

**THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S
"JANE EYRE" AND JANE AUSTEN'S "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE"**

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Abstract

Multiple marriage proposals in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre are the focus of this article. I'll demonstrate how the narrative structures of Austen's and Brontë's works are fundamentally shaped by the inclusion of two proposals, one from Darcy and the other from Rochester. In order to illustrate when a proposal should be accepted, I will look at how Austen and Brontë present their heroines with multiple proposals. Through discussions with a number of literary experts who study Austen and Brontë, this thesis will place Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre's decisions in context. The first chapter will analyze Darcy and Elizabeth's evolving relationship and discuss Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. The second chapter will look at Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë and how her personal journey connects to her relationship with Rochester. I'll also look at how each author illustrates how gender norms and stereotypes can be detrimental to both one's personal growth and the stability of a relationship.

Keywords: *nineteenth-century feminism, women, marriage, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë.*

Introduction

Among the most influential female writers of the nineteenth century were Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. As a result, a lot of Victorian readers and critics made parallels between the two writers. That being said, there is no proof that Austen and Brontë thought highly of one another's writing. Naturally, Austen died before Jane Eyre was released, and Brontë gave Austen's books little thought. In a correspondence with one of Brontë's admirers, H Lewes, penned, "I am puzzled on that point: why do you like Austen so very much?" (The Letters of Charlotte Brontë 10). Despite Brontë's lackluster reaction to Austen, there are parallels between the two writers' works. Particularly Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë and Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

have a romantic plot that is strikingly similar. Both writers make use of Elsie B. "The story of a hero positioned between a wealthy, materialistic, status-conscious woman who would enhance his social prestige and a poorer, more altruistic, and psychologically independent woman, who is the antipode of her rich rival," is what Michie describes as one of the most prevalent marriage plots in nineteenth-century English literature. The compelled confinement to the institution of marriage that most women of the time experienced probably piqued Austen and Brontë's interest in this storyline.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Austen and Brontë put their main characters, Jane Eyre and Elizabeth Bennet, in the same precarious situations that many women of their age do in order to confront these injustices. This enables the writers to critique these problems and advance the ideals and morals they believed women needed to uphold in order to lead fulfilling lives, in addition to portraying the challenges women faced and the limited options available to them. What unites Elizabeth and Jane goes beyond the challenges they face to include the opportunities that come their way. Elizabeth and Jane are lower-class women who depend on marriage for stability and financial security, but they both initially turn down suitable men who could give them that stability. Strangely enough, though, they eventually turn to and accept these same men. Even though they eventually came to accept these men, it was risky for them to reject them at first because they thought it would officially bar them from marrying these specific men. By depicting this kind of situation, Austen and Brontë invite their readers to ponder a crucial question: What are the proper conditions for a woman to marry under? But just because Austen and Brontë address the same issue doesn't mean that they come to the same conclusion. Although marriage does not play a major role in the plot of Jane Eyre until much later in the book, it is nevertheless important to Jane's journey and to Brontë's message. Like Elizabeth, Jane does not think that marriage should be entered into solely for practical reasons, as she makes clear when she turns down St. John. But when she finds out the truth about his previous marriage to Bertha Mason, she rejects not only him but also the man she loves, Rochester. Jane is tempted to stay with him, but she decides to leave Thornfield and reject Rochester because of her Christian values. "In Jane Eyre's understanding, love is pure [and] divine," writes Gao ("Feminism in Jane Eyre" 930). She cannot, therefore, continue her relationship with Rochester because it would be neither divine nor pure. While both Brontë and Austen examine practical and romantic marriage, Brontë addresses morality, a subject that Austen largely ignores. Furthermore, even though both authors place a strong emphasis on the growth and self-actualization of their female protagonists, Brontë implies that a woman's personal fulfillment is just as significant as finding the perfect husband by limiting the marriage plot to specific moments in her texts rather than having it drive the overall story. In light of these concerns, this thesis

examines the thematic significance of the multiple marriage proposals used by Brontë and Austen in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*, respectively. This progression is essential to the story structure of Austen's and Brontë's works because it occurs when both Darcy and Rochester make two separate proposals to their intended wives, each of whom is initially rejected and then accepted. Moreover, the heroines' initial denials and eventual acceptances are politically significant because they convey something about nineteenth-century female independence and marriage as represented by Austen and Brontë. If Elizabeth or Jane had said yes to the first proposal, she would have agreed to enter into a marriage that required her to give up her independence and uniqueness as well as go against her morals. The authors explore the appropriate time to accept a proposal by giving heroines hesitant answers to marriage proposals. They also illustrate the situations in which accepting a proposal, no matter how alluring it may be disastrous. For example, it appears that both Austen and Brontë believe that men need to set aside their pride and snobbery in order to prove themselves worthy of wives, and that women should develop their morality and individuality before getting married. Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* examine nineteenth-century marriage, with a particular focus on how it affected women living in patriarchal societies. Additionally, they take into account the ways that conventional gender norms and stereotypes may contribute to issues with identity and the self in addition to troublesome relationships. Both novels show, as I have argued, how traditional forms of masculinity and female independence cannot coexist in a healthy relationship through their strong protagonists and their problematic male characters, at least occasionally. Furthermore, by outlining various marriage proposals, both writers illustrate what they believe to be the proper and prerequisite conditions for a woman to get married. They make one thing very clear: love and compatibility should take precedence over money considerations, even in a time when a woman's financial and personal security depended on marrying well. It's true that *Jane Eyre* and Elizabeth Bennet both initially turn down marriage proposals on the grounds that they don't love and respect the man enough. Both of the protagonists ultimately decide to marry men they love and who are financially stable enough to support them, despite the fact that these writers prioritize love and compatibility above all else. This is because they were acutely aware of the financial risks that single women faced. Therefore, while Austen and Brontë emphasize love in their ideal marriage, they also recognize the significance of financial considerations. Additionally, both authors show that respect and equality between spouses are necessary for an ideal marriage, as well as the preservation of a woman's independence. Despite their similarities, Austen and Brontë come to somewhat different conclusions about these issues. Although both writers categorically reject examples of "flawed" masculinity, they take distinct stances on the subject. Austen emphasizes the importance of equality and respect between spouses, and she

does so by showing Darcy's development over the course of the book. At first, Darcy is a haughty, conceited man who despises people from lower social classes. He realizes his shortcomings and decides to alter his character as a result of Elizabeth's rejection and criticism of him. Darcy grows because of Elizabeth's rejection, but he also actively and voluntarily changes. He gives up his conceit and haughtiness along with the conventional and faulty aspects of his previous masculinity. With Rochester, this isn't the situation. Jane seems to think little of him after his first proposal, as evidenced by the times he turns down her repeated requests that he stop buying her jewelry. Although Darcy chooses to evolve, Rochester is compelled to do so.

The fire at Thornfield, which renders him blind and disabled, compels him to give up his conceit and haughtiness, and one wonders if he would have made that transition on his own. Brontë emphasizes the independence of women, whereas Austen would emphasize respect, equality, and the significance of a "ideal" masculinity. In fact, a lot of Jane Eyre's story revolves around Jane's quest for independence; unlike Elizabeth, who marries to guarantee her financial security, Jane attains economic independence before agreeing to marry Rochester. The novel's ending has caused some feminist scholars to object, even though it appears to have progressive elements. They contend that although the novel follows Jane's arduous path toward independence, it concludes with her marriage to Rochester and the suggestion that she will care for him until the end of time.

Conclusion

Pride and Prejudice and Jane Eyre use multiple proposals for a variety of reasons. Using this strategy, the writers are able to make the case that marriage should be founded on compatibility and love, not just a means of securing a woman's social standing or financial future. In order to show which specific elements each author believes are required to create the ideal marriage and the ideal man, it also enables each author to outline a trajectory from the first, rejected proposal to the last, accepted one. Finally, it enables female protagonists to reach a point of self-awareness and independence, enabling them to marry on an equal footing. Though they do so in different ways, Austen and Brontë demonstrate that love, equality, and female independence are prerequisites for a happy and fulfilling marriage.

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