

THE ROMANCE OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN AUSTEN AND GASKELL

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

English

August 2014

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to start by thanking Dr. Melissa Jenkins for her tremendous help throughout this process. Her support, extensive knowledge, countless read-throughs, and confidence in my abilities greatly contributed to the success of this project, and I cannot imagine having undertaken it with any other advisor. I would also like to thank Drs. Jessica Richard and Claudia Kairoff for their helpful suggestions in editing and revising this project. I thank Ms. Sheila White and Ms. Peggy Barrett for all the work they do administratively to keep their offices running and providing help to students like me who would be lost without them. Finally, it goes without saying (but I'll say it anyway) that I greatly appreciate all my family and friends, most specifically my parents, who have put up with late night, early morning, and mid-afternoon phone calls merely to listen to conclusion paragraphs or try to help me remember certain words that a second-year English Master's student should not forget, and to my best friend and life cheerleader Rachel Ford for her steadfast faith in me and her promises to help me celebrate once I succeeded.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Letters, Gaskell or Austen</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Mansfield Park</i>	<i>MP</i>
<i>North and South</i>	<i>NS</i>
<i>Northanger Abbey</i>	<i>NA</i>
<i>Plan of a Novel</i>	<i>Plan</i>
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	<i>PP</i>

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to investigate the use of the classical and modern romance plots and their interactions with the social problem-novel plots in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. After a discussion of classical romance conventions in the first chapter, I will employ a close reading of *Pride and Prejudice* to show how it both fulfills and subverts romantic conventions, arguing that Austen's unique romance structure allowed for the beginnings of social problem-novels. The second chapter will analyze *North and South* as a modern romance and then address the novel's romantic resolution not as a way to distract the reader from a lack of social resolution but instead to demonstrate a model for social resolution. Overall, I will argue that both works achieve their social commentary by simultaneously adhering to certain elements of the classical romance and distancing their works from others, creating the hybridization of the romance and social problem-novel plots.

INTRODUCTION

From epic poems of knights and courtly love to modern crime-fighting hybrids, the romance has captivated audiences for centuries. It has, of course, featured many evolutions. From its original form of strictly highborn, if not outright royal, characters featuring traits either good or bad with no gray area, throughout the years its characters slowly became more varied in class and more morally flexible. Instead of dragon-slaying and fantastic journeys, the central action became focused on everyday life experiences in drawing rooms, chance encounters in social settings, and even business meetings. The supernatural presence of magic, sorcery, and miracle slowly faded from the forefront of the tale, becoming merely a vehicle for effecting the lovers' happy ending or being slipped into the background as coincidence. Over the course of centuries, various adaptations and evolutions of the romance as well as the additions and hybridization of the plot with other genres (crime, science fiction, and historical fiction to name a few) have made its more modern productions virtually unrecognizable from its original genre.

One of the authors responsible for the evolution of the romance is Jane Austen. Her novels distanced the romance plot from its original form in a way that paved the way for the realist novel, but they also retained enough of the classical romantic conventions to lay the foundation for the coming Harlequin romance, as well. Her love stories and witticisms have won the hearts of scholars and airport romance readers alike ever since her original publication of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811. Soldiers in WWI even requested *Pride and Prejudice* be sent to them in dug-outs and foxholes, clinging to Austen's

most beloved and popular work as a lifeline (Goodman). She has inspired adaptation after adaptation, reaching today into the playfully irreverent *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and the YouTube series “The Lizzie Bennet Diaries.” She has fascinated Hollywood, both with her works and in “biographical” ventures.¹ She has also inspired multiple retellings, ranging from a somewhat smutty, sex-based modern tale of love and lust between a lawyer and a judge to a metafictional tale set in modern Wales with the gender roles reversed².

This trend of rewriting (or at the very least heavily incorporating) *Pride and Prejudice* started long before the twenty-first century. One of the earliest such attempts to include the storyline was Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*. The similarities go beyond a simple titular sequence pattern. Nils Clausson, Janine Barchas, and Valerie Wainwright have all at least mentioned the parallels between the romance plots in the two. Clausson outlines Gaskell’s adherence to romance conventions and Barchas makes an argument for *Pride and Prejudice*’s central protagonists’ genders being flipped in Gaskell’s industrial Milton. Alongside questions of *how* Gaskell chose to imitate and adapt *Pride and Prejudice* are questions of *why* she chose to incorporate Austen’s masterpiece in her work. When *North and South* was published in Dickens’ *Household Words* from 1854-1855, Gaskell was a known and admired author, having written three novels and other shorter works of fiction before its publication. *Mary Barton*, her first published novel, had a similar focus on the costs of industrialization, featured an attention

¹ The factual basis for *Becoming Jane* is fictional. However, the fact remains that audiences are intrigued and invested in any representation of Austen, whether a fictional representation of her life or a new adaptation of her works.

² Sara Angelini’s *The Trials of the Honorable F. Darcy* (2009) and Kate Fenton’s *Vanity and Vexation* (2005), respectively.

to the conditions of factory workers in Industrial England, just as *North and South* does, and was certainly a success – why, then, the publication of *North and South* with its Austenian romance plot to complicate the issues of laborers' rights? It is my belief that Gaskell recognized the possibilities in Austen's unique blend of narrative realism and traditional romance as a new method for discussing current social problems.

The scope of this project is to determine the significance of the romance plot's utilization in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Gaskell's *North and South*. My decision to focus on these two novels specifically is threefold. Firstly and most simply, the most significant and intriguing similarities between the two authors' works are present in these two particularly. Secondly, although Austen's concern with societal injustices is most obvious in *Persuasion*'s depiction of Anne Elliot's friendship with the unfortunate Mrs. Smith, *Pride and Prejudice* is Austen's most studied and acclaimed work; therefore, the presence of questions of political issues within the earlier novel speaks to an overarching concern present throughout her entire body of work. Thirdly, while *North and South* is far from Gaskell's paramount work, it is the work that focuses most directly on romantic conventions in both the classic and modern senses, which leads to an investigation of why these conventions are so present in a novel also rife with societal tragedy and death. To begin with, I will outline a brief context of Austen's literary existence, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century opinions regarding the evolving status of the novel as a genre, and the functions of the classical romance Austen revolutionized in her comedies of manners. Then I will examine *Pride and Prejudice* as an example of how Austen has distorted the standards of the classical romance in a way that allows for a subtle social commentary on the inappropriateness of the entail system and the importance of accurate perception for

moral agency; in other words, I will demonstrate that Austen's most beloved romance hides elements of a mind shrewdly interested in questions of human rights and not merely novels of manners. After this, I shall discuss the implications of Gaskell's choice to incorporate the romance plot from *Pride and Prejudice* in her creation of *North and South*. Some research has been done into this, most notably Clausson and Barchas' articles investigating the link between romance plots. Finally, I shall outline the implications of adapting the romance, what such adaptation has to offer or detract from discussions of social problems.

My first chapter will discuss *Pride and Prejudice*'s romance in order to draw attention to Austen's markedly business-like approach to themes of love. First, I will briefly outline the history of the romance and then the novel's history as it emerged as an acceptable medium of study along with some of its criticism (namely Wordsworth's criticism of frantic novels during Austen's time and Eliot's criticism of "silly novels" as a contemporary of Gaskell as examples of the indictments present against novels and novel writers). Then I will turn to a discussion of Austen's subversion of the classical romance plot. Following this, I will examine various plot elements, language, and narrative that all indicate Austen's association of the "pure" aspect of love with a capitalist marketplace. This chapter will conclude with an argument that the mutual consumption of both man and woman in *Pride and Prejudice*'s many examples of lovers serves to communicate Austen's belief that a good romance must feature a simultaneous submission and a consequent equalization of its partners, serving as a social critique along the same lines as Gas-

kell's portrayal of both Higgins and Mr. Thornton each submitting (ever so slightly) to the other in order to have a fulfilling business partnership in *North and South*.

My next chapter will focus on *North and South*. The crux of this chapter will rest on my demonstration of Gaskell's utilization of the modern romance functions established by Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance* to further both the romance and, more significantly, the social problem aspects of her novel. I will further argue that Gaskell's inclusion of lower class characters such as Higgins and Boucher marks a further remove from the classical romance genre than that Austen created in *Pride and Prejudice* and draw attention to the application of the modern romance functions to the same-sex friendship between Mr. Thornton and Higgins. Finally, I will outline how the standards of the modern romantic resolution are necessary in *North and South* for the resolution of its social concerns instead of merely required for Margaret Hale and John Thornton's happily ever after.

In my conclusion, I will discuss the implications of Austen and Gaskell's decision to use romance to display or complicate their social concerns. I will here note the importance of chance to the classical romance as outlined by Jessica Richard in *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* as well as the importance of chance in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South*. Finally, I will acknowledge the problems encountered by the distortion of romantic conventions as well as by their application to concerns typically outside their subject matter. However, it is my belief that Austen and Gaskell's use of romance functions to discuss issues of social concern results in an overall more complex and complicated understanding of each author's work. By outlining this, I hope to encourage looking at romance plots from a different perspective.

Instead of questions regarding romantic integrity, we can and *should* read romances as indicative of larger, social concerns.

CHAPTER ONE

Unconventional Romance: Austen's Social Commentary

*She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion on matrimony was not exactly like her own,
but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action,
she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.*
- Jane Austen³

Austen's heroines succeed not because of social factors but in spite of them.
- Michael Suk-Young Chwe⁴

Literary criticism tends to focus on works that defy convention; academia is more interested, it seems, in the fact that Chaucer displays techniques and motifs popular in centuries after he was composing than in the aspects of his work that *are* in keeping with his time and medium. This is an understandable trend, as we like to think the enlightened mind craves the challenge of discerning unique characteristics, finding the element that stands out, just as much as it delights in finding order in chaos.⁵ What I find most interesting about *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South*, however, is the fact that both works simultaneously conform to and circumvent the conventions of the romance plot.

It is important to note, of course, that when I am speaking of the romance plot, I am *not* referencing a historical, mediaeval romance or a romance as a historical genre, but as the more modern sense of Nora Roberts and Lisa Jackson novels lining the shelves at Barnes and Noble. Neither Austen nor Gaskell wrote novels concerning knights or chiv-

³ *Pride and Prejudice*, 85.

⁴ *Jane Austen, Game Theorist*, 5.

⁵ Or, perhaps, maybe modern literary critics have fallen victim to the dangers of too many *Where's Waldo?* books while children.

alry (though both *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South* discuss the proper behavior of men). Nor do they write novels of sentimentality that were very popular during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Austen in fact critiques such sentimentality in *Sense and Sensibility* with her portrayal of the overly sensitive Marianne Dashwood);⁶ neither of the works I examine in this study exhibit the standard tendencies of sensationalist fictions (or, at least, not to the extremes which such fictions would normally depict). Rather, Gaskell and Austen have created romances in the more modern sense, stories of love gone awry and then tied up neatly in the couple's return to each other at the novel's conclusion.⁷ This more modern romance, however, has its ties to previous understandings of *the* romance. Knights and courtly love may not appear in texts, per se, but they do rather symbolically show up in various works: the hero is always compared to a less worthy man and respected for many chivalric ideals (respect, loyalty, honesty, strength of resolve and character, etc.), and the love shared between hero and heroine is always portrayed as something *more* than mere physical attraction and lust, or even a commonplace connection – they are *drawn* to each other, unable to escape the magnetic pull, in some cases destined or fated to come together. Austen and Gaskell's novels feature these traits, as well, though less blatantly than the medieval romance and less tawdrily than its modern progeny. The romance of sensibility in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

⁶ Though, as Stephen Ahern points out in *Affected Sensibilities*, sensibility and sentimentalism are two distinct concepts; sensibility was the first to enter society and merely indicated that a person was capable of proper feeling, or “a term to connote self-consciousness and self-awareness” (Ahern 16, quoting G. S. Rousseau's “Nerves, Spirits and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility”), and sentimentalism was an extreme of this, being far *too* affected by stimuli to the point of excess. From this distinction, we can argue that Marianne, rather than suffering from sensibility, instead was a victim of her own sentimentality, and that every Austen heroine, whenever she encounters a moment of reflection invariably resulting in a more accurate self-awareness, engages in moments of true, unexaggerated sensibility.

⁷ This is not intended to paint Austen as writing in the style of modern romances; rather, modern romances have developed their style upon her example. If Austen and *Pride and Prejudice* are indeed the foundations of the modern romance, as *Dangerous Men* would have us believe, then Austen is more the cornerstone of modern romance than anticipatory of it.

also appears in the modern romance in that modern romances are populated with central “good guys,” whether male or female, who must either already possess the ability to respond properly to various provocations or must learn as part of their development through the plotline to do so. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we see this aspect of the romance in Elizabeth’s reflections, and in *North and South*, such a moment comes when Margaret Hale must come to terms with the fact that she may have misjudged the quality of man she has rejected in Mr. Thornton after his proposal.

The central issue of the romance is, quite simply, love. Certainly there are other elements: modern Harlequins have ranged from bloodthirsty, lustful pirate adventures to modern business tales of corporate and physical takeovers, but at their core, every romance features a similar tale of boy meets girl, complications, and happily ever after following the resolution of those complications. Austen and Gaskell are no different. I am convinced, after conducting research for this study, that they chose to write romances because they recognized within the romance plot something *beyond* the romance plot, something *more* than boy meets girl, complications, and happily ever after, something that their predecessors, contemporaries, and even successors all failed to acknowledge, that of the application of the principles of the romance to questions of how to resolve conflict both in private and public spheres.

To fully appreciate this, we must examine the evolution of the novel. In Regency England, the novel was a questionable art form, providing entertainment but not fully acknowledged as a literary accomplishment. We see Austen’s famous defense of the novel in *Northanger Abbey*:

I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemp-

tuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding—joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works... Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us [novel-writers] not desert each other; we are an injured body... Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world...there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them... [The novel is] only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.

Austen *NA* 22-23

This polemic turned rallying battle cry addresses the anti-novel attitude of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Wordsworth in his “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” claims that novels are to blame for the “blunting” of the human mind’s ability to perceive the beauty he strives to communicate in his poems: “The invaluable works of our elder writers...are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse,” he claims (Wordsworth). I suppose novel-writers can take solace in the fact that they are not, according to Wordsworth, solely responsible for the inability of the modern man to appreciate the beauty of a well-written, poem, but it is impossible to separate them from the lessened appreciation of Milton and Shakespeare as artists capable of conveying moral lessons to their society. It is worth noting, of course, that Wordsworth’s critique is of “frantic novels,” primarily gothic novels, not of novels in general (Page 33). These gothic novels are the same Aus-

ten satirized in *Northanger Abbey*, indicating that Austen saw similar problems in this genre of fiction.⁸

This critique of novels lasted beyond Austen's time and into Gaskell's. George Eliot, before turning her own skills to writing novels, also cried out against the indignity of specifically female novel-writers in her essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." She, unlike Wordsworth, did not view the novel itself as a lesser art form, something to detract from the seriousness of artistic creation, but she *did* lament the effect of the multitude of lady novelists' productions. In her essay, she outlines the plotlines for the most stereotypical works by women writers of the time, pointing out their flaws and ridiculing the stock image her contemporaries seemed to hold in mind when imagining the longsuffering lady novelist writing for her keep. She complains that women novelists in particular featured a highly narrow range of topics, had mediocre writing ability, and contained depressingly traditional philosophical and moral messages.⁹ She does admit that not *all* female novelists deserve her reproach, but that the majority of the most critically celebrated do not deserve the attention they receive and that those whose works *do* merit praise and accolades receive little to no notice: "Harriet Martineau, Currer Bell, and Mrs. Gaskell have been treated as cavalierly as if they had been men," she says (Eliot 322)¹⁰. This comment, of course, spares Gaskell from Eliot's criticism, but still maintains that most, if

⁸ Robert Hopkins' "General Tilney and Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of *Northanger Abbey*" presents an interestingly complication of Austen's satire. Instead of a simple critique of the genre, he points out elements of the plotline that follow a more realistic gothic than the fantasy-filled tales of Austen's contemporaries, as well as highlighting contemporaneous historical occurrences that would have been worthy of a gothic excitement.

⁹ By "depressingly traditional," I mean an analysis of a social situation that allows for no other interpretation than the predominant, well-established moral school of thought present at the time of its production.

¹⁰ I also think this phrasing is deserving of more attention, that Eliot's worthy female authors are treated "as if they had been *men*," but that's an entirely different study, much as I would love to address it in more detail.

not all, female novelists were guilty of the crimes Eliot outlines throughout the rest of her essay.

Authors and academics together fought the battle to either accept or reject the novel as an art form. Paul G. Bator, in his article “Rhetoric and the Novel in the Eighteenth-Century British University Curriculum,” outlines the movement by Scottish professors to include novels as texts appropriate of study in the late eighteenth century, focusing on the novel’s ability to convey methods of action and analyze it morally. These professors would discuss the novel as a “fictitious history” in order to make them less radical and more acceptable for academic attention: the works under discussion were not simply the sensational novels flooding the circulating libraries but instead were fictional representations of past events that allowed a better understanding of human behavior than accurate histories because they were not bound by literal truth, limiting the variety of their representations. Unlike histories, the novel could present a situation that had never happened in reality in order to examine, hypothetically, its moral implications. Therefore, some academics argued, this new form should be given appropriate attention along with the poetry, drama, and other forms of *belles lettres* studied by academia. Jane Austen herself, while guilty of utilizing a very traditional marriage plot in all of her published novels, featured a use of such plots as groundbreaking, outlining new ideas and methods of interpersonal relations. As her works gained popularity, she was approached by Mr. James Stanier Clarke, the Prince Regent’s librarian, about dedicating her upcoming *Emma* to the Prince and perhaps writing something more akin to the traditional romance than the comedy of manners she had been penning in the past. Her response to him was civil but firm:

I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other.

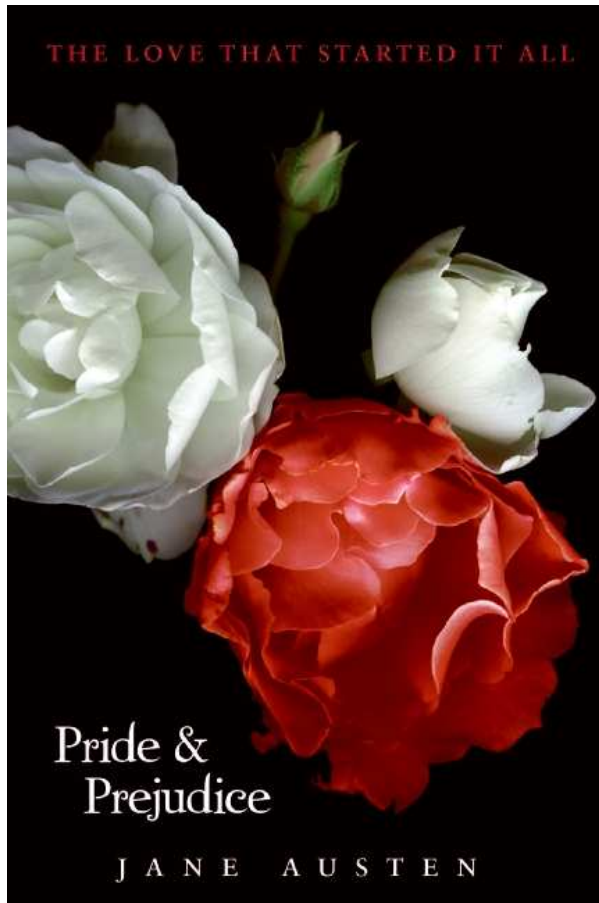
Austen L 138

Her later creative response to the suggestion that she write a more traditional romance is found in her *Plan of a Novel, according to Hints from Various Quarters*. This plan features characterization and plotlines significantly more in keeping with the established romance: a perfect father (who has spent significant time at Court, interacting with the highest of the high) with a perfect daughter, retiring to the countryside, who “converse in long speeches, elegant Language – and a tone of high serious sentiment” (Austen *Plan*). The Anti-hero, in love with the heroine, drives the two from their home and into various foreign lands, where every character they meet is either perfectly good or perfectly evil, holding to the traditional depiction of good and evil in romances (Austen *Plan*). Along their travels, the heroine meets the hero, “all perfection of course,” whose purity and conscientiousness keep him from proposing, and furthermore endures all manner of proposals from those less than worthy of her (Austen *Plan*). The heroine struggles to provide for herself and her father until her father dies in Kamschatka¹¹ with an expected array of advice for his daughter and literary language, after which she returns home (Austen *Plan*). Throughout her travels, the heroine constantly escapes from the advances of the villainous Anti-hero until she is finally reunited with the Hero, who has miracu-

¹¹ Incorrectly spelled Kamtschatka, a northeastern peninsula of Russia and therefore a fittingly foreign place for atrocities and hardship to occur.

lously decided to pursue her regardless of his previous restraint just as she decided to return home (Austen *Plan*). This sketch, practically dripping with sarcasm, makes abundantly clear Austen's distaste for the least realistic aspects of the traditional romance. Certain aspects of the genre she may have continued to use (the marriage plot, the separation of hero and heroine, their eventual reunion, etc.), but her works would revolutionize the romance.

In her works, which would come to be called comedies of manners, Austen rewrote the romance at a significant distance from its original genre. Instead of high status knights and ladies, Austen wrote of the middle class; her characters' adventures would not take them to drastic, foreign lands with fantastic, usually supernatural forces, but to the Lakes Region, Bath, and Lyme; and instead of displaying characters as either strictly good or strictly bad, Austen almost without fail provides her reader with characters firmly in a gray area. Perhaps most importantly, all Austen's heroines are significantly flawed in some way important to the plotline. For instance, Marianne must learn restraint whereas Elinor must learn to be more open in *Sense and Sensibility*. These changes to the tradition of romance allow for Austen to move her romances into the realm of social critique, anticipating the coming genre of the social problem or industrial novel. D. W. Harding's "Regulated Hatred" essay portrays this beautifully: not only does Austen critique her society, but she writes in such a way that those she wishes most to critique are among her biggest fans: "she is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine" (Harding 297).



http://www.thegimcrackmiscellany.com/wp-content/woo_custom/104-pride-and-prejudice.jpeg

Pride and Prejudice, as Austen's most popular romance plot, has set the stage for millions of other romance novels, of both the Harlequin and literary variety. Its importance is noted through homages, retellings, and even cover designs.¹² Because of this, I do not believe I need devote much time to proving why *Pride and Prejudice* should be considered as a romance. Not only does Nils Clausson in "Romancing Manchester" name *Pride and Prejudice* as "an early prototype of the woman's romance,"¹³ but Austen is also mentioned five times

in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, a collection of essays by romance writers on the romance novel, in four essays out of twenty-one, making her mentioned in just shy of a fifth of the essays presented, and always in the context of either outlining a standard of the modern romance plot or as the basis on which modern romances, despite their apparently different tendencies (modern inclusions of sex, vulgarity, and/or professional

¹² This cover design was part of a series of redesigns of classic novels and plays in the wake of the popularity surge of *Twilight* and its sequels. While I'm not sure I agree with the implication that *Pride and Prejudice* needs *Twilight* assist its sales, the statement "the love that started it all" is significant and accurate: Elizabeth and Darcy's romance trajectory has inspired countless subsequent romances.

¹³ A categorization I find troubling. Does such phrasing mean to imply that romances are only for women to read and/or write? However, as with Eliot's statement that her worthy female authors are treated as men, a more in-depth analysis for this would require a separate project.

activity in their heroine's lives) are founded (Clausson 2).¹⁴ In one essay, she is mentioned as both one example of academic rigor and also *the* example of the witty romance plot. There have been many works published regarding an analysis of her various romance plots and their implications, but for this study, I'm interested more in her less romantic aspects. Namely, I want to examine *Pride and Prejudice* as an example of Austen's social commentary and critique. In other words, I want to study *Pride and Prejudice* as something beyond the early prototype of "woman's romance," as an early prototype of the social problem-novel.

That Austen was concerned with social issues and wrote her social critique into her novels can be seen in both her personal correspondence and her fiction. Judith Newton in her article "*Pride and Prejudice: Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen*," points out that Austen's letters provide numerous examples of the inequality of power and privilege between men and women in eighteenth and nineteenth century England. Austen recounts examples of her brothers' "access to work that paid, access to inheritance and preference, and access to the independence, the personal power, that belonged to being prosperous and male" whereas Austen herself, along with her female relations, spent the better part of their adult lives nomadically traveling from relative to relative after her father's death until her brother Edward was fortunate enough to inherit and then offer Chawton Cottage to his sisters and mother as their permanent residence (Newton 27). It is only in her fiction, however, that we glimpse traces of Austen's opinions on this inequality; it is no coincidence that the majority of Austen's fictions begin with outlining a less than ideal financial or material set of circumstances: the entail of *Pride and Preju-*

¹⁴ The Brontës are mentioned with an equal frequency, but always together. When taken as individual authors, they are each mentioned half as often as Austen.

dice, the loss of the Dashwoods' family home in *Sense and Sensibility*, the Eliots forced removal from Kellynch Hall in *Persuasion*, Catherine Morland's modest background with a multitude of siblings in *Northanger Abbey*, and Fanny Price's alienation from her family in *Mansfield Park*. Claudia Johnson in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* points out that, by outlining these inequalities in fiction, and "by opting...to retain the same preoccupations as her more conspicuously political contemporaries, without, however alluding as they did to the topical considerations which had originally animated them, Austen was able not to depoliticize her work—for the political implication of her work is implicit in the subject matter itself—but rather to depolemicize it" (Johnson xxv).¹⁵ Subtly featuring her social criticism in her fictitious novels instead of in her personal correspondence and avoiding specific references to contemporary issues and events, in other words, allows Austen a way to safely portray her opinions and thoughts on her society without attracting its censure.¹⁶

An investigation into the social critique present in *Pride and Prejudice* could easily fall into the realms of Marxist criticism, concerning itself with issues of social class and struggle. Literature dealing with this critical lens and Austen exists in abundance.¹⁷ David D. Hume's "Money in Jane Austen," for example, focuses on the distinctions of wealth and social class and the "grimly realistic depiction of the dismal position of gen-

¹⁵ Austen's "more conspicuously political contemporaries" referenced here would be women like Mary Wollstonecraft, those with an inescapably political message post the French Revolution.

¹⁶ Of course, the only correspondence we have of Austen's is that her family carefully selected as being appropriate to share with the public, so it is possible that Austen discussed her true opinions of gender inequality in letters that simply were never shared.

¹⁷ There are five pages of results searching for the terms "Austen" and "class" in the *MLA Bibliography* (fifteen individual results for "*Pride and Prejudice*" and "class") and another two for "Austen" and "money" (six for "*Pride and Prejudice*" and "money"). Considering these are the search results for simply *one* database, it's safe to assume pairing Austen with a discussion of economic and social concerns as a method of critiquing her works is a well-established field.

teel women in Austen's society" (Hume 289). Edward Copeland's chapter "Money" in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* discusses how money is presented as "the love-tipped arrow aimed at the heart of Jane Austen's heroines and her readers," a fact that cannot be denied no matter how strongly we advocate for the resolution of her plots having at least a *little* to do with something other than material gain (Copeland). Jane Austen herself did not write out of some romantic notion of the author feverishly producing out of some inexplicable need to express herself, but was very conscious of the fiscal benefits of publishing, working to gain as much of the profits from her published works as possible to support herself and demonstrating a shrewd business sense (Fergus). All of Austen's fiction is also blatantly concerned with more economic aspects, featuring heroines who are conscious of money and their own (and others') financial limitations and resources; such a consciousness is, in fact, a requirement for Austen to deem a character worthy of respect (more on this later in this chapter). I do not, however, necessarily wish to contribute to this body of scholarship. I will not, in this chapter, mention even once the concept of the "bourgeois Jane Austen" (Spring 392). Nor will I attempt to argue for any socialist leanings on the behalf of the author. Instead, I would argue that *Pride and Prejudice* presents a critique of society's reduction of romance and marriage into business ventures, a literal marriage market, as well as a general concern for gender inequality.

Drawing parallels between romance/marriage and business/economy is hardly a new idea, of course; my father, for instance, when I entered college, told me he hoped I would use my time in pursuit of a B.A. degree that would lead to a job instead of simply looking for an M.R.S. degree, implying that the search for a marriage can be viewed as

similar to the search for professional fulfillment, and when I met a previous employer, the first thing he did, instead of enquiring after my studies or my current employment, was to check for a wedding ring. The idea of treating marriage as a business is also posited, however unknowingly accurately, by Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park* when she tells Sir Thomas, “Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well” (Austen *MP* 7). Throughout history, society has also referred to domestic duties as “women’s work,” declaring that a man’s job was to work in the economic marketplace and earn a living while a woman’s was to marry, bear and raise children, and run the home. Taking “woman’s work” literally, we can see that the search for a husband becomes less an aspect of romance and more an aspect of professional advancement; whereas a man in Augustan England might manage his finances and investments or (should he be unfortunate enough to rely on a trade to make his living) perform his chosen profession better than his competitors in order to improve himself, a woman had to make herself desirable through accomplishments, attract the attention of an eligible bachelor, and then prudently approve of an acceptable marriage proposal in order to improve herself. In this way, a romantic trajectory for a woman became the equivalent of a professional one for a man, making the title of “woman’s work” for romance and matrimony a true and accurate description.¹⁸

¹⁸ For example, Pip’s journey in *Great Expectations* is one of an attempt to better himself financially through learning to be a gentleman and take up some form of career in order to bring in money, whereas Estella’s is related to relationships pursued or not pursued. This is not to say that a man could not attempt to better himself through a fortuitous match or that a woman could not manage to survive through means other than marrying (Wickham certainly won’t marry without fortune in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Miss Bates manages to make ends meet in *Emma* despite being a spinster), but without losing her social standing, a woman had to marry or face possible financial ruin whereas a man was free to pursue marriage or not and still maintain his social status.

We can see this clearly throughout *Pride and Prejudice* and, to some extent, in its adaptations. The 1940 Greer Garson film most poignantly demonstrates this by having the news of Mr. Bingley's arrival at Netherfield happen at a tailor's, pairing the concept of marriage and romantic developments with a physical marketplace. The female Bennets then quite literally compete with the Lucases in a race of a carriage ride home to pass along the news to Mr. Bennet, implying action must be taken immediately, much like an investment should be made early in order to reap the full benefits from a share in the stock market. This scene is presented as comedy, of course, but it has serious undertones when one examines what is actually happening: in a world where remaining a spinster was about the worst fate that could befall a single woman, marriage was not only a woman's work, but it quickly became the most important aspect of her work. In the 2005 Focus Features film, Lizzy asks her mother if marriage was all she thought about. In response and in an unusually insightful comment for her character, Mrs. Bennet replies, "When you have five daughters, Lizzy, tell me what else will occupy your thoughts, and then perhaps you will understand" (Wright). Furthermore, the narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* says of Mrs. Bennet that "the business of her life was to get her daughters married" (Austen *P&P* 4). This indicates that, while we may laugh (or shake our heads) at Mrs. Bennet's obsession with seeing her daughters successfully married no matter what the cost, it is actually a legitimate business, one that takes up all of her thoughts *because* of its seriousness. To Mrs. Bennet, Lizzy, whose mind is occupied with other trivial matters (like moral decision-making, long walks, and witty banter) cannot understand this until she has experienced the fear of having your five daughters remain unmarried in a world where a woman's survival depended on her marriage. Having Lydia married, even

if it is to a rake like Wickham, is considered by her mother better than having her become a spinster who cannot provide for herself.¹⁹ Marriage for Mrs. Bennet presented her daughters with the Regency version of job security.

We can further see evidence of this “economic romance” from the very first pages of the novel (Copeland). Everyone knows the iconic first line of *Pride and Prejudice*, but the slightly less well known following lines clearly mark the single man in question in terms of a capitalist economy:

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 *PP* 3, emphasis mine

The man in question here is no longer considered as an autonomous, rational being with choice but is instead discussed in terms which a family might use to discuss a new horse or carriage. It is an interesting choice of language, portraying the man as the commodity to be traded, as opposed to the woman; by setting up her discussion of the romance of a courtship ending in marriage in terms of the man being the property of the woman, Austen sets up for us a world in which *women* have the consumptive power in a marketplace. This world is part of Austen’s fantasy, her attempt at subversion, according to Newton, a world that is not one in which men will call the shots and make all the decisions, but is rather one in which women have the ability to run a sort of romance real estate market, surveying their options and ending their romance plot by securing a particularly choice

¹⁹ Of course, this is not the first reaction. Mrs. Bennet is, at first, hysterically worried about Lydia’s elopement. This is not because of some mere moral standard for the time (though that would definitely have played a part), but is instead because of the destruction of her four other daughters’ prospects romantically (and thus financially) because of this rash decision. One bad investment move in the romance market has the potential to bring all the Bennet girls’ romantic and financial opportunities crashing down forever, just as one company’s stock crash can result in many other’s following suit.

piece of both literal and social property. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet demonstrate this for us with their first conversation:

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?... Do you not want to know who has taken it?” cried his wife impatiently.

...“Is he married or single?”

“Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!”

“How so? how can it affect them?”

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” replied his wife, “how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.”

“Is that his design in settling here?”

“Design! nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he *may* fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.”

“I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you best of the party.”

Austen *PP* 3, emphasis original

Austen does several interesting things with this seemingly innocuous passage. Firstly, we see that it is Mrs. Bennet, the woman, who gathers this information and brings it to the attention of her husband. *She* is the active one, the one gathering research regarding her family’s potential opportunities for advancement. Secondly, she discusses Mr. Bingley’s “design” (or lack thereof) in language that posits her *own* design in securing him for a son-in-law. She is not “hopeful” of his marrying one of her daughters, but is instead “thinking” of it, anticipating it, arguing that Bingley’s settling so near Longbourn is a fine opportunity for her daughters, and she furthers this idea by later entreating her husband to “think what an establishment [Netherfield] would be for one of them” (Austen *PP* 4). Finally, Mr. Bennet’s closing remark in this section helps to cement that this business of

match-making is for his wife and other women to partake in rather than himself. While his directive that he will send Mrs. Bennet and the girls by themselves to meet Mr. Bingley is clearly meant to be humorous and not entirely sincere, we cannot overlook the fact that, despite his attempt at comedy,²⁰ his suggestion implies that the job of the woman is to secure a romantic match; he denies he will go, but is open to sending women to broker the merger, so to speak. Later on, during Bingley's first visit to Longbourn, the girls watch Bingley's arrival (or departure (or both)) from an upper window, learning "that he wore a blue coat and rode a black horse" (Austen *PP* 7). Bingley, however, is not able to catch a glimpse of the famed Bennet girls. It is up to the women, then, to formulate an opinion on Bingley and determine his eligibility as an object for their pursuit, not Bingley's privilege to determine *theirs*.

We can further see the emphasis of material language in Austen's first real introduction to Bingley's party after the Meryton Assembly:

[Bingley's sisters] were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.²¹

²⁰ Comedy in an Austen novel should never be mistaken for light-hearted material. Austen herself issued some of her most biting social critiques under the guise of comedy.

²¹This passage is representative of Jane Barchas' study in her 2008 article "Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*: Austen's Early Legacy." One of the most interesting aspects of her study focuses on the regional differences between several characters, portraying the North as a dangerous, somewhat uncivilized place in comparison to the country calm of the South. Barchas argues that having Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy (as well as Jane and Mr. Bingley) end at Pemberly, geographically in the middle ground between north and south, serves as a recognition that neither extreme is without fault and that a compromise is necessary for the happily ever after. These regional distinctions furthermore, she argues, help solidify the suspicion that Gaskell's *North and South* was heavily influenced by *Pride and Prejudice*, and not only in terms of the romance plot, but also in terms of philosophies regarding compromise and understanding.

Here we see the main cause for the narrator's distaste for Bingley's sisters: poor financial management. We learn nothing but good things of them at first – they are attractive, well-educated (or at least expensively educated), have sizable dowries – but their fatal flaw has to deal with money – like many of today's society, they spend more than they should. On top of that, they have forgotten the source of their ill-managed fortune; rather than respect the hard work and trade by which their money was made, they choose to overlook its source and pass themselves off as having been born into aristocracy. By turning a blind eye to their origins, they further earn Austen's censure, for almost without fail, Austen's heroines reflect at some point on how they came to a certain situation, wonder at how their origins have led them to their moment of introspection. Without this introspection, they do not develop, and they hence cannot serve as moral agents. In short, Bingley's sisters fail to achieve Austen's standards for heroines (or even respectable supporting characters) both financially and morally.²² What is interesting is that Austen first mentions their financial failings and then their moral ones, indicating that a lack of financial sense is just as important (if not more so) than a lack of moral fortitude. By putting Bingley's sisters' lack of financial sense before commenting on their moral failings, the narrator implies that their lack of financial responsibility is just as indicative of their moral failings as the other aspects of their natures. Furthermore, their moral failures stem not from a cruel word or a malicious manipulation but from a willful ignorance of their own

²² It is not, of course, only Bingley's sisters whose imperfect natures are revealed through their poor financial practices. Wickham's rakish actions are driven by his financial necessities caused by irresponsible gambling, and Mr. Bennet's poor management of the estate at Longbourn is also a sign that he is not completely morally equipped. Mr. Darcy comments on Mr. Bennet's less than perfect propriety in his letter to Elizabeth (Austen *P&P* 130-131).

monetary background; even their *moral* failings of a lack of self-awareness eventually are represented through the discussion of their financial situation. They are poor romancers (as we see through Miss Bingley's constant and unsuccessful attempts to woo Mr. Darcy) and poor money-managers, two failings that do not lead to much success in the business of romance.²³

Charlotte Lucas is, perhaps, the best example in *Pride and Prejudice* of a philosophy of romance as a business as well as one of the best examples of Austen's social criticism. When discussing Jane's affection for Mr. Bingley, Charlotte is full of practical advice for securing a man's interest (though how a woman so insightful about how to gain a man's affection is still unmarried at this point is an intriguing dilemma): "in nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew *more* affection than she feels," she begins (Austen *PP* 15, emphasis original). Jane should be a better advertiser, in other words, for "[Bingley] may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on" (Austen *PP* 15). When Lizzy counters that Jane *does* offer a display of her affection, Charlotte points out that Mr. Bingley "does not know Jane's disposition as [Lizzy does]" (Austen *PP* 15). Jane, as the reader, Lizzy, and Charlotte all know, is a quiet woman, reserved in her expression, though gentle and engaging when spoken to. She is virtuous and wonderful in every sense; however, Charlotte argues, her very demureness will work against her. Finally, she posits that "when [Jane] is secure of [Bingley], there will be leisure for falling in love as much as she chuses," (Austen *PP* 15) and finishes her argument with the claim

²³ If romance is a business and marriage is job security, it could be argued that Mrs. Hurst has proven she *is* capable of good "business" sense as she is already married at the novel's beginning. However, we can see that Mr. Hurst is by no means an enviable husband: he is boring and significantly less engaging than his single housemates at Netherfield. Mrs. Hurst, therefore, may be surviving in the romance marketplace with a steady business, but her marriage by no means competes with the opportunities Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy offer prospective romance/business partners.

that “happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance” (Austen *PP* 16). To Charlotte’s mind, marriage is a financial arrangement, and if one can experience romantic happiness with one’s spouse, then that is an added bonus, but by no means a requirement.

Elizabeth, of course, functions with a very different business mindset and is completely oblivious to Charlotte’s actual opinions. After this outline of how to best secure a husband, Elizabeth tells her friend, “Your plan is a good one...where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it” (Austen *PP* 15). Elizabeth, we see here, is not in the market for husband-hunting; she considers herself out of the competition. Despite Charlotte’s very well-spoken argument, she further insists, “it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself” (Austen *PP* 16). Elizabeth, of course, prides herself on her discernment and never dreams she could be wrong in this pronouncement, leading to her shock later when Charlotte informs her that she is engaged to the most odious Mr. Collins. To explain herself, Charlotte tells her friend in one of the darkest and most disturbing moments of the work:

I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins’s character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.

Austen *PP* 85

Elizabeth, for all her pride in discernment, has misjudged the person she considered her best friend. All of Charlotte’s pragmatism she has mistaken for comedy, and we have presented here the first moment in which Elizabeth *should* be reexamining her previous judgments. Instead, she merely reflects for several scenes about the inappropriateness of Charlotte’s choice of strategy when it comes to romance: “she had always felt that Char-

lotte's opinion on matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage," she thinks immediately after receiving the news (Austen *PP* 85). Later, when discussing the situation with Jane, she launches into an angry tirade regarding Charlotte's marriage:

It is unaccountable! in every view it is unaccountable! ...were I persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding, than I now do of her heart. My dear Jane, Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man; you know he is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as well as I do, that the woman who marries him, cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavor to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness.

Austen *PP* 91

Austen's choice of language in these moments reveals a significant side of Elizabeth's philosophy of the purpose of marriage. Charlotte has violated all of Elizabeth's ideas about love being the most important aspect of marriage and has shaken her belief in her own perceptions to the core (though she may not consciously acknowledge this yet): if she has misjudged her best friend, who knows who or what else she must have misjudged, and whether her own beliefs are as valid as she has thought all along? This sliver of self-doubt is, I believe, the reason Elizabeth insists that Jane acknowledge her perception of Mr. Collins in the passage above; she needs a little confirmation that her perception of his character is correct. Then, at the end of this speech, Elizabeth refers to the importance of principle and integrity, sounding very much like Mr. Thornton in *North and South* when he determines he will *not* risk his mill, his investors, and his workers' means

of livelihood by entering into a high-risk investment. Elizabeth sees Charlotte as engaging in a *very* high risk venture, pinning all her hopes for happiness on the ridiculous Mr. Collins, and she does not approve.²⁴ It is this difference of risk-taking philosophies that drives a wedge between Elizabeth and her friend, not the choice itself. Charlotte's risk does, fortunately for her, pay off; while Mr. Collins does not improve with the benefit of Charlotte's company, she manages to construct a happy life in her new home outside Rosings. Still, Elizabeth reflects as she returns Charlotte's letters that she does so more out of a fondness for the memory of how their friendship used to be instead of how it currently is; she cannot quite get past the fact that she has lost respect for her friend through Charlotte's high risk investment.

Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins serves as more than simply an example of two differing viewpoints on marriage, of course; it also serves as the central demonstration of Austen's social critique. While Johnson is correct in stating that "no specifically authorial moral opprobrium is ever attached to Charlotte's frankly mercenary marriage to Collins," that is not to say that no moral message is conveyed regarding the situation (Johnson 81). The novel's narrator offers no condemnation or approval of Charlotte's decision, but Charlotte's own defense of her decision outlines the reasons supporting her marriage to Collins. By not featuring an authorial judgment on Charlotte, I believe Austen is demonstrating one of the worst situations (or at least one of the worst situations possible in a comedy) a woman could find herself in and highlighting the "horrors" she must suffer in order to survive in this society. This situation presented is more complex than a

²⁴ Essentially, Elizabeth disagrees with Charlotte's business venture. Like Thornton's distaste for risky investments, Elizabeth finds it distastefully that Charlotte would enter into an emotionally risky marriage (nor does she like that Charlotte is treating marriage as a method of financial survival in the first place). She disagrees with Charlotte's business-like approach and with her risky behavior, which is what drives a wedge between them, not simply that she does not care for her friend's husband.

simple critique of the entail system by outlining who women were reduced to marrying, however. Austen criticizes society for creating a world in which a woman such as Charlotte (whose only faults are being somewhat plain and living in a community in which single men are scarce) must submit herself to be married to such a ridiculous man as Mr. Collins in order to survive while simultaneously criticizing the naïveté and willful ignorance of Elizabeth (and others who would criticize a mercenary marriage for the sake of survival) by implying that to pass judgment on such a marriage shows remarkable blindness to the harshness of reality.²⁵ Given the situation of single women in Austen's time (especially 27-year-old single women), we can safely assume that Charlotte is acting rationally and for her own survival. Elizabeth's vehement disapproval of the marriage shows that she does not have as firm and accurate an understanding of reality as she believes she does, a fact that she will eventually realize due to Darcy's letter.

This differing of perspectives is demonstrative of the social problem-novel. According to Josephine Guy in *The Victorian Social Problem Novel*, works of the titular genre "are typically distinguished from earlier novels, and from other works contemporary with them, by their attempt to comment on, and stimulate debate about, matters of general public and political concern" (Guy 3-4). These novels featured discussion that centered on problems facing British society due to some combination of changing demographics, technological advancement, and employment patterns, all issues facing Austen and her society. Johnson notably acknowledges that "Austen's decision [in *Pride and Prejudice*] to engage her exceptionally argumentative antagonists in direct, extensive, and

²⁵ Mr. Collins' ridiculousness could be viewed merely as a matter of opinion or the product of Elizabeth's flawed perception before Darcy's letter, but given the clergyman's letter to Mr. Bennet claiming it would have been better for his family if Lydia had died than her elopement, we can safely assume that he is *actually* ridiculous and inappropriate (Austen *P&P* 192).

mutually improving debates can just as well be viewed as a step towards, rather than an ‘escape’ from, constructive political commentary” (Johnson 74-75). As the Industrial Revolution approached and wealth began to be disseminated down the social ladder, an increased number of previously “insignificant” classes began rising to prominence, among them the landed gentry and more fortunate working class, the classes of Elizabeth Bennet and her family in Cheapside. Following the French Revolution, issues of class and gender inequity became increasingly prominent in British society. In the wake of such publications as Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, questions of the legitimacy and fairness of issues like the entail system began to be questioned. Featuring the financial difficulties and hardships of women in the entail system, most prominently in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, allowed Austen to portray the consequences to those women stuck in it. Charlotte Lucas’ mercenary marriage, therefore, becomes an example of the means which women who were unfortunate enough to be caught in the entail system were forced to use in order to survive. While many readers may agree with Elizabeth’s disgust at the concept of marrying Mr. Collins, Charlotte’s censure of Elizabeth’s disapproval is a poignant defense of such mercenary marriages. It was not, after all, the fault of the women trapped in the entail system that they had to rely on marriage to survive in their society. Jane, always the voice of tolerance and understanding, also reproaches Elizabeth for her distaste for the marriage:

Consider Mr. Collins’s respectability, and Charlotte’s prudent, steady character. Remember that she is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for every body’s sake, that she may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin... I must think your language too strong in speaking of both...and I hope you will be convinced of it, by seeing them happy together.

Jane's chastisement of Elizabeth here highlights the lack of options facing women in this society and criticizes those who would criticize the women forced into marriages with their own Mr. Collinses. Here, as in later parts of the novel, we receive the message to not pass judgment on another's decision without intimate knowledge of their perspective or experience.

These other examples include Elizabeth's perception of Darcy and Lady Catherine's visit to Longbourn. Elizabeth is forced to rethink her understanding of Darcy when his letter causes her to acknowledge her fallibility of perception in the classic Austenian moment of self-reflection in chapter 36. When presented with Darcy's account of Wickham's behavior, she is forced to reexamine her own secretly high-risk investment she had been pursuing with her flirtation with Wickham:

As to [Wickham's] real character, had information been in her power, she had never felt a wish of enquiring. His countenance, voice, and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue. She tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Darcy; or at least, by the predominance of virtue, atone for those casual errors, under which she would endeavor to class, what Mr. Darcy had described as the idleness and vice of many years continuance. But no such recollection befriended her.

Austen *PP* 135-136

This letter causes her to question her own perception of Jane and Bingley's flirtation, for if both Mr. Darcy and Charlotte expressed that Jane did not show enough affection to convince Bingley of her partiality for him, perhaps she *should* have shown more visible signs of attraction. "Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind," Elizabeth laments regarding her misperception of Wickham and Darcy (Austen *PP* 137).

She has fallen victim to Wickham's charm and Darcy's reserved nature; the woman who prided herself on discernment has been taken in by a warm smile and a casual flirtation.

Throughout the rest of the novel, Elizabeth takes a little longer to form her judgments. For instance, when she visits Pemberley, she takes multiple days to fully form her opinion and decide that Darcy might have been a significant asset. She does, of course, marvel at the economic boon that would have come from being mistress of Pemberly, but also remarks on the style of landscaping being tasteful, the interior decorations being expensive but not flamboyant, and all manner of other signs that speak to the personality of confident moderation of the estate's owner. Most importantly, we get a glimpse into how he treats his servants; Mrs. Reynolds, his housekeeper, has nothing but good to say about her employer ("He is the best landlord, and the best master...that ever lived," causing Elizabeth to reflect that "it is very much to his credit...that [she] should think so" (Austen *PP* 161). Not only does this show that Darcy does not treat *all* those who are beneath him socially with the coldness Elizabeth has come to expect for the way he has treated her parents and sisters, but it also shows that, as an employer, he garners respect from his employees. He runs a house and his business (as a landlord to his tenants) in a way that changes her opinion of him as a potential partner. His tenderness toward his sister, his generosity toward Wickham for the sake of Lydia (and by extension Elizabeth), and his role in reuniting Jane and Bingley demonstrate the lengths (both financial and emotional) to which he is willing to go in order to assist her. These factors, combined with her own humbling acknowledgment that she is less than perfect, help her to see the true value of what he is offering her when he puts his proposal back on the table, so to speak. This time, she accepts his offer.

Lady Catherine's visit to Longbourn depicts another example of perceptions formed hastily, without intimate knowledge of the circumstances of the event. She has rushed to Longbourn to dispel all rumors that Darcy and Elizabeth may be engaged, infuriating Elizabeth in the process by drawing attention to her "inferior birth" and her being "of no importance to the world" (Austen *P&P* 231). Elizabeth is now on the receiving end of the censure to which she subjected Charlotte; just as she criticized her friend for making an imprudent match of personalities for the sake of money, now Lady Catherine is accusing her of attempting the same for Darcy's fortune. In her final speech to Lady Catherine, Elizabeth announces, "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" (Austen *P&P* 233). Lady Catherine has, in other words, acted upon an inaccurate understanding of the situation as well as, more importantly, an inaccurate understanding of the character of the persons involved, a fault the entire novel has been advising against. It is important, moreover, that the novel's final conflict concern its *central* conflict of misunderstanding and misperception, as well as being dismissed and condemned by its now morally aware and responsible heroine. The issue at hand, starting from a preliminary misunderstanding and misperception of Elizabeth by Darcy, has come full circle, through many reiterations, to allow Elizabeth to defend herself against such misunderstandings and misperceptions.

Another aspect of Elizabeth's conversation with Lady Catherine is one of the most blatant discussions of class present in the novel:

"If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere, in which you have been brought up."

“In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal.”

“True. You *are* a gentleman’s daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition.”

“Whatever my connections may be,” said Elizabeth, “if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to *you*.”

Austen *P&P* 232, emphasis original

The open discussion of class in the novel is a new aspect, something that has only become possible due to the distancing of the romantic plot from the classical romance genre. With the inclusion of the middle class, Austen allows for the beginnings of novelistic discussions of class inequalities. While it is true that Austen does not stray far from her little bit of ivory in including all of her central characters in the upper echelons of the middle class, the inclusion of the fact that Elizabeth’s uncles and aunts are of the merchant class is an important step toward including more social classes as appropriate novelistic characters; this inclusion paves the way for Gaskell’s (and other Victorian novelists’) ability to include characters like Nicholas Higgins and Boucher in their social problem-novels.

Austen’s central message, though, does eventually focus on gender issues over class ones. Johnson points out that Elizabeth herself is controversial according to gender understandings and standards of the time; while today readers may find her the epitome of refinement, Johnson highlights the ways in which Elizabeth challenges traditional standards of feminine propriety. Elizabeth’s behavior and personality are in direct contradiction with Mr. Collins’ favored *Fordeyce’s Sermons*, but Austen has carefully crafted a work in which this fact is overlooked because of the wild inappropriateness of Lydia’s behavior. The reader doesn’t notice Elizabeth’s failure to preserve the distinction of rank

because of Lydia's blatant forwardness and risky decision-making. As Johnson points out, "Lydia is a decoy who attracts the disapproval to which Elizabeth herself could otherwise be subject, and by lamenting Lydia's glaring excesses, Elizabeth is cleared for her less egregious but still 'improper' rambles, conceit, and impertinence without arousing our discomfort or incurring our censure" (Johnson 76-77). Being aware of this, however, the reader must *also* be aware that the very character of Elizabeth challenges societal definitions of propriety and acceptable behavior in women. By providing us with a likeable, endearing character such as Elizabeth, a character completely antithetical to the existing thoughts regarding propriety and acceptable behavior, Austen paves the way for a more tolerant environment for women. To use Darcy's own phrasing, by the end of the novel, the reader has a quite different understanding of what exactly makes a woman "worthy of being pleased" (Austen *P&P* 241). This rewriting of the definition of propriety is key to Austen's social criticism, an important element of her work that anticipates the social problem-novel.

What is most important to note when analyzing *Pride and Prejudice* as a prototypical social problem-novel is the fact that the social problem aspects of the work are resolved not through societal adaptation of policy change but through the functions of the romance; the novel's resolution is marriage, not economic reform. However, this marriage is more than simply a marriage. Johnson emphasizes that "[general readers and critics both] find in the marriage of the exuberant heroine and her manly hero the comedic promise of personal fulfillment *as well as social harmony*" (Johnson 73, emphasis mine). Beyond a simple happy ending, Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy is representative of social resolution. Newton argues that the marriage is "a complicated...juggling act in

which all the economic and social powers of the traditional husband/hero must be demonstrated at last but demonstrated without diminishing the powers of the heroine” (Newton 39). This simultaneous recognition of power by both hero and heroine traces back to Austen’s crafting *Pride and Prejudice*’s romance as a capitalist marketplace: both men and women are simultaneously consumers *and* the goods consumed. Sarah Emsley in *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues* supports this argument, saying that “Elizabeth and Darcy must each learn to regard the other as superior, in a complex understanding of both hierarchy and equality” (Emsley 22). Elizabeth and Darcy *both* benefit from their relationship – Elizabeth clearly gains materially, but what is most important is that both she and Darcy gain moral understanding. This sets *Pride and Prejudice* apart from most modern romance novels and their film counterparts in which men are routinely presented as the good to be consumed either through their physical attractiveness or emotional perfection.²⁶ In Austen’s works, however, single men of large fortunes are sought after as the good to be consumed by the ladies of Meryton as they simultaneously peruse the offers of domestic happiness promised them by the very ladies desperate for a look at their blue coats and black horses. The mutuality of consuming and being consumed, of accepting and being accepted, is central to Austen’s marriage plot; in all of her novels – but most clearly in *Pride and Prejudice* – both parties must submit to each other before they can achieve their wedded bliss, putting the newlyweds on a more even footing once the wedding takes place due to their participation in the marketplace of romance. This, of

²⁶ While Harlequin romances frequently portray a woman in the throes of barely contained passion, she is clothed (at least somewhat) while the hero stands behind her, shirtless, showing off his perfectly sculpted torso and pectorals for the statistically probable female reader to consume. Additionally, though the hero is always flawed, he is never *too* flawed; his flaws are never enough to make him unappealing by the romance’s end.

course, only takes place when the newlyweds have entered into a moral marriage. To draw a quick comparison between Austen's central marriages and other, less moral pairings: Maria Bertram's marriage to Mr. Rushworth in *Mansfield Park* ends in disaster due to the immorality of her reasons for marrying him. In this situation, Rushworth is much more the consumed than the consumer, a man wed merely for the purposes of his financial benefits and comfortable living. Rushworth sacrifices his trust and vulnerability of reputation and possibly affection, placing such fragile things in Maria's hands, but she offers nothing except her beauty and potentially good-natured humor in return. When the opportunity comes for her to sacrifice her happiness for the sake of her marriage, when she is presented with the opportunity to remain faithful to her husband or turn to Henry Crawford, she chooses not to sacrifice, putting the wedded pair on unequal footing and thus destroying the marriage. By entering into their marriage with a simultaneous and equal submission to and consumption of each other, however, Elizabeth and Darcy avoid this disaster, showing that a woman can be unconventional while still being an appropriate bride and that a fruitful relation to another person can only arise once one has established an accurate understanding of the other party's circumstance, the two most central issues to Austen's social critique in *Pride and Prejudice*.

CHAPTER TWO

“A Romance Blown to Pieces”?: The Romance Plot of *North and South*

“On some such night as this she remembered promising to herself to live as brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read or heard of in romance, a life sans peur et sans reproche; it had seemed to her then that she had only to will, and such a life would be accomplished.”

- Elizabeth Gaskell²⁷

“In a romance novel, the relationship between the hero and the heroine is the plot.”

- Jayne Ann Krentz²⁸

Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* features a further remove from the classical romance following Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*; as in *Pride and Prejudice*, the work features no overt supernatural elements outside of Margaret Hale’s meditations on God, characters are far from perfect (Margaret’s first description is indicative of this), and beyond Austen’s revolutionary focus on the middle class, Gaskell expands her focus to include those facing starvation and homelessness, those victims of the hardships of industrialization. Such distinctness from the classic romance might lead one to believe that Gaskell has created a novel that blows romance to pieces, as her character Edith suffers, but apart from these differences, Gaskell adheres strictly to romantic functions in her plotline (Gaskell *NS* 402). In fact, several critics have theorized that *North and South* may be one of the first retellings of *Pride and Prejudice*, the foundation of the modern romance, and as such it should be considered a novel enshrouded as much in the romance plot as it is in its condition-of-England concerns.

²⁷ Gaskell *NS* 401. French translation: “without fear and without reproach.”

²⁸ Krentz “Trying to Tame the Romance” 108

The basic plot of the modern romance has been outlined in Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, in which she describes her thirteen romance functions *à la* Propp's folktale functions, recreated below:

1. The heroine's social identity is destroyed.
2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male.
3. The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine.
4. The heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her.
5. The heroine responds to the hero's behavior with anger or coldness.
6. The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine.
7. The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated.
8. The hero treats the heroine tenderly.
9. The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness.
10. The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt.
11. The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness.
12. The heroine responds sexually and emotionally.
13. The heroine's identity is restored.

Radway 134

There are, of course, other elements of the romance plot that exist in both classic and modern romances independent of Radway's thirteen functions. One such trait is physical beauty, which Gaskell's Margaret Hale has, even though it does not present itself traditionally: Margaret has a "tall, finely made figure" (Gaskell *NS* 11) and her face has "an honest, open brightness" (Gaskell *NS* 12). She is, however, not *the* pretty one; in fact, our narrator tells us in the second chapter that many observers have wondered "that parents so handsome should have a daughter who was so far from regularly beautiful; not beautiful at all" (Gaskell *NS* 18). However, following this is a passage ridiculing Victorian standards of beauty: "Her mouth was wide; no rosebud that could only open just enough to let out a 'yes' and 'no,' and 'an't please you, sir'" (Gaskell *NS* 18). Gaskell makes it clear with this passage that Margaret is not some perfect doll (to which her cousin Edith is earlier likened), but that her unconventionality will lend itself to a more prominent role; she will not simply adhere to whatever standards are set by society, but

she will speak out when she sees a practice with which she does not agree, a fact will allow her to function later on as a dissenting philosophical voice in the social problem-novel plot. Further, Margaret is put in contrast with Edith, who is first described to us as like Titania, queen of the faeries. Margaret may not be unattractive, but Gaskell makes it abundantly clear that she has other qualities that surpass her beauty.

This placing second-best in standards of beauty but not in intelligence and outspokenness stems from *Pride and Prejudice*: “[Lizzy] is not half so handsome as Jane,” (Austen *PP* 4) says her own mother, and Darcy himself “at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty... [and] detected more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form” (Austen *PP* 16).²⁹ His opinion of her physicality does improve, of course, as he notes a face “rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes” and admits “her figure to be light and pleasing” (Austen *PP* 16). In the end of both novels, of course, the woman of more unconventional beauty emerges victorious, secure of the most eligible husband of all men presented in her storyline.

We can compare Margaret’s beauty requirement in her romance plot with Thornton’s social problem-novel plot by examining Margaret’s initial description of him in terms of power: “He is a tall, broad-shouldered man, about...thirty – with a face that is neither exactly plain, nor yet handsome, nothing remarkable” (Gaskell *NS* 65). As we can see here, just like both Elizabeth Bennet and Margaret Hale, Mr. Thornton is origi-

²⁹ Mrs. Bennet is, of course, hardly to be trusted as a reliable judge of any actual reality. Darcy, however, has no reason to alter his pronouncement of his perception, especially in this section of the novel, when our narrator is using free indirect discourse to give the reader a glimpse of what is actually going through his mind instead of what he says aloud (though calling her merely “tolerable” at the Meryton assembly proves the sincerity of this initial perception of her (Austen *PP* 8)).

nally perceived and described as being less than notable.³⁰ However, Margaret also allows that his face has “such an expression of resolution and power” to keep it from being considered common or vulgar, and that such a power makes him appear “sagacious, and strong” (Gaskell *NS* 65). That power is first revealed to the reader (though not the Hales) in the last sentence of this chapter, when the Hales discover the landlord has acquiesced at last to allowing a change in the wall paper of their rented residence:

There was no particular need to tell them, that what he did not care to do for a Reverend Mr Hale, unknown in Milton, he was only too glad to do at the one short sharp remonstrance of Mr Thornton, the wealthy manufacturer.

Gaskell *NS* 66

This inherent power, though initially unnoticed by Margaret, secures him as the hero of the social problem-novel. He has power, a strength that comes from his successful business; this power is displayed not through a show of physical force, not through an exuberant display of his wealth to impress others, but instead through a spontaneous and generous desire to better the domestic sphere of an acquaintance he has only just met. He also has a shrewd business sense, altering the chimney stacks to consume their own smoke before the act of Parliament demanded it, both decreasing the smoke and dinginess of Milton (if such a thing were possible) and saving himself money by saving coal. Likewise, we can assume that he may have implemented the wheel Bessy speaks of to lessen the consumption-causing fluff in the air of his factory:

Some folk have a great wheel at one end o’ their carding-rooms to make a draft, and carry off th’ dust; but that wheel costs a deal o’ money – five or six hundred pound, maybe,

³⁰ This failure to accurately perceive and recognize features strongly in both novels and is, I will later argue, the demonstration of what both Austen and Gaskell see as the crux of a subject’s moral action to the other: without proper perception and accurate recognition, all of their characters are incapable of true moral action, but more on that in subsequent chapters.

and brings in no profit; so it's but a few of th' masters as
will put 'em up...

Gaskell *NS* 102

When Margaret meets Mrs. Thornton, the latter alludes to some unique improvement her son has made: "Every improvement of machinery is," she informs the girl she perceives as husband-hunting after her son, "I believe, to be seen [at his mill], in its highest perfection" (Gaskell *NS* 99). After the strike, we find Mr. Thornton musing on how it has damaged his business, noting how his Irish workers are not filling orders as well as his usual ones, reflecting that he has bought cotton in bulk to fill orders he has not filled because of the strike, and, most significantly, recalling that "a good deal of his capital was locked up in new and expensive machinery" (Gaskell *NS* 311). This machinery is never specifically referred to as the wheel Bessy wishes she had had in her place of work, but given that we know Mr. Thornton is relatively proactive in improving his workplace before government agencies require it and that no other mentions of "new and expensive machinery" occur, the likelihood of Mr Thornton's implementing such new and beneficial technology is high, indeed.³¹

Clausson's article highlights that *North and South's* romance plot is closer to the modern romance standard and also lifted directly from *Pride and Prejudice*, the backbone of almost all subsequent romance plots, and argues that the "incompatibility" of the romance plot and the social problem-novel causes most disapproval of Gaskell's work (Clausson 4). This is, however, based on the assumption that the two genres are inherently exclusive, that to have a successful romance, you must sacrifice issues of the social

³¹ The BBC miniseries of *North and South* certainly believes Thornton would be such a master; at the Master's Dinner scene, Thornton reveals he has put up machinery for the health of his workers, not only for their sake, but also because healthy workers work harder and more often since they aren't suffering from sickness.

problem-novel and that to have an effective social problem-novel, you must put the romance plot on the back burner. Catherine Gallagher displays a similar opinion in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, arguing that *North and South*, as well as many other social problem-novels, features the two parallel plotlines of romance and social problem. Instead of completely resolving social problems, Gallagher claims, Gaskell and other Victorian authors use the romantic resolution to cover up the lack of true social resolution featured in their novels. She further argues that Gaskell creates this illusion of resolution “through her use of Margaret Hale to control the novel’s point of view, through comparing public and private plot episodes while concentrating on ethical dilemmas common to both spheres, and, finally, through making Margaret and John Thornton actual representatives of the English upper class, thereby endowing their marriage with practical social consequences” (Gallagher 170). These techniques are so successful at intertwining the romance and social plots, she concludes, that the reader is fooled into viewing the “conventional resolution of the novel’s love plot” as “a partial solution to industrial social problems” (Gallagher 170). This analysis, however, I believe stems from a belief that the two plotlines are mutually exclusive. To use the analogy of two threads, one of romance and one of social commentary, running side by side, Gallagher’s interpretation is that, with *North and South*’s conclusion, Gaskell drops the thread of social commentary to weave solely with the thread of romance. Instead, I believe that Gaskell weaves the two threads into one, creating a stronger, more useful resolution than by focusing on either one to the exclusion of the other.

When the functions of the romance and the purpose of the social problem-novel are pursued to their fullest, both are examinations of appropriate human relations.

Whether the focus be on employer-employee relations or a romantic courtship, the end goal of both the social-problem novel and the romance plot is to point out how to take two unique, conflicting interests and reach a sense of mutual understanding and respect (or, at the very least, to highlight the dangers of *not* accomplishing this). This is particularly true of the romance plot in Regency and Victorian England; whereas the modern romance heroine can provide for herself financially should things not work out with her hero, the Austen and Gaskell heroine could not support herself without some extremely good fortune (both in terms of luck and money). A heroine in Austen's time who misses her romantic happy ending most likely gives up her financial and material happy ending, as well. In the social problem-novel, a failure to reach a mutual understanding and respect between employer and employee also results in financial loss: the employee loses wages and the employer loses productivity, as we can see very clearly in the beginning relationship between Nicholas Higgins and Mr. Thornton in *North and South*. The failure to reach mutual understanding and respect also influences both the romance plot and the social problem-novel in less monetary ways: in the romance, if lovers finally fail to connect, they miss out on enriching personal relationships that could give them intangible happiness, children, and the chance to pass on their own legacies, and in the social problem-novel, if employers and employees fail to do the same, they forfeit a valuable working relationship, potential business innovations that could only stem from their teamwork, and good reputations for both working and leading. In short, in both the romance plot and the social problem-novel, if mutual respect and understanding is not both realized and then demonstrated, conflicts of sexual, social, and financial natures are left at best unresolved and at worst disastrously ended. By featuring the romantic and social prob-

lem plotlines running parallel through *North and South*, Gaskell shows how intertwined and interrelated the two genres are and how both plots are centered on the moral premise that mutual understanding and respect are paramount for human relations. To demonstrate this, I would like to analyze the effect of the incorporation of Radway's 21st-century romance plot functions on the social problem plotline in *North and South*.

Radway's romance functions begin with Gaskell's second chapter, when we get the first indications that all is not right in the world of Margaret Hale. From "Haste to the Wedding," in which we see a Margaret Hale perfectly content within the realm of accepted, comfortably wealthy, southern Englishness, to "Roses and Thorns," there is a marked difference. She is returning to Helstone, her childhood home and idealized image of paradise, but "[her] heart felt more heavy than she could ever have thought it possible in going to her own dear home" (Gaskell *NS* 17). She reflects on her father's figure in the train carriage with her and notes aspects of discord instead of the perfect tranquility with which she is used to thinking of Helstone. When they reach home, she is surprised by the lack of domestic harmony between her mother and father. Moment by moment³² her security in her perception of her home is weakened. The final blow comes, of course, when Mr. Hale reveals that they must leave Helstone. Upon hearing the news, Margaret "[bursts] into tears. The one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking" (Gaskell *NS* 36). The destruction of her social identity has moved from slight and internal to momentous and external, though even its external nature displays itself in an internal fashion; it is not physical pain she suffers, but an emo-

³² The only exception to this constant diminishing of Margaret's happiness comes when she is out in her forest, reveling in nature: "Her out-of-doors life was perfect. Her indoors life had its drawbacks," we are told (Gaskell *NS* 19). This strengthens the parallel between Margaret Hale and Elizabeth Bennet, who is also frequently associated with nature, long walks, and physical activity, and helps to foreshadow that the course of the storyline will follow a *Pride and Prejudice*-esque plot.

tional wrenching from what is familiar and safe. From the established and respected daughter of the country clergyman who was known by everyone and who fully intended to enshrine herself in the life of the county and its school, Margaret becomes the daughter of some “Reverend Mr Hale, unknown in Milton,” whose landlord doesn’t respect him enough even to change the wallpaper he dislikes (Gaskell *NS* 66). In Milton, she must learn a new role, new behaviors, and new standards in order to engage with a new society; her safe and secure social identity of the south is destroyed.

The next requirement stems from various misunderstandings, misperceptions, and frankly, poor timing. From the moment Margaret Hale meets Mr. Thornton for the first time, entertaining him despite her exhaustion from her expeditions around town, she comes across as haughty: “her quiet coldness of demeanor he interpreted into contemptuousness,” we are told (Gaskell *NS* 64). Later, when Mr. Thornton is leaving the Hales’ after taking tea there, Margaret fails to perceive his outstretched hand, leading Mr. Thornton to reflect as he leaves, “A more proud, disagreeable girl I never saw” (Gaskell *NS* 86). It is important to note, however, that the disagreements and antagonism between Mr. Thornton and Margaret Hale stem almost exclusively from misunderstandings and a failure to accurately interpret the other’s behavior or expressions rather than from some inherent dislike of each other in and of him-/herself. On the contrary, Margaret thinks to herself that she likes his smile, and Mr. Thornton frequently takes notice of Margaret’s great beauty, though the traits they admire in each other are overshadowed by their faulty understandings of each other’s characters. Misunderstanding, however, is central to both the romance and the social problem-novel, and must be allowed in order to give each party the opportunity to reevaluate the other party later on in the work.

Mr. Thornton's behavior after meeting Margaret is certainly ambiguous. Though we as readers know of his conflicting distaste for what he perceives as her haughtiness and his growing admiration and affection for her, she remains oblivious to it. Therefore, he frequently makes comments that are derogatory toward her beloved south: "I would rather be a man toiling, suffering – nay, failing and successful here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease," he says at one point (Gaskell *NS* 82). Likewise, he engages her in debates about human rights, the definition of the gentleman as opposed to the true man, and generally enjoys verbal sparring with her whenever they converse. Then comes the all-important and much discussed scene of the riot, in which Margaret protects Mr. Thornton from the crowd by shielding him with her own body, wounding herself in the process, an act that, along with some encouragement from his mother, leads to his proposal.³³ Margaret is hence provided with two very disparate images of Mr. Thornton: on one hand, he is the proud, stubborn, callous Milton manufacturing legend who belittles her home, but on the other, he professes that he loves her as no man has ever loved a woman before. This conflict of images leads her, along with her own personal (at least conscious) lack of feelings for him, to reject his proposal, telling him his manner of proposing offends her, that he essentially cannot fully understand her as a *gentleman* should, hence sparking the old antagonism over definitions of proper

³³ Gallagher claims that Mr. Thornton's proposal after the riot is indicative of his failure to understand Margaret's intentions, but this fails to take into account the fact that his mother talks him into believing Margaret's actions stemmed from an affection for him: "I cannot believe such a creature [as Margaret] cares for me," Mr. Thornton says, and Mrs. Thornton replies, "What proof more would you have, I wonder, of her caring for you?" and sends him off to the Hales with the instruction, "Don't fear!" (Gaskell *NS* 187). Without the interference, therefore, of one wholly unconnected with the situation or the parties involved, Mr. Thornton may not have fallen victim to "his own hopes and fears" regarding the prospect of Margaret's affection for him (Gaskell *NS* 187).

masculine behavior. She finally decimates any hope of a returned regard for him by telling him, after he accuses her of despising him because she does not understand him, “I do not care to understand” (Gaskell *NS* 193). This choice of wording is particularly cruel in *North and South*; Gaskell has many times before this speech made it clear that misunderstandings are central to disputes and that accuracy of perception is the key to resolving them. A misunderstanding of Margaret’s behavior, for example, leads Henry Lennox to profess his feelings for her, and a misinterpretation of why Margaret would want to visit his home leads to a sharpness in Nicholas Higgins’ response to her when they meet on the road. It is, indeed, Margaret’s demand of Mr. Thornton during the riot that he go make himself understood to his men and understand them, thus treating them “as if they were human beings” (Gaskell *NS* 175). By refusing to try to understand Mr. Thornton, therefore, Margaret is denying him that human courtesy, making him lower than any other character in her estimation, and with a harshness the reader knows to be uncalled for, adhering to the fifth function of Radway’s romance plot.

The next function, the hero punishing the heroine for her coldness, takes place in two ways. The first punishment Mr. Thornton exacts on Margaret is the mental anguish she experiences from his avowal that he will continue to love her, even if the idea is distasteful to her and even if he does not express it. To Margaret’s mind, the fact that she dwells on this means that he has “mastered her inner will” and she “[shudders] away from the *threat* of his enduring love” (Gaskell *NS* 196, emphasis mine). With his declaration, he has ensured that Margaret will never be able to think of him without thinking of his love for her, and the concept of that love frightens her: “she shrank and shuddered as under the fascination of some great power, repugnant to her whole previous life,” we are

told as Margaret accepts the fact that Mr. Thornton's profession of love is sincere (Gaskell *NS* 195). The sensation this sparks in her is likened to a nightmare that haunts the dreamer even after waking, demonstrating how long-lasting this unintentional punishment will be. The second aspect of his punishment is the awkwardness his physical presence instills in her after she rejects his proposal. When he delivers a basket of fruit to Mrs. Hale, her "heart [flutters]" (Gaskell *NS* 211) and she later is "half afraid of moving or making any noise to arouse Mr Thornton into a consciousness of her being in the room" (Gaskell *NS* 212). As we can see from this, the hero does not exact physical punishment on the heroine in the romance, but rather a psychological torment that comes from the realization that she has misread the hero's character.³⁴

Mr. Thornton and Margaret are separated emotionally by Mr. Thornton's own will; he refuses to acknowledge her after his rejected proposal when he brings her ailing mother fruit, and Margaret dares not confront him for fear that she will spark some return of the distasteful sensations his declaration of love originally sparked in her. During a visit to Mrs. Hale, we are told that "if [Margaret] spoke, [Mr. Thornton] gave no sign of attention" (Gaskell *NS* 235). They are, of course, later physically separated, but that aspect of the tale is more in line with the social problem-novel's functions than those of the romance plot. This separation allows Margaret time to reexamine Mr. Thornton's actions, to reflect on their relationship with the clarity only distance (be it emotional or physical) can give. Of course, Mr. Thornton's acts of tenderness toward her (bringing her mother fruit during her illness, ordering Watson the policeman to make no further inquiries into Leonards' death and therefore questioning Margaret's character, accepting

³⁴ That is to say, the hero does not *usually* exact physical punishment in the romance. There are, of course, outliers, like *Wuthering Heights* or the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy.

Nicholas Higgins into his workforce as he begins to adopt less strict work habits), help her come to the realization that he may be something more than the overbearing Milton manufacturer she has decided he is. We can see the first stages of this warming of her heart when she reflects on all the kindnesses he has shown her throughout the novel:

She was smitten with a feeling of ingratitude to Mr Thornton, inasmuch as, in the morning, she had refused to accept the kindness he had shown her in making further inquiry from the medical men, so as to obviate any inquest being held. Oh! she was grateful! She had been cowardly and false... It was a pleasure to feel how thoroughly she respected him.

Gaskell *NS* 282

This is quite a change of opinion, especially given her earlier likening him to a tradesman and describing him as “nothing remarkable” (Gaskell *NS* 65). From regretting that he has forced himself on her consciousness after his proposal, she has moved to longing to see him and having to tell herself she is glad when her repressed hope he will call is dashed (Gaskell *NS* 296, 297). Additionally, as her opinion of Mr. Thornton changes, so does her opinion of Milton and the north, even to the point of forbidding Nicholas Higgins to move to the south. So convinced is she at this point of Mr. Thornton’s goodness of character that she suggests Higgins ask for work at the old bulldog’s mill even though he has already been turned down from the place once.

We know that Mr. Thornton’s strictness and demanding nature is a product of his previous life experiences, just as the abstract romance heroine must learn in Radway’s tenth function. As he says to his mother’s question as to whether he should want his sister to be noticed by a grocer’s assistant out at night, he replies that “it is not many years since I myself was a draper’s assistant,” reminding the reader that he has struggled

through his own hard times (Gaskell *NS* 305).³⁵ Both the reader and Margaret are also aware at this point that Mr. Thornton has survived his father's poor investment destroying his family and, after his father's suicide, has had to pull his entire family out of destitution and into their current position of relative affluence, accounting for his expectation that his workers will work in less than ideal conditions to better themselves. Margaret is, of course, also right in thinking that his coldness to her is a result of his jealousy after seeing her with a handsome young man at the train station, his belief that she has a lover, and the pain it causes him to think of her with another man than himself. However, due to her own embarrassment at his having caught her in a lie and out of a concern for her brother's safety, she cannot correct his assumption, and leaves for London without resolving his misperception. Margaret's change in thinking about Mr. Thornton due to her accurately understanding his character satisfies the tenth function of the romance plot.

When Margaret returns to London, Mr. Bell perceives a sickliness to her appearance, though she has been removed from the sorrowful, death-ridden, smoky Milton of Darkshire and is now returned to the sunny, warm, happiness of the south. During her visit to Helstone, she reflects that "it hurt her to see the Helstone road so flooded in sunlight" (Gaskell *NS* 376). Despite her return to her social circumstances in the beginning of the novel – she is once again a wealthy, eligible,³⁶ single young woman – she is not

³⁵ This notion of social mobility is prevalent in modern romances: the concept of the "diamond in the rough" is very popular. A thief or con-man falls in love with a virtuous woman, reforms, and then rises in society either right before or right after their reunion (*Aladdin, Tangled, A Knight's Tale*). The pattern also works in reverse, typically in the story of the "whore with a heart of gold" (the best example of this I can think of is *Pretty Woman*).

³⁶ Perhaps even more so than at the novel's beginning, as Mr. Bell bestows upon her a greater fortune than her father as a country clergyman could ever have hoped to do.

fulfilled.³⁷ Later, when Mr. Thornton visits her in London after the failure of his business, we are told that “with his first calm words a vivid colour flashed into her cheeks, which never left them again during the evening” (Gaskell *NS* 418). This serves as the first indication that her social identity will only be restored with the fulfillment of their relationship.

Mr. Thornton’s supreme act of tenderness comes very late in the novel, even for a romance. After Margaret proposes to invest her money in Marlborough Mills, he drops to one knee and whispers – Gaskell uses the word “panted” – that if Margaret does not acknowledge him, he will “claim her as [his] own in some strange presumptuous way” (Gaskell *NS* 424). This continues the sexual overtones of his perception of Margaret throughout the novel, though he is always respectful and believes in her maidenliness (Gaskell *NS* 264). We see this attraction most predominantly in their first meeting:

Her full beauty met his eyes; her round white flexible throat rising out of the full, yet lithe figure; her lips, moving so slightly as she spoke, not breaking the cold serene look of her face with any variation from the one lovely haughty curve; her eyes, with their soft gloom, meeting his with quiet maiden freedom.

Gaskell *NS* 64

Her spilled blood during the riot, along with her fainting spell and weakness, certainly has sexual overtones, as well (even if Margaret herself does not choose to acknowledge them). During his proposal, his declaration of love causes her to shiver and tremble, and he pants as he awaits her response (Gaskell *NS* 192). However, despite all of this, he

³⁷ We see the unsuitability of the south furthered with the tale of the cat being burned alive that the south is not, perhaps, the idyllic paradise to which so many characters in the novel have likened it. While there may have been hardships in Milton, no character exacted such nonsensical cruelty on another living being; this irredeemable behavior happens only in the south, and moreover in Helstone, the epitome of peace and tranquility, further confirming that this is not a place for our sensible and deep-feeling Margaret Hale to spend the rest of her days.

never acts on his physical passion until this last moment, when he feels he cannot deny it any longer. Margaret, for her part, responds instantly to this newest declaration, both emotionally and sexually, by resting her head on his shoulder. He furthers the motion from one of a woman submitting emotionally to her hero to a gesture more sexually suggestive by placing her arms in the position they had been in the day of the riot and causing the reader to recollect the sexual implications of her actions that day. He restores her social identity further by giving her roses from Helstone, incorporating her sense of her own past with her hopeful future. While the two do not actually marry within the confines of the novel, there can be little doubt that a Victorian wedding is forthcoming, securing Margaret's social identity in the way of both a classical and a modern romance: being wealthy, married, beautiful, and respected.

Gaskell uses the functions of the romance plot not only to depict Margaret and Mr. Thornton's journey to wedded bliss, but also to further the social problem-novel aspect of *North and South*, recognizing the inherent focus of the romance's demonstration of the importance of mutual understanding and respect between two opposing forces in order to resolve conflict. Michael Lewis points out that this is the purpose of the Victorian industrial novels as well in his article "Democratic Networks and the Industrial Novel," stating that industrial novels "guarantee formal, diurnal contact between disagreeing parties" (Lewis 243). Valerie Wainwright in her article "Discovering Autonomy and Authenticity in *North and South*" and in her chapter on *North and South* in her work *Ethics and the English Novel from Austen to Forster* outlines how Mr. Thornton, champion of classic liberalism, and Margaret Hale, advocate of paternalism, come to an understanding, each one initially refusing to bend and then, upon increased exposure to each other

and a fuller understanding of themselves and the implications of strictly adhering to their philosophies, each compromising until they develop a new, more beneficial philosophy, one that encompasses a more realistic and more practical method of relating to the world of industrial England and its problems. Thornton's changing mindset is important, she argues, because "it is through [the] narrative of his transformation that Gaskell indicates metaphorically the potential road that the unrevised liberal may follow" (Wainwright "Discovering").³⁸ However, it is important to note that the marriage of Margaret Hale and John Thornton does not necessitate a domination of one philosophy over the other, but rather a mutuality of and simultaneous consumption and submission to each other in order to create a more fruitful philosophy.³⁹

Whereas the opposing forces of the romance are focused on the lovers' quarrel and a battle of the sexes, the social problem-novel depicts the same battles among different philosophies regarding proper behavior, particularly between employers and workers in the setting of the Victorian industrial age. As Lewis points out, the central conflict in the social problem plotline of the novel is the relationship between Mr. Thornton and his workers, namely Nicholas Higgins. Lewis further outlines the stages Mr. Thornton and Higgins go through, drawing attention to the fact that "Thornton first denies an industrial network, refusing to meet and listen to union representatives, but finally develops one, hiring and engaging with the union leader Higgins. Higgins forces his employer into a flourishing friendship, as both men admit and accept the other's influence" (Lewis 247).

³⁸ This process of change is also central to the romance plot functions which outline the heroine's changing viewpoint toward an accurate perception of her reality.

³⁹ Wainwright argues that the marriage between Margaret and Mr. Thornton involves "neither a subordination of one, nor a total synthesis of the two revised codes" (Wainwright "Discovering"). Likewise, Guy claims that "the final reconciliation between [Margaret and Thornton]...seems to indicate that the new understanding demanded of both Margaret and Thornton can be a prototype of a new solution to contemporary social problem" (Guy 162).

This follows the same basic stages of the romance plot functions between Margaret and Mr. Thornton, those of misunderstanding, miscommunication, and subsequent conflict as well as the resolution of this conflict despite differences through reexamination of the character of the other party. The application of romance functions to relationships between those of the same sex is complicated, however, as we can see from Mr. Thornton's discussion with Mr. Bell as he attempts to explain his relationship with Higgins, naming him in succession "my friend," "my enemy," and then simply "the man I told you of" (Gaskell *NS* 353). Mr. Thornton is confused, unsure of how to define his relationship with Higgins, demonstrating the potential problems in applying romance functions to non-romantic relationships. However, despite Mr. Thornton's confusion, it is clear that his relationship with Higgins is beneficial, offering him both personal and financial fulfillment and furthermore assisting to bridge the gap between Mr. Thornton and the rest of his workers. This bridge is created through romantic resolution, or at least the resolution created through following the romantic plot functions. The fruitfulness of this resolution, however, can only come about through the tension and conflict that both parties or ideologies must overcome, for, as Lewis puts it, "tension forces growth" (Lewis 248).

It is my belief that Gaskell chooses to highlight a parallel structure in the romance and social aspects of her work in order to demonstrate the central focus of both, that of the requirement of accurate perception (Margaret's misperception of Mr. Thornton's actions leads to their falling apart just as Mr. Thornton's misperception of the value of other business philosophies leads the near destruction of his livelihood) in the mutual understanding and respect necessary for resolving conflict. She condemns violence, opting instead to highlight moments of two differing philosophies fully recognizing each other

(most notably in the moments of Margaret's reflection on how she has misunderstood Mr. Thornton and in Mr. Thornton's changed opinion of Higgins, indicating their diametric difference of philosophy but symbiotic relationship in improving the productivity and working conditions of his mill). Charles Dickens, in a letter to Gaskell on the 26 of July 1854, acknowledges this focus by recommending the title of the work be *North and South* instead of *Margaret Hale*: "it implies more," he says, "and is expressive of the opposite people brought face to face by the story" (Dickens 378). Catherine Gallagher further notes this in her books *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, highlighting that the title *North and South* demonstrates that "the book [will dwell] on the difficulties that northerners and southerners have in understanding one another" (Gallagher 181).

Central to *North and South*, just as in *Pride and Prejudice*, is the question of accuracy of perception and the development of its central characters to a point of moral responsibility. For instance, Margaret is unable to fully appreciate Mr. Thornton's worth until she is forced to face her own faults. Once confronted with the fact that she has lied to protect Frederick, she reflects:

How faithless she had been! Where now was her proud motto, "Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra?"⁴⁰ If she had but dared to bravely tell the truth as regarded herself, defying them to find out what she refused to tell concerning another, how light of heart she would now have felt! Not humbled before God, as having failed in trust towards Him; not degraded and abased in Mr. Thornton's sight.

Gaskell *NS* 279

Having recognized her own faults, Margaret is now free to truly realize the extent of Mr. Thornton's worth: it is on page 282 that Margaret acknowledges that she is grateful to Mr. Thornton for all his help. It is this realization of his worth and goodness, this newly

⁴⁰ French translation: "Do what you must, come what may."

discovered faith in his character that leads her to encourage Higgins to apply directly to Mr. Thornton for work, an action that leads not only to the romantic resolution between herself and Mr. Thornton but also to the social resolution between the workers and their master. Until this realization, Margaret has operated under the illusion that she is understanding, that because she is sympathetic to the plight of the less fortunate, she has the ability to accurately perceive the world. Afterwards, she is forced to admit that she may have misjudged Mr. Thornton, just as Elizabeth Bennet must admit she has misjudged Darcy. And, just as Darcy develops in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Thornton must also develop before he is able to serve as a truly acceptable match for *North and South*'s heroine. Gaskell writes to a Mrs. Emily Shaen discussing *North and South*'s progress, saying:

I've got to (with Margaret—I'm off at her now following your letters) when they've quarreled, silently, after the lie and she knows she loves him, and he is trying not to love her; and Frederick is gone back to Spain and Mrs Hale is dead and Mr Bell has come to stay with the Hales, and Mr Thornton ought to be developing himself—and Mr Hale ought to die—and if I could get over this next piece I could swim through the London life beautifully into the sunset glory of the last scene. But hitherto Mr Thornton is good; and I'm afraid of a touch marring him; and I want to keep his character consistent with itself, and large and strong and tender, and *yet a master*.

Gaskell *L* 321, italics original, underlined mine

With this commentary, the author reveals that the “glory of the last scene” cannot be achieved until Mr. Thornton has developed himself; the romantic resolution is not possible without the personal development of both hero and heroine. Furthermore, the final resolution is not possible until Mr. Thornton has realized the truth of Margaret's affections for him – their romantic reunion is only possible once he accurately perceives her feelings. Likewise, the resolution reached between Mr. Thornton and Higgins, symbolic

of the master and the hands, cannot be achieved until both men gain a true understanding of each other. This accuracy of perception in the world of *North and South* is only achievable through the process of romantic resolution, whether between actual lovers or different classes in society.

Gaskell constructs in *North and South* a novel that is careful to use the elements of an updated romance to resolve social problems instead of taking social solutions (policy changes, government mandates, etc.) to resolve romantic conflict. In this way, she subtly insists on the importance of the romance plot's structure for resolving conflict of many kinds, including but not limited to romantic disputes, gender relations, class differences, and philosophic ideologies. By requiring the functions of the romance plot to resolve the conflicts of the social problem plot of *North and South*, Gaskell argues that the romance plot itself provides a means for social commentary and a method for suggesting resolution to social conflict.

CONCLUSION

*Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think,
without feeling that she had been blind,
partial, prejudiced, absurd.*

- Jane Austen⁴¹

*I know you despise me; allow me to say,
it is because you misunderstand me.*

- Elizabeth Gaskell⁴²

The case for Austen and Gaskell writing novels with political agendas is so strongly supported it need hardly be made. Claudia Johnson, for example, points out that “[Austen’s fiction] emerges, draws, and departs from a largely feminine tradition of political novels” (Johnson, xix) and also that “late eighteenth century women read and wrote novels that undertook either to defend the nation from the contagion of ‘Jacobinism’ or to improve the nation by pointing to the need for social reform” (Johnson xx). Elizabeth Gaskell, champion of the downtrodden and persecuted through *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, and *Ruth*, clearly promoted political agendas in her works; writing a social problem-novel necessitates a political agenda. What is interesting about both authors is how they used and adapted the genres of romance and the social problem-novel to communicate their respective ideologies.

Austen’s adaptation of the romance (creating a romantic plot centered on “every day” people, removing the supernatural, featuring central characters with faults) allowed her to discuss issues of her social criticism. In her case, utilizing the romance was a way

⁴¹ Austen *PP* 137.

⁴² Gaskell *NS* 193.

to mask her critique of elements of society, mainly the entail system and its treatment of marriage as a business instead of as a means of personal fulfillment and class snobbishness. These critiques, however, hidden as they are behind the mask of romance, differed from the many other political voices present in her contemporary fictions by their subtlety. In 1821, Archbishop Richard Whately declared: “The moral lessons of this lady’s novels, though clearly and impressively conveyed, are not offensively put forward... they are not forced upon the reader” (Waldron 5). Mary Waldron in *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time* goes on to argue, regarding Whately’s sentiment, that in Austen’s time:

Without the moral the credibility might be dangerous, especially to young readers. They might want to imitate the “bad” characters if they were not given clear guidance. Austen was surely aware of the currency of these ideas through her reading of Dr. [Samuel] Johnson, especially of *Rambler 4*, but felt that the balance had been disastrously disturbed; she appears to have concluded that fiction was beginning to sell out to polemic; to prioritise didacticism of one kind or another; in short, to give way to “cant.”

Waldron 2

It is perhaps this opinion and literary environment that prompted Austen to introduce the concept of the romance with characters that were not strictly black and white, not purely good or bad. Johnson posits that “Austen has contrived *Pride and Prejudice* in such a way that virtually every argument about it can be undercut with a built-in countervailing argument, a qualifying ‘on the other hand’ which forestalls conclusiveness” (Johnson 77). To exemplify this, she points out that the environment that created Lydia Bennet is the same that created Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. Likewise, by providing the example of Charlotte Lucas’ mercenary marriage, carefully defended by the 27-year-old spinster and also legitimately lamented by her more “romantic” friend, Austen creates a situation that requires personal interpretation. By carefully restraining herself from passing judgment

and providing these binary situations, Austen demonstrates that objective and universal truths are nonexistent. I would not go so far as to argue that Austen engages in moral relativism, but she certainly seems to understand that what is right for one person may be wrong for another, that the moral rightness or wrongness of a situation or action depends entirely on the circumstances, a support of the idea of the “toleration of some ethical relativity which some of her contemporaries could have found disturbing” (Johnson 81). However, Austen never “[leaves] us bereft of rational means for ethical discrimination” (Johnson 81). In other words, Austen provides systems for ethical thinking that vary character by character, situation by situation, and argues for no universally “correct” moral, no one, single right way of establishing value or behaving in society. However, she does make it clear that some systems are definitely incorrect (Lydia and Wickham, Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr. Elliot in *Persuasion*, John and Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, and the Crawleys in *Mansfield Park* are all). The idea of the ability to have a keen moral intelligence while not adhering to a universal set of moral rules across all situations is the subject of in Sarah Emsley’s *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues*: “my book proposes that the most radically innovative aspect of [Austen’s] work is her emphasis on the centrality and flexibility of the tradition of the virtues” (Emsley 3).

Related to the ability to determine the morality of a given situation is another significant aspect of Austen’s social critique: a focus on the importance of independent thought. This is why, as Johnson points out, Austen’s heroines normally experience their revelations and develop their sense of moral responsibility and agency away from their parents and guardians. This privileging of the concepts of independent judgment, authenticity, and autonomy shows up again in Gaskell’s *North and South*, as well. This inde-

pendence and autonomy is an essential part of Gaskell's message, as Valerie Wainwright points out: "that [Thornton] is attracted and yet not dominated, is central to Gaskell's narrative strategies... [His] reformation will naturally have important social implications"; it is politically important to Gaskell's narrative, in other words, that neither of her central characters are dominated by the other (Wainwright "Discovering"). Wainwright goes on to argue that *North and South* features "more complex characterization and narrative strategies [in order] to articulate more complex ethical and social issues, and to express, moreover, a characteristically modern moral viewpoint" than does Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (Wainwright "Discovering"). However, I disagree with her central arguments to support this claim, that:

Gaskell's is a vision informed by the belief (1) that the personal developments of individuals are necessarily interdependent, (2) that the clash of ideas is healthy, and (3) that the highly distinctive lives and personalities of members of society complete each other. The idea of gradual progress, to be achieved by mutually dependent developing individuals who are able to cultivate their higher natures through the interplay of variety of experience and diversity of thought, suggests deep affinities between the social thought of Gaskell and Mill.

Wainwright "Discovering", numbers mine

This description of how Gaskell does more than Austen does nothing except outline what Austen accomplishes in *Pride and Prejudice*; I take issue with the claim that Austen does not do all of the things Wainwright here says Gaskell does. To address these in order, Elizabeth and Darcy's developments are intertwined, both dependent on the other's development; Elizabeth and Darcy only develop morally because of their interactions with each other – Elizabeth only realizes her flawed perception of reality because of Darcy's letter, and Darcy only realizes the egregiousness of his pride because of Elizabeth's re-

marks as she rejected his first proposal. The clash of ideas is presented as healthy in *Pride and Prejudice* in a similar way: without the violent nature of Elizabeth and Darcy's tête-à-têtes, the two might never have reached their respective moments of moral clarity. Stemming from this, no one can deny that Elizabeth and Darcy are classic examples of "distinctive lives and personalities," nor that they do not complete each other. One could argue that Gaskell offers a wider array of social class than Austen, but it is important to note that Austen's focus on the middle class was in and of itself revolutionary, and even though the central conflict of *Pride and Prejudice* is between a gentleman and a gentleman's daughter, Austen's use of characters in the middle class paved the way for romantic plots to incorporate more social classes, making it possible for Gaskell to discuss characters such as Higgins and Boucher in her own novel.

Because of her inclusion of lower social classes, Gaskell is able to argue for more than the concept that it is impossible to form a moral judgment on a situation without an accurate perception of the event, or that the entail system leads to a distortion of the purpose of marriage; she is able to posit the theory that "personal 're-form' and social reformation go hand in hand," to examine the interrelation between personal relationships and social change (Wainwright "Discovering"). This idea of personal reformation leading to social reformation is presented in *North and South* by the fact that Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton are only able to effect real and lasting social change once they adapt themselves and their philosophies. The very distinctiveness of their two original ideologies, furthermore, makes their eventual union that much more impressive; as Wainwright claims, the two "ultimately...achieve a new moral status, by embracing difference, realizing their potential to move beyond orthodox modes of thought" (Wainwright *Ethics* 87).

Through distancing their novels from traditional standards of romance, both Austen and Gaskell create revolutionary plotlines that allow for more complex analyses than traditional romances or mere social criticism feature. Both authors are also careful as they adapt the romance to their own purposes to remain true to the basic plot requirements of the genre, if not the characterization typical of classic romances. While it is true that neither *Pride and Prejudice* nor *North and South* feature any blatant supernatural events or forces, both rely heavily on chance. Jessica Richard's work *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* discusses the ties between romance and gambling, namely the chance and fortune inherent in gambling. At a surface level, she argues, the marriage market allows for women to gamble on their husbands: "Rather than the objects exchanged; women in the marriage market are gambling in an economy of chance, contemplating how big a risk to take, how to control the outcome of their wagers, hoping for a big win and far too aware of the losses possible" (Richard 157). This is emphasized in Charlotte Lucas' famous line in *Pride and Prejudice* that "happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" (Austen *PP* 16). To her mind, Charlotte gambles on Mr. Collins, analyzing that her potential winnings (a comfortable house, a secure station, relative respect as the wife of a clergyman) outweigh her potential losses (the ridiculousness of Mr. Collins himself and the almost certain probability that his behavior will embarrass her at some point in the future).

Regardless of all the central characters' moral growth, their final developed abilities to accurately perceive and understand the other people with whom they interact, the storylines are dependent on coincidence, on chance occurrence. It is this chance that keeps the reader reading romance despite its fairly established plot structure. Richard

highlights this as she describes the draw of gambling. “The gambler,” she argues, or reader of romance in this case, “revels in this moment of the unknowable, of utter submission to contingency...even as he hopes to control [the gamble’s] outcome with luck, calculation, intuitive hunches, or methods of cheating” (Richard 6). She goes on to note that “the gambler hopes that calculations will accurately predict the outcome of his wager,” just as the unattached heroine of a romance plot hopes her perceptions will lead her to a safe choice of a partner, while “on the other [hand], he bets the long odds, believing *in the romance of the unlikely heroic achievement*, the lucky break, the unpredictable outcome,” just as the romance heroine hopes against hope that her eventual partner will be everything she has ever wanted (Richard 13-14, emphasis mine). Just as, during the eighteenth-century, gamblers were searching for methods to calculate risks, studying the mathematics behind probability, novelists could outline all the potential outcomes of a given set of circumstances.

Beyond the heroine’s hope for romance and the ability of the novel to depict multiple outcomes, Richard outlines the importance of the function of chance in the romance. Specifically in reference to *Pride and Prejudice*, she argues that chance events and coincidence are essential to the novel’s conclusion: it is only chance that Bingley rents Netherfield instead of some other country house, that Darcy accompanies him to Netherfield, that Darcy and Elizabeth happen to visit Rosings simultaneously, and that Elizabeth’s trip with her aunt and uncle gets cut short and they happen visit Pemberley at the exact moment that Darcy happens to come home unexpectedly from his trip, providing the opportunity for the two to reevaluate their perceptions of each other. *North and South* features a similar reliance on chance: it is chance that Mr. Thornton is the only stu-

dent of Mr. Hale's who visits the house on a regular basis, that Margaret happens to be at the mill on the day of the riot, that the pebble happens to graze Margaret's head, that Frederick happens to encounter Leonards at the train station on a night when Mr. Thornton *happens* to see Margaret with Frederick, and that Mr. Thornton's financial misfortunes lead him to talk to his new landlord, who just *happens* to be Mr. Bell's heir, Margaret Hale, creating the opportunity for the novel's romantic resolution.

Of course, the use of the romance to discuss social issues does present a few problems. Most importantly in *Pride and Prejudice*, many critics fault Austen's focus on such a small sliver of life. While I believe it is unrealistic to hold Austen accountable for later standards of diversity of class representation and in fact diminishes her importance in paving the way for that very standard of diversity, I also acknowledge that the conflicts resolved in *Pride and Prejudice* revolve almost exclusively around gender relations. However, these gender conflicts lay the foundation for later narrative conflicts of class, like the ones presented in *North and South*. The fact that Gaskell chooses to resolve her class conflict with the same techniques she uses to resolve her romantic ones shows that the model for resolution provided by the romance plot is applicable to social issues as well as gender ones. The transition is not perfect, however. For instance, when applying the romance functions' steps to the same-sex interactions between Mr. Thornton and Nicholas Higgins, awkwardness and confusion arise. Eventually this awkwardness and confusion subside, but in the meantime, the bond between the two is fragile, presented as unstable enough to potentially fall victim to the pressures of disagreements and differing philosophies. Still, through the dedication and perseverance of both parties, a fruitful relationship can be attained. Thus, despite the problematic aspects of Austen and Gaskell's

distortion of the romance plot in order to better represent their social commentaries, it is clear that the decision to do so incorporates the opportunity to safely discuss social criticism without appearing polemical, to expand the standard of appropriate subject material, and to demonstrate the importance of private, gender conflict resolutions in discussions of larger scale, social reformation ones in Gaskell.

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- Editor-in-Chief for *IMUNION*, the Iberian Peninsula's MUN Conference newsletter, 2007

BACHELOR OF ARTS, MAGNA CUM LAUDE | AUGUST 2012 | UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA -- GREENSBORO

- Major: English
- Minors: Psychology, History
- Honors Project: "Lost (or Gained?) in Translation: An Examination of the Re-Imaginations of Jane Austen in Film, Novel, and Graphic Novel"
- Memberships
 - Phi Beta Kappa
 - Phi Sigma Pi
 - Golden Key International Honour Society
 - Sigma Tau Delta
 - Sigma Alpha Lambda
- Elizabeth Fort Scholarship
- *Sense and Sensibility* Public Reading, 2011

MASTER OF ARTS | AUGUST 2014 | WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

- Major: English
- Thesis: "The Romance of Social Problems in Austen and Gaskell"
- TA, Fall 2013