9] Feminists engaged in the discourse of the time, saw that this development based on the teachings of Rousseau and Dr. Gregory, as Wollstonecraft claimed, "contributed to render women more artificial, weaker characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society" (30). Without room for emotional growth and the exploration of knowledge, wives were infantilized and often acted no better than an "overgrown child," as Wollstonecraft asserted (38). Mrs. Bennet acts this way, so her daughters act this way. As more than just a poor example, Mrs. Bennet encourages her daughters to act in such infantilized and irresponsible ways, but as Wollstonecraft asserts, this silliness is a direct product of the kind of education afforded women. And Mr. Bennet abdicates any responsibility for the ethical or intellectual education of his daughters, finding great amusement in his wife's behaviors.

Most alarming is Mrs. Bennet's encouragement in allowing Lydia to go on a trip to visit the militia regiment at their encampment after they have left town (Austen 160-161). At 16, Lydia has no business going on this trip; Elizabeth knows it, and so does her father. Austen is

showing how different a woman's perspective can be when she is treated as an equal. Elizabeth is smart, self-educated, intelligent, and sensible. Lydia is silly, vapid, shallow, irresponsible, and has no sense. She has her mother's approval. Her father does not care much what she does. Elizabeth's inner musings foreshadow Lydia's fate, and the fate of all young women without a sensible father's or mother's influence: "[H]er other sister, from whose disposition greater evil might be apprehended, was likely to be hardened in all her folly and assurance, by a situation of such double danger as a watering place and a camp" (Austen 160). Alluding subtly to the alcohol-fueled sexual danger for a young girl at a military camp, Austen indicates that Elizabeth realizes the path Lydia is on and she is powerless to stop it.

Even though the dominant ideology of female conduct focused on making more wives and mothers, there was pushback,[10] especially from those like Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft.[11] Hannah More believed in an "*education of the heart*," and in her essay she claims that the defects concerning the current education system for women "seems to consist in this, that too little regard is paid to the dispositions of the *mind*, that the indications of the *temper* are not properly cherished, nor the affections of the *heart* sufficiently regulated" (43). While this pushback against the teachings of Chapone and Gregory is a better alternative, it is still innately regressive in its philosophy. More mentions the need to regard the "dispositions of the mind," but in her advocacy of a religiously based education, this suggests not rigorous training of the intellectual, but rather an instruction in maintaining a sweet temperament and affectionate heart, suggesting that women should cultivate docility and a happy compliance with social norms. Women are still innately put below men in this form of education. Austen evidently did not agree with this ideology any more than she did with the dominant thoughts of etiquette teachings; this

is shown through the character of Mary Bennet, who immerses herself in pious writings with no critical intelligence applied to them at all.

Mary is the middle Bennet sister and is often the voice of reason during anxious situations, but she always speaks in clichés that seem lifted directly from some book of pious instruction. Her introduction to the reader is through her father: "'What say you, Mary? for you are a young lady of deep reflection I know, and read great books, and make extracts'" (Austen 4). Mary spends a great deal of time reading, just like her older sister Elizabeth. However, Mary reads nothing but religious texts. Mary's purpose, as Auerbach suggests, is to serve "as a reminder to readers" that it is a disservice to "feed [their daughters] a diet of essays, conduct books, and sermons" (144). While fairly learned for a young lady, she only regurgitates what she reads, and it is often inappropriate and sometimes downright callous. As Johnson argues, Mary's "moral extractions" serve as a way of emphasizing the political aspect of a woman's education (3). These moral components of a woman's education were meant to keep women in line.[12] Mary's speech to Elizabeth after Lydia's disappearance to follow the troops demonstrates this: "'Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we must draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable—that one false step involves her in endless ruin—that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful—and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behavior towards the undeserving of the other sex'" (Austen 193). While Elizabeth recognizes how insensitive Mary's remarks are, Mary herself remains oblivious, and finds comfort in the words she has quoted (Austen 193).

While some critics view her in harsh light, she is not a character to be laughed at, but rather pitied; she is a product of her education.[13] Like Lydia and Jane, Mary acts the way she does because of the conduct she has been taught and the books she has read, which speak

through her. Austen uses her to show the results of someone educated in More's ideas about educational reform, where a woman's education focuses solely on morality and studying religious texts to sweeten her temperament and expand her heart rather than on learning that would expand her mind. While arguably more righteous than the socialites looking for a husband, these women are still just as clueless about how to maneuver in society and they certainly do not contribute anything meaningful to it either. As Johnson asserts, a "woman's education, their manners, their modesty, their reading, their opinions about personal happiness, their power of choice in matrimony, and their expectations from married life were all matters of increasingly anxious public concern" (2-3). Mary Bennet showcases this anxiety over a woman's place in Regency society as evidenced in the conduct books she parrots, especially given the gendered politics of her favorite "moral extractions," as evidenced in her condemnation of her sister's behavior (Johnson 3). Austen uses Mary in order to emphasize these political concerns about women in such a way that the moralistic concerns seem cold-hearted and absurd. Educators like Hannah More may have been more progressive on the surface; however, they were just as guilty of promoting an education that did little to offer growth in a woman's intellect or prepare her for anything other than an unequal marriage and an acceptance of her subordinated place in society.

Elizabeth Bennet, on the other hand, fits into the kind of education Mary Wollstonecraft was promoting. Wollstonecraft advocates for an individual education for both men and women, claiming, "the most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as best calculated to strengthen the body and the heart" (29). The Bennet daughters are encouraged to read and explore their interests unrestrained: "We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary" (Austen 113). Elizabeth is defending her education against

Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a spiteful socialite who is appalled by the Bennet's lack of governess. To have a young woman speak up against one of a higher class is an anomaly. As Newton suggests, Austen's heroine critiques and challenges the dominant ideology of womanhood, not only in this interaction with Lady Catherine, but throughout the novel (76). Elizabeth defends her actions and those of her family to Lady Catherine, creating some friction between the two that is never resolved.

The unrestrained freedom of reading allows Elizabeth to grow and learn as the novel progresses. Austen uses her to show what can happen when a woman has the autonomy and ability to learn beyond etiquette, disregarding the discourse of female conduct. Throughout the novel, Austen has Elizabeth verbally sparring with Mr. Darcy.[14] The first instance occurs when Elizabeth goes to Netherfield to take care of her sick sister, Jane; she argues with him about what it means to be an accomplished woman (Austen 24-26). The fact that Elizabeth is contradicting Mr. Darcy, a man, goes against every teaching of Regency society, for women are supposed to be "silent in company," as Dr. Gregory urged, and to not show superiority over men, who are allegedly superior by nature (23-24).[15] Instead of being disgusted with Elizabeth's behavior, Mr. Darcy is intrigued. Not only does he want a woman who reads, but a woman that can be his equal in every way (Austen 26). Austen uses this interaction to show the compatibility between the two characters while also showing that it is possible to have a relationship built on equality. As Johnson asserts, "[i]n endowing attractive female characters like Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet with rich and unapologetic sense of self-consequence, Austen defies every dictum of female propriety and deference propounded in the sermons and conduct books which have been thought to shape her opinions on all important matters" (xxiii). This is radical. Elizabeth Bennet, a character who goes against society's norms, is still beloved. In this character,

by allowing Elizabeth to educate herself through unrestrained reading, Austen is showing that women can become intellectually liberated and equal to men.

Elizabeth's push against societal norms can be seen in her relationship with Mr. Darcy. As the novel progresses, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy become closer. However, Elizabeth never truly lets her guard down, believing him to be responsible for the downfall of Mr. Wickham and her sister (Austen 130). This comes to a head when Mr. Darcy proposes to her. His proposal is a disaster, and at times, downright insulting, especially when he claims that his attachment to her "in spite of all his endeavors, he had found impossible to conquer" (Austen 129). Instead of accepting his proposal, Elizabeth gets angry and refuses him. She blames him for her sister's, Jane's, unhappiness and the ruin of Mr. Wickham (Austen 132). Instead of getting angry with her accusations, Mr. Darcy graciously accepts Elizabeth's rejection and returns the next day with a letter explaining his actions and her accusations:

> Two offenses of a very different nature, and by no means of equal magnitude, you last night laid to my charge. The first mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Mr. Bingley from your sister—the other, that I had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity, and blasted the prospects of Mr. Wickham. (Austen 133)

While he is responsible for separating Bingley and her sister, he does so only with the best of intentions and is deeply remorseful (Austen 134). As for Wickham, Elizabeth learns of his true dastardly nature (Austen 137). This not only gives Elizabeth an opportunity to grow as a person, accepting that she has been wrong, it also reveals another layer of Darcy's character. Darcy is gracious in his acceptance of Elizabeth's rejection, and he takes the time to compose a letter to

defend himself. He is not hasty in his reaction, choosing instead, to take the time to think and contemplate Elizabeth's accusations and his own actions.

Through Mr. Darcy's letter, Elizabeth learns that she has misjudged him; Hortwitz claims that this realization allows Elizabeth to discover herself, for she learns that she did not really know who she was until that moment (143).[16] However, I disagree with this claim because it gives too much credit to Mr. Darcy for Elizabeth's growth, it assumes that she did not know herself without Mr. Darcy's intervention, and it ignores that Elizabeth acquires much more than self-knowledge here. She stands as an intellectual equal with a man, even one of higher social standing. Darcy very well could have used his social status as a way of manipulating Elizabeth into accepting his proposal; he is of higher rank than she in Regency society, not only as a man, but also as someone of the landed gentry. It is not only the letter that aids in Elizabeth's discover, but his actions as well. Mr. Darcy is only one element that Austen uses to aid in Elizabeth's education and self-discovery.

This new opinion of Mr. Darcy is reinforced when Mr. Darcy comes to Lydia's rescue. He is the reason that Mr. Wickham and Lydia get married after scandalously running off with each other. Given Wickham's reputation for taking advantage of other women, even Darcy's sister, their hasty disappearance seems to foretell the ruin of Lydia's reputation in this patriarchal society. While visiting the family, Lydia accidently reveals to Elizabeth and Jane that it is Mr. Darcy that has arranged the entire marriage (Austen 214). Elizabeth decides to send a letter to her aunt, so she can get the whole story. The response she receives is enlightening; her views of both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham are reinforced (Austen 215-218). Throughout the entire novel, Elizabeth goes through a learning process; she learns that first impressions are not what they seem, reputations are not always accurate, and love can be magnificent when it occurs between

equals. As Elizabeth learns her lessons, Austen subtly suggests her forward-thinking vision: women are equal to men and should be treated as such. This idea that "neither sex is innately inferior to the other," as Horwitz suggests, propels the novel forward (144). Because of this belief, Austen sees the proper kind of education as a foundation of equality—it must be liberating rather than constraining; it must reject the narrow constraints placed on women by the discourse of female conduct. Since men and women are of equal intellect, having an education where both men and women receive the same knowledge would lay the groundwork for equality in other areas. Elizabeth is used as a prime example of what happens when women have access to knowledge and the freedom to grow intellectually and emotionally.

Whereas the dominant discourses of female education and female conduct discouraged intellectual exploration for women,[17] Austen not only creates a novel that has a protagonist who actively explores knowledge and grows emotionally and intellectually, but as an author, she herself also exceeded the limited accomplishments of a woman in society by writing this, and many other novels.[18] By showing how a liberating education and the miseducation of women has an impact upon their lives, Austen demonstrates the importance of equality. She uses Jane, Mary, and Lydia Bennet, as well as Miss Bingley and Miss Lucas, to show products of a system that miseducates its women, and she uses Elizabeth to show what can happen when women are given the freedom to explore knowledge on their own, free from the strictures of the conduct books and educational treatises.

Marriage and Social Class

Jane Austen's novels always surround a marriage plot, with the protagonist ending up with a gentleman of her equal at the end. *Pride and Prejudice* is no different, and it is the various marriages throughout the novel that serve as the driving force behind the characters' actions and

motivations. While the romantic elements are a focal point in today's reading of Austen's novels, readers of the early nineteenth century focused more on the irony and whit elements of her works (Greenfield and Troost 9).[19] However, within the marriage plots. Austen embeds some of her sharpest wit and irony. She uses the marriages of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins, Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham, and Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy as examples of the various marriages during Regency society. By showing both good and bad examples of marriage, Austen shows that it is only when marriage is seen as a partnership, rather than a fight for dominance, that a marriage can be successful.

The first characters seen in the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, present a paradigm of an unequal marriage and the problems that result from such a union. Mrs. Bennet is the first to speak: "'My dear Mr. Bennet,' said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?'" (Austen 1). Her first moment of dialogue not only sets the tone for the rest of the novel, but it reveals much more about Mrs. Bennet's personality and character traits. The reader sees that Mrs. Bennet is concerned with her neighbors. Based on the first two lines of the novel, one can reasonably conclude that it must be a single man of a good fortune that has let Netherfield, which is revealed by Mrs. Benner's later dialogue (Austen 1). She claims, "'What a fine thing for our girls!'" revealing that she believes that because the young man with a large fortune is single, then he must be looking for a wife (Austen 1). Her husband evidently does not reach this same conclusion and is confused as to how the new neighbor would be good for their daughters (Austen 1). Mrs. Bennet's main goal in life is to marry off each of her five daughters. Hence, she views Mr. Bingley, who has leased Netherfield, as a good opportunity to reach her goal. When Mrs. Bennet complains to her obtuse husband for being "tiresome" and having to spell out to Mr. Bennet how a single man relates to their single daughters. The reader first sees

the dynamic between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Mrs. Bennet appears a bit flighty in her concern with marrying her daughters. Mr. Bennet seems to be amused by Mrs. Bennet and gives her backhanded compliments, such as when he says: "'for you are as handsome as any of [our daughters], Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party'" (Austen 2). Mr. Bennet is telling his wife that she is the prettiest of the Bennets, and Mrs. Bennet simply takes his comment in stride, not even recognizing the humor or sarcasm in the statement.

This interaction continues and even more of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's relationship's dynamics are revealed. Mr. Bennet reveals his favoritism of his daughter, Lizzy, calling the rest of them "silly and ignorant" (Austen 2). Perhaps it is because of his favoritism that the other girls play into this idea of being silly, following the example of their mother, the only parent that seems to care for them. Mrs. Bennet is appalled by her husband's opinion of their children, exclaiming, "'Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse you children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves'" (Austen 2). Mr. Bennet famously replies, "'You mistake me, my dear. I have high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least'" (Austen 2). Here, the reader receives insight to Mr. Bennet's character. He is someone who does not take his wife seriously, and it appears that he is used to her outbursts. While he claims to consider her feelings, he really does not care about her. This lack of concern extends to his daughters and even to his overt favoritism of Elizabeth, which can be seen as contributing to his other daughters' inability to take themselves seriously as independently thinking beings.

The fact that Mr. Bennet raises no objections to Lydia's trip to follow the militia suggests his lack of engagement with his family, as though the whole concept of family is simply an encumbrance to him (Austen 159). While much of Lydia's behavior can be blamed on the

mother's influence, it can also be traced to Mr. Bennet's lack of influence over his daughter. He views her as of little importance. Mr. Bennet seems fairly unhappy with his life, and as a consequence, with his wife and most of his daughters as well. The Bennets' marriage serves as a warning of a match made between those who are not equal. Mr. Bennet married his wife by beauty and the "appearance of good humour," and as such, he greatly regrets marrying someone with, in his opinion, such an "illiberal mind" (Austen 159). Mr. Bennet seems to crave something beyond the silliness of his wife and daughters, and as a result, buries himself in his books, and chooses to be amused by Mrs. Bennet's ignorance and folly, never recognizing the folly of his own inaction and ineffectualness as a person engaged in an active life (Austen 159). By doing so, however, he misses his opportunity to build a meaningful relationship with his wife and daughters, other than Elizabeth. His daughter Lydia is nearly ruined as a result. Because Mr. and Mrs. Bennet have a dysfunctional and unequal relationship, they create an atmosphere of dysfunction and destruction in their home and with their daughters.

The Bennets are the main married couple in the novel; the other characters either get married over the course of the story or are introduced later, as with the Gardiners. For a novel focused on the everyday life of the gentry, Austen does not portray a flattering image in the Bennet parents. As Wollstonecraft asserted, patriarchy "keep[s] women in the dark, because the [tyrants] only want slaves, and the [sensualists] a play thing" (32). While Mr. Bennet would not be described as a tyrant or sensualist, he does play into the patriarchal ideal of keeping his wife ignorant and in the dark. He barely seems to tolerate her, and there does not even seem to be a fondness between them.[20] From this relationship, Austen seems to suggest that a relationship built on the superficial arts and attainments so many women were expected to exude and master

does not set a lasting foundation for marriage. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are not a match that anyone should aspire to emulate, but unfortunately, their daughter Lydia seems to be on the same path.

Lydia runs off with Wickham and faces potential ruin. However, Austen does not end the story here; she allows Lydia to regain social "respectability," but at what cost, the novel asks, for she has to be married to a man that has a habit of seducing younger women. Lydia is no longer seen as a fallen woman, but Austen questions this attribution of "fallenness" to Lydia since she puts it in the mouth of her robot-like sister, Mary, whom Austen undercuts as cold and unfeeling towards her sister (139).[21] Likewise, this charge of "fallenness" is put into the mouth of the hypocritical social climber, Mr. Collins, who, as Horwitz asserts, "insists that the family will never recover from Lydia's mistake" (139). By having the repugnant Mr. Collins's judgment align with what is culturally acceptable, Jane Austen challenges this judgment cast upon women who are the objects of seduction by men. Austen's narrative strategy here is much in line with Wollstonecraft's idea articulated in "Morality Undermined by Sexual Notions of the Importance of a Good Reputation" that men should take responsibility for their actions of seduction.[22] Wollstonecraft elaborates that a woman who does not hold these men responsible has little right to claim the virtue of modesty because she "smiles on the libertine whilst she spurns the victim of his lawless appetites and their own folly" (138). The education Lydia has received, not something inherent in her nature, has led to her subordination in society, as Wollstonecraft claimed such a miseducation would do (31). Poovey asserts that "[e]quating chastity with value not only required a woman to suppress or sublimate her sexual and emotional appetites; it also required her to signal her virtue by a physical intactness that is by definition invisible" (23). The reader sees what happens to Lydia when she pushes against this idea; she is ostracized by polite society, and only thanks to the gracious nature of Mr. Darcy is she able to function in society at

all. Because she is ultimately redeemed, as Jordan asserts, Austen is suggesting that if women started off with a well-rounded education rather than "preparation for marriage and maternity," then they would have the knowledge to maneuver through life instead of just being a spectator and relying on others to make choices that direct their lives (442). Austen wants to give women back their autonomy and independence.[23]

Lydia's character shows how a woman's education permeates every aspect of her life, especially her marriage. As Bilger asserts, Austen approaches the feminine ideal of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by having Lydia "side[step] the requirement that women's heroines follow conduct-book guidelines by making their own heroines less than perfect—that is, virtuous, but error-prone" (86). Bilger views this type of character as a trickster (108-109), and while it can be argued whether Lydia is a heroine in *Pride and Prejudice*, there is no debate that she steps outside of conventions and instead of being completely condemned for her actions, she ends up escaping social censure and is fairly comfortable, at least in terms of what she desired. Rather than being completely oblivious in her actions, it can be argued that Lydia is somewhat self-aware, and she uses her reputation as a silly girl to get what she wants: marriage—even if it is marriage to Wickham. As Johnson asserts, Lydia is seen as a product of her education and the dominant thought of what women should be pursuing (76). This is why she so adamantly pursues getting married as a 16-year old by running off for adventures in the militia encampment, and eventually, running off with Wickham, who apparently had no intentions of marrying her; she was willing to use her "silliness" to secure a marriage—and it worked. While both Lydia and her sister Elizabeth both step outside of gender conventions during the Regency era, Elizabeth is a beloved character and Lydia, perhaps too dismissively, is often written off.[24]

Elizabeth, on the other hand, is rewarded through marriage to a kind and wealthy man. Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy have a relationship of equals, the kind of marriage Wollstonecraft demanded that women deserved, a marriage built on the foundation of friendship (36). While Darcy's and Elizabeth's relationship started off rocky, throughout the course of the novel, the two characters fall in love and form a friendship. This can be seen through their verbal sparring. As the author of *A Letter to the Women of England* and early feminist Mary Robinson claimed, "WOMAN is a thinking and enlightened being!" (45).[25] Whether Austen read Robinson, she seemed to be of the same opinion that women had intellect and were capable of debating with their male counterparts. Her novel can be seen as participating in the same discourse of a liberating women's education that Wollstonecraft and Robinson disseminated. Elizabeth exemplifies the idea of a liberated female intellect, and instead of being repulsed with Elizabeth's lack of propriety, Darcy admires her intelligence. He becomes a true partner over the course of the novel, drawn to Elizabeth by the power of her mind and brilliance of her wit.

Elizabeth receives three proposals throughout the novel from two different men. The first proposal is from the bumbling Mr. Collins as a way to soften the blow that the Bennets will one day lose their property due to inheritance laws, which disallow any of Mr. Bennet's daughters for inheriting his estate. As the nearest male heir, Mr. Collins will inherit the Bennet property. Mr. Collins tries to undermine Elizabeth's autonomy and mind, even before his disastrous proposal. For example, Elizabeth tries to prevent Mr. Collins from making a fool of himself at the ball; she "tried hard to dissuade him from such a scheme; assuring him that Mr. Darcy would consider his addressing him without an introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment to his aunt," Lady Catherine, Mr. Collins's patroness (Austen 67). Instead of listening to Elizabeth,

Mr. Collins "mansplains" the purpose of introducing oneself, and proceeds to make a fool of himself:

> "My dear Miss Elizabeth, I have the highest opinion in the world of your excellent judgement in all matters within the scope of your understanding, but permit me to say that there must be a wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst the laity, and those which regulate the clergy; for give me leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom—provided that a proper humility of behavior is at the same time maintained. You must therefore allow me to follow the dictates of my conscience on this occasion, which leads me to perform what I look on as a point of duty, pardon me got neglecting to profit by your advice, which on every other subject shall be my constant guide, though in the case before us I consider myself more fitted by education and habitual study to decide what is right than a young lady like yourself." (Austen 67)

Had he listened to Elizabeth, Mr. Collins would not have made himself into a laughing stock at the ball. While Mr. Darcy is polite to Mr. Collins's outlandish behavior, he does have a physical reaction to the absurdity; "Mr. Darcy was eying him with unrestrained wonder" (Austen 67). To get such a physical reaction out of the aloof Mr. Darcy indicates that Mr. Collins is acting outside of normal societal boundaries, a faux pas that could have been avoided if he had listened to Elizabeth. This reveals the darker nature of Mr. Collins, a professed minister who is only interested in climbing up the class system to better himself. If he were truly humble as he professes, he would have approached Mr. Darcy differently, rather than focusing on trying to impress his patroness, Lady Catherine.

The scene at the ball foreshadows the pitiful proposal he gives Elizabeth a few chapters later. Once again, Mr. Collins attempts to explain to Elizabeth a concept she is already familiar with—her mind. When Elizabeth turns Mr. Collins down, he exclaims:

> "…[I]t is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and I shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long." (Austen 74)

Mr. Collins refuses to accept Elizabeth's rejection at face value, insisting that she is instead playing hard to get. Austen was way ahead of her time; she is incorporating issues of consent by showing that women can know their own mind, and that "No" does, indeed, mean "No." Women are not swayed by what a man who considers himself a "nice guy" has to say; women can make their own decisions.

This is highlighted in the second proposal that Elizabeth receives, this time from Mr. Darcy. While his proposal is still not the most flattering, with accusations of loving her against his will and reason (130), he still professes his love (129), and when he is rejected, he only asks why (130), instead of forcing himself onto her or refusing to acknowledge her answer. Austen uses this scene to show how a man can graciously accept "no," even if, or especially if, his way of asking for something of a woman is an insult to her, and she lets him know it. Mr. Darcy responds to Elizabeth's accusations in a letter, not only revealing his eloquence, intelligence, and integrity, but showcasing Elizabeth's intelligence as well; she truly is his equal, and he addresses her as such. Though Elizabeth does eventually accept Mr. Darcy's proposal, her marriage does not detract from her liberation as an independent woman. She is Darcy's equal in every way, and it is her choice to marry him—just as it was once her choice to reject him because of his arrogant

comportment. Mr. Darcy grows as a person and shows that he is a kind man by rescuing Lydia and by bringing Jane and Mr. Bingley back together. When Darcy professes his love once again, Elizabeth is ready to accept it (248-250). She is able to maintain her autonomy in the relationship and to choose whether or not to marry. She chooses to follow her desires for a man who can treat her as an equal.

Elizabeth's initial refusal is radical in a time that women were expected to marry, and to "marry up."[26] Elizabeth especially was not in a place financially where she could be turning down generous proposals; yet, the reader sees her do this twice. As Toran asserts, it is a lack of a male heir and a loss of income when Mr. Bennet dies that is the root of the Bennets' money problem as well as Mr. Bennet's poor money management, for the "Bennets are not poor: poor money management has left the daughters without dowries" (6). While the Bennets were of comfortable social means, it would be a temporary comfort, lasting only until the father dies. This is one of the reasons that Mrs. Bennet is so eager to marry off her daughters, and this anxiety could contribute to some of the more tumultuous events of the novel, such as when Elizabeth refuses to marry Mr. Collins, or when Lydia runs away.

Mr. Collins's marriage to Elizabeth's lifelong friend, Charlotte Lucas, certainly does not ease Mrs. Bennet's anxiety. Indeed, Austen uses this situation to show another anxiety within Regency society—the anxiety caused by an older, unmarried daughter. Poovey elucidates that when "Charlotte Lucas rejects romance, she does so for its opposite, the matter-of-fact assessment that a 'comfortable home' is more substantial than romantic fantasies" (197). Charlotte Lucas loses her autonomy as a woman when she chooses to marry Mr. Collins, whom Austen depicts as a thoroughly unctuous, materialistic, aspiring, and hypocritical character. While Poovey suggests that Charlotte has the option of making a choice, I would argue that it has

been so ingrained into her being that she must marry or else be a burden to her family, that she really has no choice in the matter (204-205). Indeed, Charlotte Lucas loses her autonomy when she marries Mr. Collins; she is no longer Charlotte, but Mrs. Collins. She is never referred to by her first name after she gets married. It is just as early feminist Mary Robinson suggests, in her condemnation of the cultural imperative that women marry, no matter whom: "[I]s it not degrading to humanity that such a woman should be the passive, the obedient slave, of such a husband?" (42). She loses herself.

The loss of personhood Charlotte sustains in marriage can be seen when Elizabeth visits her friend; she witnesses Charlotte turning a blind eye to her husband's failings in order to keep up the illusion of her happiness and the success of her marriage. Her marriage is not a partnership, and there is only a small amount of fondness or friendship, the lack of which Wollstonecraft criticizes in most marriages based on the subordination of women and the trivialization of their intellects in "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed" (36). Charlotte appears to be satisfied with her life, but how can she be truly happy when she is married to an idiot who worships his patroness the aristocratic Lady Catherine? While Elizabeth is visiting the Collins, they receive an invitation to Lady Catherine's home for dinner. Charlotte claims Lady Catherine is a sensible woman, but considering that she marries Mr. Collins, her judgment is no longer reliable (Austen 108).

Lady Catherine, as Elizabeth soon finds out, is not a sensible woman, but rather an elitist socialite who uses her status as a way to control others. Most notable is when she tries to prevent Elizabeth from marrying Mr. Darcy because she wants him to marry her daughter (Austen 237-241). Lady Catherine shows up at the Bennets' home in the middle of the night and demands to know what is going on between Elizabeth and Darcy, and she is shocked with Elizabeth's

response: “I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. *You* may ask questions, which *I* shall chuse not to answer” (Austen 238). Once again, Elizabeth puts Lady Catherine in her place. The exchange between the two female characters highlights a power struggle not only between two women in Mr. Darcy’s life, but also between two social classes within Regency society. Lady Catherine has certain expectations because she is of higher social standing than Elizabeth. However, Austen does not envision her character’s behavior to be dictated solely by her social station in life. Instead, she has Elizabeth step outside of her class status and address Lady Catherine as an equal, even as she professes that by society’s class institution she is not considered one. Her logical demolishing of Lady Catherine’s argument demonstrates how fully Elizabeth sees herself as the intellectually and ethically superior person:

> Lady Catherine seemed pleased [that Darcy and Elizabeth were not engaged].
>
> “And will you promise me, never to enter into such an engagement?”
>
> “I will make no promise of the kind.”
>
> “Miss Bennet I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young woman. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away, till you have given me the assurance I require.”
>
> “And I certainly *never* shall give it. I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship wants Mr. Darcy to marry your daughter; but would my giving you the wished-for promise, make *their* marriage at all more probable? Supposing him to be attached to me, would *my* refusing to accept his hand, make him wish to bestow on his cousin? Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application, have been as frivolous as the application was ill judged. You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be

> worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your nephew might approve of your interference in *his* affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject." (Austen 240)

This interaction is one way that Austen is critiquing the class system in nineteenth century England; she suggests that people are inherently equal and should be treated as such, as indicated in the language Elizabeth uses when addressing Lady Catherine.

While Lady Catherine tries to use her power to prevent Elizabeth and Darcy from marrying, she is unsuccessful. The two marry and form a marriage that is built on equality and partnership, and they disregard marital and class expectations since Darcy has "married down" in the eyes of society. Even though Elizabeth "married up" the social ladder, she demonstrated that she was perfectly willing not to "marry up" or to marry at all, as her two refusals of marriage suggest. Austen does not focus on Elizabeth's class status in the final pages. Instead, she tells the reader of her happiness with Darcy (Austen 262). This exalts this idea that marriage can only be successful when it is built on equality and established as an equal partnership, regardless of class status.

Conclusion

Jane Austen in her culturally acceptable novel carefully criticizes the social institutions of education, marriage, and social class, through witty dialogue, creative plot sequences, and nuanced narrative irony. She focuses on questions about gender relations, social class, marriage, and human fulfillment, and as such, her novels are still beloved today. By subtly questioning the consequences of patriarchal gender relations, unequal marriage relationships, and a stratified class system, and by using focal characters to represent different positions for women in

Regency society, Austen suggests that men and women should be treated equally in society regardless of their gender or class status. Concerning Jane Austen, twentieth-century feminist Virginia Woolf claims that "[h]ere was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching…" (50), for "[w]hat genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to hold fast to thing as [she] saw it without shrinking" because she "wrote as women write" (55). This is what makes *Pride and Prejudice* so phenomenal; it is a novel that cleverly pinpoints and critiques the failings of society without hate. By creating a radical story in the disguise of a socially acceptable novel, Austen paved the way for other writers to do the same. She created a lasting novel that not only pushed against the ideals of her day, but also can still help us reflect critically on today's culture.

CHAPTER 2

THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY, EDUCATION, AND ORGANIZED RELIGION: RESISTING INTERPELLATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE*

"It was *my* turn to assume ascendency. *My* powers were in play, and in force. …I must, and would be alone" (Brontë 520). So asserts Jane Eyre, dismissing St. John Rivers, who pursues her for a celibate marriage, which she rejects, deciding instead, to seek a relationship with Mr. Rochester. In nineteenth century England, women were constrained by the patriarchal rules and regulations that demanded their dependence and obedience. Charlotte Brontë in her novel *Jane Eyre* puts this ideology into question and gestures toward inevitable change in the power relations that could, and should, be obtained between women and men.[27] Throughout the course of the novel, Jane begins to assert agency and gain control of her life. She rises above the societal expectations instilled in her. With sometimes overt social criticism, Brontë creates a novel that challenges patriarchal gender relations while showcasing and problematizing the stark reality of a woman of limited means during the nineteenth century. Brontë's social criticism can be seen through the character of Jane, particularly by looking at the ideological state apparatuses that shape human subjects and against which she struggles, such as the patriarchal family, her education, and organized religion.

As Louis Althusser explains, "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subject* by the functioning of the category of the subject;" applying this to Brontë's text suggests that Jane's subjectivity is shaped by the patriarchal ideology enforced by the ideological state apparatuses of family, education, and religion as represented in the novel (245). However, Jane resists interpellation by patriarchal ideology thrust upon her through social institutions over the course of the novel. Brontë suggests that women have the resiliency to survive and thrive in a

patriarchal society when they reject the patriarchal family as well as the conventional social institutions of education and religion, striking out on their own to create alternatives. Jane is able to resist these ideological state apparatuses through her exertion of what Raymond Williams calls "creative practice" (Williams 212). In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams asserts that all human subjects are capable of struggling for "new forms of consciousness" despite the pressures exerted by cultural "hegemony," the term he prefers to use rather than the earlier Marxist concept of "ideology."[28] They do so, according to Williams, in their "active struggle for new consciousness through new relationships that is the ineradicable emphasis of the Marxist sense of self-creation" (212). Jane struggles to attain "new forms of consciousness" in a number of ways: by participating in the quiet subversion within the daily relationships and practices of the communities of women she encounters, by turning away from social institutions and towards nature, by forming a non-patriarchal marriage, and by narrating her own story. The novel illuminates what Williams calls "creative practice," not only in Jane's storytelling about her struggles, but also in Brontë's shaping of the novel.

Viewed in the context of conduct books like Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Daughters of England* (1842), which emphasizes the religious aspects of women's education designed to shape them into submissive subjects, Brontë's novel can be seen as showcasing how institutional Christianity can be perverted into an apparatus that works to keep women subordinate within the class system. As a child, Jane is subjected to abuse at the hands of her male cousin and interpellation by patriarchal ideology in her adoptive home with the Reeds. Because Jane receives an education in submissiveness at the charity school, Lowood, following her rejection from the Reeds, it places her in the position of a governess, which subjects her to the advances of the "master of the house." An orphan taken in by her aunt, Jane suffers humiliation and physical

violence as a child in the Reed household. After being sent to what was advertised as a Christian educational institution for children of the poor, she suffers further humiliation by Mr. Brocklehurst, a dominating man in charge of Lowood—witnessing first-hand—the injustices of the patriarchal institutions of religion and education. Fortunately, through her practical, daily relationships with the other women—first in the Reed household and later in Lowood—Jane participates in a community of women who oppose the patriarchal abuse in subtle ways; moreover, she narrates her own story, which condemns the abuses of the patriarchal Reed family and of the "evangelical Christian institution." In both instances, she is able to form what Williams calls a "counter-hegemony" or "alternative hegemony" (112-113). In the quietly subversive actions of the women at Lowood, Jane participates in the kind of "creative practice" that Williams theorizes. Through their relationships, as we will see, the women engage in an "active struggle for new consciousness" and new kinds of relationships (Williams 212). This allows Jane to push against the ideological interpellation that both the Reed household and Lowood Institution have exerted as a way to control her.

Brontë begins the novel by illuminating the normalized abuse towards women through the domestic sequence of the Reed family in which the power relations render women subordinate. Jane's survival in the Reed household include her turning toward nature to seek a refuge from destructive social institutions and her seeking strength from another woman, who encourages her to leave. While temporarily escaping into the nature book *History of British Birds*, Jane finds herself transported to "death-white realms," for the "words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just

sinking;…[e]ach picture told a story" (Brontë 6). The nature depictions in Jane's book seem to reflect the despair and hopelessness she feels at the hands of the Reeds. The moon is described as "ghastly" and glancing at a shipwreck in progress—much like how Jane feels isolated and uncared for. The moon is uncaring, and unfeeling, rather than the all-encompassing mother-figure deity displayed later in the novel. Even though nature is represented as bleak in the book, Jane seeks refuge in it, rejecting the patriarchal family that she is subjected to. Here, as a child, she is little more than "other," an orphan without place or belonging.[29] Jane is disrupted from reading her nature book by "Master Reed," a boy of fourteen who is already imposing the harsh reality of patriarchy onto his female relatives and servants (Brontë 7). While not the "master of the house" quite yet, John Reed has taken on the dominant role in the patriarchal family.

In chapter one alone, Brontë introduces a critique of the current ideological practices and power relations in the homes of the well-to-do Victorian families. Because Jane narrates her own story in a way that exposes the physical and emotional abuse of girls in such patriarchal households, she demonstrates a new critical consciousness of patriarchal domestic power relations; that is, she demonstrates her own "creative practice" (Williams 212). This family dynamic is ruled by male authority and dominance. John Reed does not hesitate to remind Jane that she has no possessions to speak of and is at the mercy of the Reeds' generosity (Brontë 8). This reminder infuriates Jane, and she flies into a passion, which only results in her punishment: being banished to the Red Room, the room where her uncle died. Her cousin, John Reed, is essentially ruling the family, even though he is only a child himself. His mother follows his lead, even though she should have more authority as the parent. Instead, she follows the ruling of her closest male relative. This is problematic, and it contributes to the fallout that the family will have. Jane's saving grace seems to be a righteous rage that she has within her, an unshakeable

will and need to survive. Foucault has argued that wherever there is power, there is resistance: "At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom" (790). Jane's eruption of anger here at the start of the novel represents her resistance to oppressive power and her refusal of interpellation by the ideological state apparatus of the patriarchal family.

Even though Brontë herself never experienced such horrors as a child, as Nora Gilbert explains, she did have a similar experience with the first family she took care of as a governess (462). Brontë's biographical experiences have influenced the story that she is writing.[30] It is because of this that writers like Virginia Woolf have critiqued Brontë's approach and even the anger in her writing.[31] As Gilbert and Gubar illustrate, this anger is first seen with Jane's interaction with the patriarchal family dynamic of the Reeds and the Red Room of the deceased Mr. Reed (340). This is an internal self-preservation mechanism that propels Jane forward. While her temper is something that she tries to overcome, it is also what enables her to survive the horrors of her childhood. Although Woolf sees Jane's flashes of anger as Brontë's intrusions of her own feelings into the text, I see it as appropriate to the character of Jane and her means of survival.

Jane is resistant to the pull of the patriarchal family; she is not complacent in her place at the Reeds. As in the instance of abuse at the hands of John Reed, Jane turns to nature and away from the social institution of the patriarchal family for sustenance and strength. The reader sees Jane's first recognition of the need for agency during her punishment in the Red Room; Jane's inner monologue reveals the frustrations she has for her aunt and cousins (Brontë 12). Her thoughts scream: "Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one's favour?" (Brontë 12). Even though she is only 10 years old, Jane understands that she has been

mistreated, and that she is truly an equal to her "family," both in her eyes and in the eyes of God. Her soul has been wounded by their behavior. This leads Jane into a downward spiral, and she becomes hysterical when thinking about Mr. Reed's spirit (Brontë 13). However, Brontë once again brings forth the image of the moon. While not as melancholy as the image from the *History of British Birds*, here, in the Red Room, Jane imagines seeing a ray of moonlight, and it is here where the reader meets the narrator Jane, rather than the character (Brontë 13). Here Jane interrupts the story to inform her reader that she "can now conjecture" as to what the light truly was, and while it was just light from the house seeping into the room, Jane, the child, feels a strong pull to connect with nature in order to reject the social institution of the patriarchal family (Brontë 13). While seemingly unimportant, this interruption is the first instance where Jane can be seen as the fully realized individual, the narrator of her own story, turning away from a social institution toward what she perceives as the light of nature, rather than a child lost in the darkness and trying to find her place in the world, in order to reach the status of an independent woman.[32]

Through Jane's new female relationship with Bessie, a servant woman, Jane is able to gather the strength to leave the oppressive situation at the Reed household, especially after the incident in the Red Room. In what Williams calls an "active struggle for new consciousness through new relationships," Jane is able to resist the interpellation of the patriarchal family (212). After her recovery from hysteria, Bessie acts much kinder towards Jane, realizing, if only a bit belatedly, that Jane is not the issue at the Reed household, and she takes Jane under her wing. This is the first instance where the reader sees Jane building a community of women. Her friendship with Bessie acts as a comfort, and it contrasts with the harshness of the patriarchal family that she has become accustomed to. Bessie is the first character to bring up the idea of

school to Jane, and it allows her to reflect on what she knows about school and what it would mean for her—a means to escape the Reeds at Gateshead (Brontë 20). However, what Jane does not realize is that she will be trading in one form of patriarchal oppression for another, in the form of Mr. Brocklehurst and his ideas of religion at the Lowood charity school.

Even though Jane is subjected to the interpellation of the patriarchal doctrine at Lowood, she is able to resist by forming new relationships and, what Williams calls, "creative practice" that works towards new consciousness (212). This allows Jane to form a "counter-hegemony," or "alternative hegemony" to the one that is being used to shape the girls at the school (Williams 112-113). She finds solace in her small circle of female companionship with Miss Temple and Helen Burns. The interaction with this community allows the reader to see another glimpse of Jane's storytelling as a pathway to agency. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues, it is the tales of woe that Jane tells Miss Temple and Helen that establishes her as a storyteller (100-101). Despite what Brocklehurst does to "mortify these girls in the lusts of the flesh" (Brontë 54), this community of girls support and comfort each other: "Resting my head on Helen's shoulder, I put my arm around her waist; she drew me to her, and we reposed in silence" (Brontë 59). Miss Temple joins the girls, checking in on them and solidifying the solidarity of their small subversive community: "Have you cried your grief away?" (Brontë 59). This small community that Jane has created with her teacher and her peer has allowed her to reject the patriarchal educational institution of Lowood and allows her to create an identity outside of being a member of organized religion in this "evangelical Christian institution," as Lowood is called.

Lowood serves as nothing else but an institution to subordinate women in Victorian society; the school promotes the domestic ideology of the time, and the curriculum prepares the girls for a life of submission, which will be passed down to their wards or their own children. As

Ellen Jordan laments, domestic ideology of the separate spheres for women and men "legitimated the new relations between the sexes caused by the separation of work and home," brought about by the "emergence of industrial capitalism" (443). Further, Jordan states that women were to be wives and mothers, but an educated woman makes the best wife and mother, whose place was in the home and not in the public sphere (446). Jane does not receive an education that Mary Wollstonecraft advocated for, nearly sixty years prior; instead she is taught sewing, history, grammar, and French (Brontë 43). While sewing, grammar, and history could all be considered practical lessons, Jane's French lessons only prepare her to pass on that knowledge to her wards as a governess. Lowood Institution is preparing these girls for life as a governess as a way for them to support themselves. On the surface, this seems like an admirable goal. Indeed, as Poovey notes, nearly half of the women ages 20-40 were unmarried, and one third of Britain's women were "self-supporting" (4). However, Lowood is promoting the overbearing and oppressive patriarchal social practices, perpetuating the cultural assumption that woman is somehow lesser than man, and the governess position helps continue this cycle of interpellation, for as Poovey argues, "the definition of sexual difference, and the social organization of sexual relations are social, not natural phenomena" and "the construction and deployment of these images performed critical ideological work at midcentury, that they were intimately involved in the development of England's characteristic social institutions" as recognized in this social apparatus (2). Lowood justifies its treatment of its girls by using Christianity as a means of influencing and controlling them.

Brocklehurst serves as the face of the patriarchal institution of organized religion. While the reader has already seen a glimpse of the horrors that he is capable of when he interrogated Jane before attending school, nothing could prepare them for his interaction with the young

schoolgirls (Brontë 26-29). Mr. Brocklehurst's arrival disrupts the already unstable environment of the charity school. He questions every decision Miss Temple makes, including feeding the girls (Brontë 53), and becomes hysterical, an action typically associated with women overreacting, when he notices a young girl with curls: "'Miss Temple, Miss Temple, what—*what* is that girl with curled hair? Red hair, ma'am, curled—curled all over?' And extending his cane he pointed to the awful object, his hand shaking as he did so" (Brontë 54). Mr. Brocklehurst decides her hair must be cut off, and this decision is extended to any girls with long hair that are fixed in any way, in order to avoid vanity (Brontë 54). Under the guise of religious teaching and authority, Mr. Brocklehurst humiliates those girls, bringing them shame for something that is not their fault. Girls of lower class do not have the luxury of looking pretty, even if it is natural. These girls have committed no sin nor broken any of the school's rules, and still they are punished. Their adolescent bodies maturing into adulthood are shamed for reasons out of their control; they are forced to suppress their growing sexuality and they must, instead, be forced to look sexless with shaved heads and pinafores. Serving to break their spirits, the headmaster's actions are nothing short of despicable.

Jane, while resistant to the patriarchal teachings of the school, still falls victim to the humiliation of Brocklehurst. He turns his attentions onto Jane, singling her out in front of all the students and teachers. Having just broken her slate, Jane is terrified of what Brocklehurst may do to her; Jane's worst fears come true and she is placed on a tall stool so everyone can see her (Brontë 55). The headmaster addresses Lowood, making sure everyone hears the slanderous tale of Jane:

> "[I]t becomes my duty to warn you, that this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway…Teachers you must watch her: keep your eyes on her

> movements…this girl is—a liar!...This I learned from her benefactress; from the pious and charitable lady who adopted her in her orphan state, [and] reared her as her own daughter… (Brontë 56)

Mr. Brocklehurst follows a warped version of Calvinism, using his religion as a way to humiliate Jane and justify his actions. He separates her from her peers and teachers, effectively cutting her off from her community.

The new forms of female relationships that Jane forms play an important role in her "active struggle for new consciousness," and they allow her to have the strength to reject the patriarchal social apparatuses that dominate her life in the forms of what Williams calls, "creative practice" (212). She is able to resist interpellation at Lowood. Fortunately for Jane, Miss Temple takes the time to inquire about Mr. Brocklehurst's allegations, and Jane's name is eventually cleared (Brontë 60). This meeting with Helen Burns and Miss Temple sparks a turning point in young Jane's life. She is able to share her feelings and struggles without keeping them bottled up inside, using her storytelling as a form of "creative practice," as suggested by Williams, in order to resist the patriarchal hegemonies of the school (212). These relationships are a quiet form of subversion in their acts of "creative practice" (Williams 212). One such example is the comfort that Jane provides Helen when she is sick: "I feel as though I could sleep: but don't leave me, Jane; I like to have you near me" (Brontë 70). Jane replies, "'I'll stay with you, *dear* Helen: no one shall take me away,'" and stays in her arms the rest of the night (Brontë 70). In an institution that insists on the strictest acts of propriety, Jane rebels to find and give comfort to her friend. Even though Helen dies, her friendship still plays an important role in Jane's emotional development and her journey towards new consciousness. While the novel glosses over the rest of Jane's years of school after Helen's death, Jane does inform the reader

that her relationship with Miss Temple remains strong (Brontë 71). This allows Jane to remain steadfast in her resistance of the patriarchal teachings of the school.

At Lowood Institution, Jane is miseducated to an extent in subordination and submissiveness, although she resists interpellation into this subject position. Rather than receiving an education that would have prepared her for the real world, she was part of the mass production of governesses that occurred during the mid-1800s. As P.J. Miller asserts, Victorian society's "preoccupation with the relationship between social class and education" creates the atmosphere in which women are accorded a limited and limiting education so that their only function is to work within the patriarchal household in a way that reproduces the class system (313). An analysis of conduct literature aimed at women who were governesses reveals this preoccupation. Most notable is *Hints to Governesses. By One of Themselves* (1856), which trivializes the plight of women, brushing off the fact that women had limited means to support themselves. As Ruth Brandon laments, producing more governesses became a way of educating middle-class girls, as well as "a way of keeping destitute ladies off the streets" (1). Despite the limitations of the governess role, Jane is fortunate enough to be literate and have teaching experience at the Lowood school, so she can find a governess position to support herself.

Brontë, however, offers a resounding critique of the governess in the patriarchal household, exposing the dangers of the "master of the house." After receiving the position at Thornfield, Jane begins her journey as a governess. She is placed in a precarious position under her employer Mr. Rochester. While Jane's arrival shows a quiet position with a flighty young French girl as a ward, Mr. Rochester's presence complicates matters. As Susan Fraiman argues, Brontë shows "the working woman's fear of the predatory gentleman" (110). Brontë uses this anxiety that women felt and faced as governesses as a way to critique the current system.

Rochester takes liberties with Jane that he should not, first by revealing his sexual history and then when pursuing a relationship with her. Rochester sees her as more than a governess, and as Bodenheimer illuminates, Jane uses these interactions to her advantage, asserting her independence (102). This "creative practice" allows her to resist interpellation and eventually gain agency.

Even though Jane is fairly satisfied with her life, Brontë does not let the reader forget about her vulnerability as a governess. When Jane first arrives at Thornfield, she meets Adèle, her young charge, and learns that she is the ward of Mr. Rochester, a man who spends much of his time away from the estate (Brontë 86). While Jane begins to become restless and discontent, she discovers something unsettling about her position: "When thus alone I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh: the same peal, the same low, slow ha! ha! which, when first heard, had thrilled me: I heard, too, her eccentric murmurs; stranger than her laugh" (Brontë 93). This is the first hint that all is not quite well at Thornfield, and Rochester's return only further complicates matters. From the beginning, he does not speak to her like an employer would speak to his employee; Rochester blurs the lines. This is first seen the day after Rochester's arrival. His young ward demands a "cadeaux," and Rochester flirts with Jane, telling her that while she does not ask for a present, she certainly hints at some sort of praise (Brontë 103). Rochester continues to cross this line, eventually pursing a relationship with her. Brontë uses Jane's relationship with the "master of the house" as a way to emphasize the vulnerability of the governess. After building a romantic relationship with her, Rochester asks Jane to marry him, resulting in an almost bigamous relationship. After the disastrous wedding is interrupted, Rochester introduces his wife, Bertha, to Jane. Bertha is described as a beast, rather than a human with an illness (Brontë 250).

Of Creole descent from the West Indies islands, Bertha's beastly appearance reflects a problematic colonialist view during the Victorian era.[33] While Brontë has a strong grasp on the abuse of the patriarchal household and its sexual dominance as an ideological state apparatus, she does not see its parallel with imperialism. Rochester himself seems to colonize women in his attempt of sexual dominance. Brontë has an ideological blind spot. As Spivak critiques, Bertha "must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, …so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction" (244). Brontë uses this "violence of imperialism" as a way to put to rest the final distinctions of the "other" (Spivak 244). While Brontë confronts the hegemonies of the patriarchal family, education, and organized religion, she has a blind spot, and has not developed a new consciousness concerning imperialism.

Even though Brontë's use of Bertha's heritage is questionable, a parallel can still be made between Bertha, who is represented as the madwoman, and Jane. As Mary Poovey asserts, governesses made up the largest category of women in insane asylums during this period (130). Had Jane not had an internal fire that pushes her to survive, she could have ended up with a fate like Bertha's.[34] As Gilbert and Gubar argue, Bertha serves as a mirror and embodiment of Jane's rage as well as Brontë's own (395-360). It is in Bertha that Brontë can express her own anger at an unjust and patriarchal society. After the revelation of Bertha, Jane leaves Rochester and her position of the governess. He begs her to stay, telling her that she could be his mistress (Brontë 269). As James Phillips laments, "Rochester invokes a sentimental, rather than a legal right in order, nonetheless, to urge a new claim to the institution of marriage" (204). Instead of accepting Rochester's claim of her and following him into a farce of a marriage, Jane chooses herself: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I

will respect myself" (Brontë 270). In leaving Thornfield, Jane rejects the social apparatuses of education and the patriarchal household.

By expanding new relationships and new consciousness, through communing with nature as a personal, living power, Jane is given the consciousness to not look for meaning in social institutions. In turning away from the misguided patriarchal ideology of Thornfield and towards nature, Jane is able to resist interpellation and form new relationships by becoming the daughter of nature (the moon) and God. After nearly being a victim of bigamy, Jane rejects Rochester, and subsequently rejects the educational position that brought her to him. On the night she leaves Rochester, Jane is awakened from a dream:

> I lifted my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come—watched with the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disk. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—"My daughter, flee temptation!" (Brontë 272)

Jane replies to the mother-deity, "Mother, I will," and she flees, setting out on her own (Brontë 272). She clings to the "universal mother, Nature" (Brontë 275). For the first time in her life, Jane is truly on her own. In this dream, Jane remembers back to the ghastly image of the moon from her experience in the Red Room. In her dream, she is able to reconcile those wounded feelings she had. As Helene Moglen suggests, Jane looks to "a cosmic and personal principle of order and control: …the moon, maternal nature, the mother within herself" (48). After the

betrayal by Rochester, Jane is back to feeling like that outcast, little girl. In her dream, however, instead of being menacing, the moon is motherly and protective; she becomes a real person, and pushes Jane to leave Rochester and venture into the unknown. She is the mother that Jane has never known, and with her communal support, Jane is able to leave.

Through new relationships, this one through nature, Jane strengthens her resolve against the patriarchal social institutions that have been a defining feature in her life. She struggles, but is comforted with thoughts of nature and of God: "Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast that I was;" and "We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale…His omnipotence, His omnipotence. …I, with tear-dimmed eyes, saw the mighty Milky Way. Remembering what it was…I felt the might and strength of God" (Brontë 276). An orphan, Jane has finally found parents in the divine—a father in a God, outside of organized religion, and a mother in nature. In seeking out comfort in nature and in God, Jane is rejecting the social apparatus of organized religion and its patriarchal domination. Instead, she has found peace, and she has taken one step closer to being independent from the social institutions of Victorian England that seek to make her dependent and submissive.

By resisting interpellation, Jane is able to form a "counter-hegemony" or "alternative hegemony" through her spirituality and the surrogate relationship she has with nature and God (Williams 112-113). Jane will no longer listen to man as the voice of God, the dominant hegemony, but instead, follows his voice directly through her own sense of spirituality. She, as Moglen articulates, "discovers her own capacities and strengths. She must learn the pleasures of independence and self-sufficiency" (51). While wandering, Jane becomes ill; fortunately, she is taken in by St. John and his sisters, Diana and Mary. While St. John, a clergyman, is a legalistic

man who believes greatly in his own morality, Jane is able to build a community with his sisters, finding that support she was lacking at Thornfield. Through these new relationships, Jane is able to resist interpellation by becoming part of the subversive community she has formed with St. John's sisters. When Jane recovers from her illness, St. John gives her a teaching position at a little country school. Though happy to have independence, Jane reveals to the reader that she felt "degraded" in her position at the school (Brontë 306). Jane's status should have afforded her some matter of luxury, at least more so than teaching in a poor, one-room schoolhouse.

While Brontë allows Jane to resist interpellation by most of Victorian England's oppressive practices, as an author, Brontë is still influenced by the society around her. Brontë has a blind spot to the colonial practices of Victorian England, and this is reflected in the reality of Bertha's portrayal earlier in the novel, as well as where Jane's inheritance money that affords her independence comes from: she receives an inheritance from her Uncle John, a colonialist in the West Indies. While the imperialistic attitude is problematic, Brontë uses it as a way for Jane to gain independence. St. John reveals to Jane that he knows her true identity, and that they are cousins (Brontë 328). Jane is ecstatic to learn that she has family. However, St. John does not particularly see Jane as a sister-figure or cousin. As Moglen notes, he has a "manipulative power" and he "wants to control [Jane] completely" (54). He uses religion as a threatening bludgeon, which is seen when he asks Jane to go to India with him in a celibate marriage and tells her that if she refuses him, she refuses God. St. John's sisters, however, warn Jane that their brother is a "cold, hard man." Jane refuses St. John and his guilt-laden, celibate marriage proposal, and even his sisters discourage Jane from going with him, understanding the controlling nature of their brother (Brontë 352-354). Rather than using woman's sexuality to

shame her, as was done by Brocklehurst earlier in the novel, St. John uses it to create guilt in Jane to coerce her into marrying him.

In rejecting St. John and choosing to follow his sisters' counsel, Jane forms a "counter-hegemony" (113) as Williams would call it, through the "creative practice" enacted in their lived relationships (212). With more developed critical consciousness and further new kinds of relationships, the kind of "creative practice" that Williams articulates, Jane finds in her the strength to resist interpellation and follow her own desire. This allows Jane to form an identity outside of the patriarchal marriage and family bonds, forming relationships not predicated on binaries of oppressed and oppressor (212). Jane relies on her community of women with St. John's sisters as a way of surviving the strong ties of a patriarchal family and religious dynamic. As Phillips argues, "[h]aving feared to become, in her inequality as Rochester's mistress, an instrument for the satisfaction of his baser desires, she fears that, without St. John's love, she would become merely his instrument in turn, rather than his equal" (208). When she rejects St. John, she also rejects the institution of organized religion that he represents; after all, he claims that by rejecting him, she is rejecting God (Brontë 325-353). As Owsley suggests that "[b]y eliminating Jane's financial need, Charlotte is able to create a female character whose personal enterprise is translated into consummate awareness of identity, romantic agency and literary autonomy" (55). She is now an independent woman. Jane has rejected the social institutions of the patriarchal family, education, and religion, and is now on her way to being a fully realized individual. She has independence.

Jane's rejection of St. John is her strongest struggle against hegemony, and she confronts the ideological state apparatuses of the patriarchal family and organized religion as represented by the clergyman. Jane almost falls victim to interpellation by religion and the patriarchal

household, but she takes back her independence in forming a new consciousness with the help of her bonds with women. After rejecting St. John, Jane hears a voice in the distance, calling her name: "The one candle was dying out; the room was full of moonlight. My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities…I saw nothing: but I heard a voice somewhere cry—"Jane! Jane! Jane!" nothing more" (Brontë 357). It is here that Jane decides to return to Rochester; she feels it in her soul that it is time. Once again, the moon reflects Jane's experiences. Here, the moon fills the room, just like the feelings she has hearing Rochester call out her voice. Rejecting St. John and returning to Rochester, choices made by her own free will, have allowed Jane to form a "counter-hegemony," as Williams called it, in following her own desire (112-113). The moon serves as a guiding point, solidifying her decision to seek out Rochester by becoming a surrogate mother-figure in her community.

Jane resists interpellation in creating an "alternate hegemonic" community, as Williams would call it, in her relationship with Rochester (112-113). By returning to Thornfield, Jane chooses to resume her relationship, this time on her terms. When Jane returns, she discovers the mansion in ruins. She learns that Bertha had set a fire, and Rochester has become severely injured when trying to save her. Bertha has died, and Rochester has moved into Ferndean.[35] In learning what has happened to Rochester, Jane reverts back to her storytelling as a way to share her feelings on the matter. Jane, the narrator, addresses the reader once again, when she sees him for the first time since leaving: "And, reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity?—if you do, you little know me" (Brontë 367). As Bodenheimer asserts, "[w]hat Brontë is interested in dramatizing in the last scenes is not that Jane has the power, but how she is to use it. And the power she takes to 'rehumanize' and 'rekindle' is defined precisely as the power of storytelling"

(103). Brontë's storytelling, like Jane's, is a form of creative practice that suggests new forms of relationships like Jane's with Rochester (Williams 212). Rochester and Jane are on equal footing now. No longer is one wealthy and one poor, or one an employer and one an employee. Instead, they are of equal status, not only in society's eyes, but in God's as well, as Jane asserts. Jane is no longer an ostracized, young orphan. Instead, she is the daughter of God and nature, a fully self-actualized person. The narrator ends the story with "Reader, I married him" (Brontë 382). She resists interpellation through her exertion of a "new consciousness through new relationships" (212) as Williams claims, allowing her to form a "counter-hegemony" or "alternative hegemony" with Rochester (112-113). Instead of a relationship of oppressor and oppressed, like the hegemonic one St. John had proposed, Rochester's and Jane's relationship is interdependent and mutually satisfying, for as Jane tells the reader, "I am my husband's life as fully has he is mine" (Brontë 384). Brontë ends the novel with marriage, not because it was expected of her to do so, but as a way to show Jane's formation of a new consciousness and a non-patriarchal concept of marriage between equals.

By engaging in a process that mirrors Williams's concept of "creative practice" and thereby rejecting the ideological state apparatuses of the patriarchal family, education, and organized religion, Jane enacts an "active struggle for new consciousness through new relationships" (212). It is when Jane turns toward nature, forms subversive communities with women, and takes control of her life through her storytelling that Jane is able to push the boundaries of what was expected of a woman of the mid-nineteenth century. In resisting interpellation and creating, what Williams calls "counter-hegemonies" or "alternative hegemonies," Jane becomes the fully actualized individual she was always meant to be (112-113). Brontë allows Jane to overcome and reject the repressive social apparatuses of the

patriarchal family, education, and organized religion, in order to become a fully realized, independent woman. By looking at *Jane Eyre* through the societal expectations of the time, Brontë's social criticisms take on a new meaning. As Williams asserts, writing itself is often a new articulation and new formations of a "creative practice" that entails "not casting off an ideology or learning phases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships" (212). In the novel, Brontë represents how one might confront hegemonic cultural forces in the fiber of the self. Brontë does this by writing the novel and by having Jane narrate her story to the readers, initiating a struggle against interpellation by hegemonic institutions like the patriarchal household, the educational system, and organized religion. Not only are the criticisms targeted at an oppressive culture, but through the character of Jane, women can see that it is possible to resist interpellation even though they live in a patriarchal society.

CONCLUSION

Scholars and readers alike have been fascinated with these novels since their publications in the nineteenth century. Much scholarship has been written concerning the marriage of the focal characters in *Pride and Prejudice* as well as Jane's marriage to Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. The subject of marriage and class often come into play in discussions about these novels, but there is a surprising lack of commentary in connection with the educational systems at the time, especially when it comes to Austen's work. In using theory from Althusser and Williams to illuminate the critique of ideology presented in Brontë's novel, I hope to expand upon the work of Poovey, who expanded upon Gilbert and Gubar. By bringing the focus of my research to the social institutions, such as education, marriage, the family, and religion, and by showcasing each author's unique approach to each, I hope to bring a new perspective to the field of Georgian and Victorian literature.

NOTES

[1] Most notable is the chapter "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed," which focuses on the education women receive as well as how society views their intellect. After asking why women should stay ignorant, Wollstonecraft claims that women learn from their mothers "that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, OUTWARD obedience, and a scrupulous attention to puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man" (27). In other words, women act inferior to men to gain security. This has been ingrained into their very being from the time they were born. Wollstonecraft finds this very idea insulting, and she calls out both men and women who support this practice (27). She goes on to claim that this promotion of innocence is, in reality, a promotion of the ignorance of women, and it is a weakness (Wollstonecraft 27).

[2] Being accomplished meant being able to dance, sing, play an instrument, draw, paint, speak different languages, such as French, craft such as needlepoint, write letters, and read and discuss the "belle-lettres" and "books of the day" (Kelly 257). Being accomplished "enabled marriageable and married women to display [their] cultural distinction" (Kelly 257).

[3] Emily Auerbach in her book, *Searching for Jane Austen,* claims that Jane is a character that has been encountered in literature before (146).

[4] The money that both Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy receive a year is called a "living," which is money received or inherited over time (Newton 56).

[5] Education during Austen's time was "a process of socialisation and acculturation based on moral self-discipline and designed to fit the individual for a range of related roles in life, according to sex and rank" (Kelly 252).

[6] Mary Poovey looks at Miss Bingley in relation to how she views Elizabeth, claiming that "Miss Bingley despises Elizabeth for what she calls 'conceited independence' simply enhances our sympathy for conceit and independence, if these are the traits Elizabeth embodies" (195).

[7] Theresa Braunscheinder argues that "coquette discourse in this period function not only as a means of defining and interrogating standards of female virtue but also as a signifier of the newness of a series of social relations, practices, and experiences" (31). This influences the "creating [of] a cultural common sense about women, courtship, marriage, education, consumerism, travel, urban life, and the relations amongst all of these" (Braunschneider 31).

[8] Aleksondra Hultquist's definition is influenced by Braunschneider's book *Our Coquettes*.

[9] A woman lacking accomplishments may have been referred to as noticeable, meaning "a woman who knew little than domestic economy and was consequently incapable of cultivated socialising" (Kelly 257-258). Mrs. Bennet is considered noticeable, rather than accomplished (Austen 112).

[10] Part of the pushback is contributed to the rise of the middle class. P. J. Miller claims that the painfully slow development in England of a national system of education and the even slower integration within it of girls' schools may have been due "to the stratification of schools and the education they provided along the lines of social class" (314).

[11] Hannah More's *Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Ladies* (1771) focuses on the ways women should behave. The chapter, "Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters," addresses the shortcomings of the current

system of education and how it should be reformed. Her views on education are from a moralistic standpoint.

[12] Johnson claims that a "woman's education, their manners, their modesty, their reading, their opinions about personal happiness, their power of choice in matrimony, and their expectations from married life were all matters of increasingly anxious public concern" (2-3).

[13] Horwitz addresses the fact that "[l]earned ladies who exhibited their knowledge were made to appear unnatural and therefore ridiculous" (137). She argues that this is why Mary Bennet sounds ridiculous when trying to comfort her sisters after the disappearance of Lydia (Horwitz 139). Further, she claims "Jane Austen laughs at her because she is not a knowledgeable person; she is merely a foolish girl who has memorized a stock of quotations" (Horwitz 141).

[14] Auerbach claims that "Austen reinforces our perceptions of Elizabeth and Darcy as equals by giving them matching amounts of speaking time" (156).

[15] Hannah More in particular stresses "[t]hat bold, independent, enterprising spirit, which is so admired in boys, should not, when it happens to discover itself in the other sex, be encouraged, but suppressed" (48). Elizabeth does not suppress her personality in the slightest. More goes on to claim that "[g]irls should be taught to give up their opinions betimes, and not pertinaciously to carry on dispute, even if they know themselves to be right" (48-49). Elizabeth does not keep her opinions nor does she back away from a dispute. More would not have liked Elizabeth Bennet.

[16] Horwitz claims that "Jane Austen believed that self-knowledge rather than good nature is the most important goal of women's education" (143). However, I disagree; I believe it is

more than self-knowledge, but knowledge in general rather than the innocence and purity so heavily stressed in Regency ideology.

[17] Wollstonecraft believes that the reason that women are not led to apply their intellect is because it would "end blind obedience" (32).

[18] Gilbert and Gubar argue in their essay that "the repressive implications of the story [Austen] tells—a story, invariably, of the need for women to renounce their claims to stories of their own—paradoxically allow her to escape the imprisonment she defines and defends in her heroines' fate" (154). Concerning *Pride and Prejudice*, they claim that the novel "continues to associate the perils of the imagination with the pitfalls of selfhood, sexuality, and assertion" (Gilbert and Gubar 157).

[19] Greenfield and Troost claim in their article that "the centrality of comic portraits rules reactions to Austen because nineteenth-century readers, both early and late, were primed to admire such. In contrast, we nowadays tend to center on the romantic plots—*Pride and Prejudice* is the story of Lizzy and Darcy…" (9).

[20] Wollstonecraft claimed that "[f]ondness is a poor substitute for friendship!" (36). Friendship can only be between equals, and Wollstonecraft finds it baffling that women would be satisfied to settle for fondness from a husband or the men in their lives, over a lasting friendship (36). Mrs. Bennet does not even seem to have fondness from her husband, let alone anything more substantial like friendship. Austen seems to slip her into this second-class role as a way of showing the pitfalls of this sort of relationship.

[21] Barbara Horwitz pulls from Mary Wollstonecraft's idea of redeeming the fallen women, claiming that she "lamented the fact that young women who misbehaved sexually were

ostracized for life because of one misstep that they were probably lured into making by some unscrupulous villain" and she "advocated for the social rehabilitation of these girls" (138-139).

[22] Wollstonecraft believed that "men ought to maintain the women whom they have seduced; this would be one means of reforming female manner, and stopping an abuse that has an equally fatal effect on population and morals. Another, no less obvious, would be to turn the attention of women to the real virtue of chastity; for to little respect has that woman a claim, on the score of modesty, though her reputation may be white as snow, who smiles on the libertine whilst she spurns the victims of his lawless appetites and their own folly" (138-139).

[23] Ellen Jordan argues that it is the current gender ideologies that caused the continued separation of roles, and she cites Foucault's "discourse constellation," for "women who espoused [this ideology], of easing a personal tension between early socialization into a deeper femininity and more mature aspirations toward personal autonomy" (442). Jordan defines femininity as "having a supportive function in establishing [a man's] identity as subject" (443).

[24] Johnson points out that even though Elizabeth violates many rules of propriety, she is still a well-liked character (76).

[25] Mary Robinson was a feminist advocate and writer who wrote shortly after Mary Wollstonecraft. Her *A Letter to the Women of England* asserts that women deserved an education equal to men because they are equal. She wanted a university for women.

[26] Toran explains that "in terms of purchasing power he was a millionaire, in terms of the prestige Mr. Darcy held in British society he would have been a billionaire" (6).

[27] In "The Subject and Power," Foucault explains that "[p]ower is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar they are free" and that there is an innate will to overcome this

(790). Jane has an unshakable will that is seen throughout the course of the novel, and it allows her to succeed in her journey towards new consciousness, as well as in her creating of an equal partnership with Rochester.

[28] "Hegemony," as Williams defines it, is a "whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living…It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (110). While "[i]t has continually to be renewed, recreated, and modified," as Williams continues, "[i]t is also continually resisted, limited, altered, [and] challenged" (112). This resistance to, and alteration of "hegemony," is known as a "counter-hegemony," which is what can be seen through Jane's pushback over the course of the novel (Williams 113).

[29] This is pulled from Simone De Beauvoir's definition in *The Second Sex*.

[30] In her article, Gilbert looks at the connection between Brontë's being a governess and her writing. She pulls this from Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and focuses primarily on the Brontë sisters, Anne and Charlotte (Gilbert 456). Gilbert looks at the social problems surrounding governesses, such as the governess marrying her employer and climbing the social ladder (459) or writing about her employers (458). This leads Gilbert to look into the writing of governesses.

[31] Virginia Woolf critiques Charlotte Brontë's anger while also praising Jane Austen's lack of self-consciousness and lack of anger; Woolf argues there is a separation between the author and the story which she finds lacking in Brontë's work (73-75).

[32] This comes from De Beauvoir's idea of the independent woman. While her ideas may have been formed about 100 years after *Jane Eyre*, many of the same qualities and critiques of a

woman in western society can still be applied. De Beauvoir claims that a woman can be independent when she has "gainful employment" (679), she is productive (680), and a "means of economic and social autonomy" (681). Throughout the course of the novel, Jane reaches each one of these milestones in her journey towards agency.

[33] Spivak argues that "Bertha Mason [is] a figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism. Through Bertha Mason, the white Jamaican Creole, Brontë renders the human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminant, so that a good greater than the letter of the Law can be broached" (240). While harsh, Spivak does bring forth a conclusion as to the harsh treatment of Betha. It shows that Brontë was struggling against the dominant ideology of imperialist thought and British superiority.

[34] In the chapter, "The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman," Showalter focuses on insanity in women in the Victorian era. When it comes to women's views and interpretations of the insanity in women, first-hand encounters in the form of memoirs and fiction are what we have to go on (Showalter 61). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is one such example; "[h]er work shows an evolution from Romantic stereotypes of female insanity to a brilliant interrogation of the meaning of madness in women's daily lives" (Showalter 66). Bertha is the main focal point of this madness in the novel. She seems to be the victim of "maternal heredity," which is "linked to female sexuality and the periodicity of the menstrual cycle" (Showalter 67). Brontë's portrayal of Bertha's violence and regression influenced her readers, including psychiatrists and their medical accounts of female insanity (Showalter 68).

[35] Showalter claims that while some feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar view Bertha as acting for Jane and as a parallel, she argues that Jane never finds "kinship with the confined

and monstrous double, and that Brontë has no sympathy for the mad creature," for "[b]efore Jane Eyre can reach her happy ending, the madwoman must be purged from the plot, and passion must be purged from Jane herself" (68-69). While it is problematic that Brontë chooses the route, the demise of Bertha feels more like a plot device, rather than commentary on female madness or colonialism.

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