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Dana L. Covo 1 April 2013

A Study of the Varying Perspectives of Marriage in *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch*, and *Jude the Obscure*

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Abstract

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In my thesis I explore the different perspectives of marriage in *Jane Eyre (1847), Middlemarch (1871-72),* and *Jude the Obscure (1895)*. I chose these novels because I wanted to examine changing attitudes over the course of a time period; the three novels span the majority of the Victorian era. In addition, each novel has a leading female character with a strong and vibrant personality. The diverse personalities of the women highlight their different ideas, perspectives, and feelings in regard to marriage. For most of the Victorian era, marriage was considered very restrictive and limiting for women, especially in terms of their legal status. They had to give up all their property upon marriage and anything earned during the marriage also became their husband's. They could not sue or file for divorce. They were essentially an entity of their husbands. However, despite these limitations women still yearned to get married as unmarried women were considered spinsters and social outcasts. Marriage offered women the chance to be a wife and a mother. These were respected and important positions of the time and gave women the responsibilities that came with running a household and raising children. Despite the legal restrictions associated with marriage for women, *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure* present marriage as an arrangement more than a legal union; the novels explore and bring to life the emotional, psychological, and physical parts of marriage that make it so sacred and coveted. Jane Eyre's, Dorothea Brooke's and Sue Bridehead's experiences with marriage both support and deny the idea of marriage as a means of defeat to the individuality and independence of a woman. However, while these women are able to make strides in terms of their independence, all of their actions are within the confines of a patriarchal society. These women ultimately rely on men to attain happiness, social status, and social acceptance.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Cultural, Legal, and Social Codes of the Victorian Era

"Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house" –John Stuart Mill[1]

As expressed in *The Subjection of Women,* written in 1869, John Stuart Mill believes that marriage is a harmful and demeaning institution that offers few opportunities for women. The restrictive nature of marriage during the Victorian era was no secret. Women knew the emotional, physical, legal, economic, and psychological limitations that were placed upon them once they entered into a legal union. However, despite these constraints, the majority of women during the era still got married. The alternatives to marriage for women of all classes were grim. Unmarried women were considered "somehow unnatural" and "abnormal, objects of pity or scorn" (Gorsky 2, 20). Single women often lived with relatives and were dependent on their siblings and other relatives, which placed them in a pathetic and low-ranking position. Unmarried working-class women who could not marry or live with family members were often forced into prostitution as a means of supporting themselves given their limited educational backgrounds. Although middle-class unmarried women usually had some education, many became governesses, which was "the fate that awaited any middle-class woman who failed to marry" (Poovey 43). Being a governess was not a highly respected position but often the only available option for these women. Despite the limitations associated with marriage, it offered

[1] Quotation is from Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women*. Cambridge: The M.I.T Press, 1970. Print. Page 80.

women a better situation than being viewed as a social outcast and spinster. Marriage also allowed women to gain more responsibilities such as taking care of the household and eventually caring for their children, which put them in a better situation compared to their role as daughters. While it is difficult to know how most women truly felt about their positions as wives, Jane Eyre, Dorothea Brooke, and Sue Bridehead, the leading female characters in *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Middlemarch* (1871-72), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) are three very different characters who allow readers a glimpse into a Victorian woman's mind. The fates of Jane, Dorothea, and Sue illuminate how marriage is not necessarily a form of defeat to the independence and individuality of a Victorian woman. They are strong-minded, clever, and determined individuals who view their roles as wives and interact with the institution of marriage in diverse ways: Jane is "very gentle, and very heroic," Dorothea vows to "never correspond to [the] pattern of a perfect lady," and Sue acts "as [she] choose[s]" (Brontë 344, Eliot 17, Hardy 223). However, what makes these characters unique and interesting is how they view and react to the seemingly opposing desires of independence and marriage. The barriers of social pressures, laws, individual desires, and ultimately romantic love are some of the issues and obstacles that impact the women's actions in regard to their quest for independence. Because of the limitations that Jane, Dorothea, and Sue face they each have different approaches to establishing their independence. Their individual struggles determine how they develop as individuals and ultimately cause them to have differing views on marriage. The progression from Jane to Dorothea to Sue shows a continuum of decreasing satisfaction toward the institution of marriage. Jane sees marriage as the source of ultimate happiness; Dorothea regards her marriage to Will as a means of independence from her past but also as a source of limitations to her future; and Sue views marriage as the concession in a losing battle with the codes of society.

While it was widely believed that once a woman got married she gave up any chance at independence and individuality in the future by entering into a contract that disregarded her as an individual, Jane, Dorothea, and Sue offer views that both dispel and support that notion. An interesting aspect of the three characters is how their different backgrounds impact their views on marriage. Each character faces distinctive obstacles in her life and, as a result, has a varying perspective on marriage and its consequences. Although her view develops over time, Jane ultimately shows that marriage is not the incarcerating and defeating institution that the laws and society present it to be; rather she sees marriage as a union that allows her to develop into her best self—truly happy and in love. She elatedly tells the reader how Rochester enables her to be more blissful and content than ever before. Both of Dorothea's marriages fail to meet her expectations. She sees her first marriage to Casaubon as a means of enhancing her education and cultural knowledge, but quickly realizes that will not happen. She views her second marriage to Will as an opportunity to fall in love and enjoy the romance and companionship that she never had with Casaubon; yet the Finale of *Middlemarch* suggests that marriage curtailed her ability to do more with her life, thus hindering her actions as an individual. However, her marriage to Will allows her to assert her independence by consciously choosing to disregard Casaubon's will. As opposed to Jane and Dorothea, Sue never views her marriage in terms of love but rather as a means of defeat to her independence and individuality. From the beginning of the novel she treats marriage as a prison sentence and refuses to acknowledge any possible benefits. Whereas Jane and Dorothea choose freely to get married, Sue sees her second marriage to Phillotson as means of conceding to social codes. She feels forced into her marriage, as it is something she would not do if the social pressures did not exist. The forms of repression that Jane and Dorothea experience from patriarchal figures allow them to develop a sense of independence and

individuality that facilitate their abilities to evaluate their needs and desires. This ultimately helps them realize the benefits of marriage and how a partner can best fulfill their needs. Sue's strong sense of independence and individuality from the beginning prevents her from being open-minded to the possible benefits of a relationship and causes her to feel defeated in the end when she marries Phillotson rather than excited about the possibility of love and having a constant companion. Based on the experiences of Jane, Dorothea, and Sue it becomes clear that Victorian patriarchy both creates and purports to solve the problem of female subordination.

Although it is easy for readers to bring the characters of Jane, Dorothea, and Sue to life, it is important to remember that they are creations of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. Each of these authors has a unique relationship to the question of female independence in the Victorian era. Brontë (1816-1855) lived a rather short life but one filled with extraordinary passion and accomplishments. Her most famous work *Jane Eyre*, was an instant success and "the identity of its author, became a fashionable topic of conversation" (Campbell 80). Brontë published under the pseudonym Currer Bell and explained her decision as "averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because — without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' — we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice" (E. Brontë 16). During a time when it was still considered rebellious for women to be part of the feminist movement, Brontë expressed her desire to "say something about the 'condition of women' question, but it is one respecting so much 'cant' has been talked, that one feels a sort of repugnance to approach it" (Campbell 83). Although Brontë did not consider herself a strong

political activist, Campbell points out that all of her novels "are concerned not only with women's experience but also with the social and political obstacles to the fulfillment of their desires" (83). As seen with *Jane Eyre*, Brontë does not write a manifesto against social conditions, but represents, and at times exaggerates, the conditions of society in terms of gender roles. However, Jane ends up happily married, suggesting that conditions did not have to be thoroughly reformed, as happiness through marriage was possible. Rochester is the only male in the story that at some point treats Jane as an equal, thus it is not surprising she ends up marrying him.

Just as Charlotte Brontë published under Currer Bell, Mary Anne Evans assumed the identity of George Eliot. Eliot (1819-1880) was an unconventional woman with a complicated background. Her relationship with George Henry Lewes, a legally married man but separated from his wife, caused her to be "cut off from what is called the world" but she didn't mind (Woolf). She relished the mystery that surrounded her and for similar reasons to Brontë, Eliot published under a male pseudonym so that her works would be read and judged based on their content and ideas rather than by the gender of the author. Eliot was a complex individual, which makes it difficult to connect her as an individual to the characters. Her novels span a vast array of themes, but what makes her novels so renowned is her "extraordinary sensitivity to subtleties of feeling expressed in the course of the ordinary lives of her characters" (Adam xii). *Middlemarch*, which Virginia Woolf deems "the magnificent book which with all its imperfections is one of the few English novels written for grown-up people," showcases Eliot's ability to take ordinary people and draw the reader into their thoughts, actions, and problems (Woolf). She is not an overtly and outspoken feminist and does not try to convey a message

through *Middlemarch,* but rather creates a platform for readers to ponder the complications of every-day life.

Despite being male, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is commonly "associated with the portrayal of female characters" (Boumelha "Women" 1). The female characters in his novels range in intellect, beauty, attitudes, and desires. Hardy wrote in his personal journal that his female characters should represent the struggles presented by "passions, prejudices, and ambitions" (Allingham). While many considered Hardy an anti-feminist author because of the negative ways he commonly presented female characters, his relationships provide insight into his thoughts: "Hardy's attitudes towards women were complex because of his own experiences. Certainly the latter stages of his own marriage to Emma Lavinia Gifford must have contributed much to his somewhat equivocal attitudes. On the one hand, Hardy praises female endurance, strength, passion, and sensitivity; on the other, he depicts women as meek, vain, plotting creatures of mercurial moods" (Allingham). This dichotomy in his views explains perfectly the character of Sue Bridehead. She is a determined, passionate woman who is also manipulative. *Jude the Obscure* was one of Hardy's most controversial novels because it discussed divorce laws and child deaths, which were taboo topics at the time. The intensely critical reception of *Jude the Obscure* caused Hardy to shift his focus from novels to poetry.

The Victorian era, ranging from 1837 to 1901, was a "place psychologically as well as historically in transition, moving back and forth ambivalently between the old and the new, the primal and the civilized, amidst a sense of gain and a fear of loss, and with the big questions constantly re-emerging and mutating within specific individual circumstances" (P. Davis 7). Although Davis presents a capacious definition, which incorporates large themes of the era, the description also accounts for the vast array of changes that occurred during the Victorian era.

These changes and uncertainties make the era interesting, controversial, and important. Ian Ward correctly defines the relationship between the laws and literature during the rapidly changing era: "the disciplines of law and literature cannot…be readily detached from the considerations of history, culture, society, gender, and so on" (4). Arguably the most significant change during the time was the role and position of women in society; "the women's movement of the nineteenth century…redefined women's sense of themselves, their relationships with others, and their role in the state" (Gorsky xiii). The women's movement did not just produce a change in attitude toward women but also greatly impacted the legal system. Women were allowed more rights while married; divorce became increasingly common; and laws were enacted to increase women's employment. However, these changes occurred slowly, and women still filled their roles of dutiful wives, mothers, and homemakers. While most novels of the time "sanction the glory of marriage," John Stuart Mill, in his radical book *The Subjection of Women* (1869), created an uproar by writing that marriage is a form of enslavement for women and should not be a woman's goal (Gorsky 18). Mill was not the first author to advocate women's rights, as Mary Wollstonecraft, eighty years earlier, had set the tone for reform with a political and social polemic: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* which argues for women's education and gender equality. Victorian authors did not abandon traditional sentiments regarding the institution of marriage and gender equality, but individual authors began using the novel to "call attention to human nature as revealed through social interaction" (Gorsky 8). In *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch*, and *Jude the Obscure*, some of the most iconic novels of the Victorian era, the female characters are trapped in the transitory period described by Davis. In search for both happiness and independence, Jane, Dorothea, and Sue must negotiate the legal parameters and social expectations of the time in order to find a balance acceptable to themselves and society. This

thesis explores the different views that Jane, Dorothea, and Sue have about marriage as a form of individual repression.

Independence is not a term with a single definition. There are several types of independence, and each individual has different expectations for what independence entails. What connects Jane, Dorothea, and Sue is that they are striving for forms of independence; yet what differentiates them is how they define independence. Mary Wollstonecraft published her polemic in 1792 as a means for drawing attention to the unequal plight of women. Her goal was to "persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body" (Wollstonecraft 12). She suggested women do so by receiving an education so that they would have the adequate knowledge to make decisions on their own. Eighty years later, John Stuart Mill revived Wollstonecraft's argument and added his own ideas. In *The Subjection of Women,* Mill argues that "the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong" (3). While Wollstonecraft did not denounce marriage but suggested ways for women to become more equal, Mill believes that once a woman is married, "a wife's position under the common law of England is worse than that of a slave's in the laws of many countries" (31). His reasoning behind such a harsh statement is that a woman "can acquire no property but for [her husband]; the instant it becomes hers, even if by inheritance, it becomes ipso facto his" (Mill 31). Unlike women, slaves under the Roman law "might have his peculium, which to a certain extent the law guaranteed to him for his exclusive use" (Mill 31).[2] Given that women were so oppressed under the law of marriage, it seems counterproductive for a woman who wanted independence to consider the institution of marriage. However, as previously mentioned, the alternatives to marriage were highly

[2] Peculium is "the property held by a person (as a wife, child, slave) under the potestas, manus, or mancipium of another as his own private property either by the permission of the paterfamilias or master or by the rules of law but becoming with certain exceptions the property of the paterfamilas or master at his pleasure" ("Peculium" Merriam-Webster)

unappealing as unmarried women were seen as even more inferior and subordinate in society. Despite the issues and limitations associated with marriage, it was an inherent part of Victorian society and still is in today's world.

While Wollstonecraft and Mill discuss marriage in terms of real people in society, there is a necessary distinction between literary and historical depictions of marriage. While everyone knew the limitations for women associated with marriage, literature offers a sense of fantasy and hope that does not exist in reality. The novels allow the authors to capture the reader's imagination. There is no such thing as true and complete independence. Everyone relies on someone else for something, whether it is love, companionship, food, or attention. Jane, Dorothea, and Sue are not attempting to pursue complete independence, but want to feel as though they have some control over their psychological, physical, and economic states. Whether or not this was an actual possibility during the Victorian era is debatable, but in the world of fiction there was no one to stop these women from dreaming and wanting to pursue independence. Although each woman has a different notion of independence, overall, women strive for economic, psychological, and legal freedom. Women knew achieving these entailed more than just fighting for their rights, but as the era progressed, the women's movement enabled these forms of independence to become closer to reality.

In the novels, psychological independence seems to be the most coveted by the women. Based on their actions, psychological independence is the ability for them to think for themselves and make decisions based on their own free wills. Although each woman is highly influenced by her surroundings and relationships, there are times when she has the ability to make decisions on her own, such as when Dorothea chooses to ignore the codicil in Casaubon's will and marry Will. Physical independence can be viewed in two ways. One is how Sue expresses it, by

withholding her body and sex from her partners so they do not have physical control over her. The other is the ability to move freely from place to place. Jane, Dorothea and Sue are constantly trapped inside a home or school, and when they venture outside, there is often a storm or a dangerous event. The final form of independence exhibited by the women is economic. Jane, Dorothea, and Sue come from different financial spheres and view economic independence in different ways. Jane becomes financially independent once she inherits a fortune from her uncle. Dorothea is financially independent based on her family's trust, but forgoes a greater sum of money by marrying Will. Sue does not discuss her independence in terms of money but references needing to support herself.

These forms of independence are all different but at the same time connected. Each one influences the other in some way. For example, economic independence directly influences psychological independence, as Jane considers herself a free woman once she inherits the money. While the women strive for various types of independence, the one aspect they cannot control and are completely dependent on men for is access to information. Jane, Dorothea, and Sue all suffer due to their lack of knowledge about a situation that their male partners failed to tell them about. Jane does not know about Bertha; Dorothea is unaware of the codicil; and Sue does not know that Jude is still married to Arabella. The lack of information from which all three women suffer causes them to be humiliated and in a position of inferiority and vulnerability. Without parts of critical information, they are ultimately never able to achieve fully the other types of independence.

One of the most notable and resolute stances on women's rights comes from John Stuart Mill. Mill argues for complete equality between the sexes, and in order for that to occur, women need to be granted independence in the legal and social spheres. He believes that by giving

women "free choice of their employments and opening to them the same field of occupation and the same prizes and encouragements as to the other human beings," society would benefit as a whole because there would be double the number of people helping to reform systems and bring new ideas (Mill 82). More independently minded women would also be a benefit to their husbands: "[for] a man who is married to a woman his inferior in intelligence…it is hardly possible….to attain exalted virtue" (Mill 89). Men should not be weighed down by wives who are not allowed to live up to their potential, but rather should take advantage of having an intelligent partner and help themselves to become more virtuous. Mill defines virtue as man's ability to "see truths which have not yet dawned upon [him]" and a dead-weight wife holds him back from being able to achieve this goal (89). Society has ingrained into the minds of the people that women are inherently inferior to men, and their sole job is to be a wife and a mother, as they are not capable of any more. However, Mill argues that "the mental differences supposed to exist between women and men are but the natural effect of the differences in their education and circumstances and indicate no radical difference, far less radical inferiority," highlighting the fact that women are not given a fair chance to prove themselves from the start (53). Mill further suggests that women have what is necessary to be equal to men in terms of intelligence, but they are never given the fair opportunity to explore and demonstrate their talents. *The Subjection of Women* revived awareness of the plight of women. Similar to Mary Wollstonecraft, Mill highlights how men are doing themselves a disservice by having inferior wives. For a man to be at his absolute best, he needs to be accompanied by someone who is equal to him. Many women during the Victorian era shied away from being seen as equals, because they knew it was not their place in society. However, despite their varying situations, Jane, Dorothea, and Sue fight

for their independence. Their different experiences with marriage show their varying degrees of success in maintaining their independence and individuality while married.

As mentioned by Mill, women had very few legal rights, particularly related to marriage, during the Victorian era. However, as the era progressed, women received increasing numbers of rights related to marriage and social conditions. Prior to 1870, a wife had to give up all of her earnings to her husband, but the Married Woman's Property Act of 1870 ruled that "all earnings of a married woman were to be deemed her own property, as also were her deposits in any Savings Bank" (Cleveland 280). While these seemed revolutionary for the time, the Married Woman's Property Act of 1882 gave women even more rights to their property: "all property belonging to a woman…at the time of her marriage, or which comes to her after her marriage, including earnings and property acquired by the exercise of any skill or labour, is absolutely her own" (Cleveland 281). Despite the advancements in property laws, Mill's statements still hold true, as he was writing before both Acts were passed. Mill also references that a couple was referred to "one person in law, " a term created by William Blackstone, which indicates that whatever is "hers is his," but the opposite does not hold true (32). In her outline of the laws governing women as of 1854, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon highlights the similarity to "slavery" that women engaged in once married: "A woman's body belongs to her husband; she is in his custody, and he can enforce his right by a writ of habeas corpus" (6). While women were making strides in terms of becoming more equal once married, laws regarding divorce were slower in terms of treating each party equally. The Divorce Act of 1857 established the High Court of Justice, which was a divorce court instead of Parliament, and set the parameters of divorce as: "adultery, cruelty, or desertion without cause for two years or upwards" (Cleveland

286).[3] However, whereas a husband petitioning for divorce just had to make a claim in court, the wife had to provide evidence if she was the petitioner (Cleveland 286). Although the "number of divorces quintupled between the 1860s and 1890s" in England, the number of divorces did not accurately represent the number of separated couples, since "a man could simply leave the home, assume a new identity in a new community, and marry again" (Gorsky 72). Despite the rising number of divorces, many couples, as seen with Lydgate and Rosamond in *Middlemarch*, accepted the fate of their mistaken marriage and dealt with the consequences without getting divorced. Gorsky believes that "literature featuring separation or divorce is sensationalist or proselytizing for reform," which holds true when examining Sue's actions and the tone of *Jude the Obscure* (73). Given the restrictive nature of marriage, it is counter-intuitive that Jane, Dorothea, and Sue, all women seeking independence and individuality, get married. While these limitations on women seem outrageous in the twenty-first century, during the Victorian era "marriage is so clearly the norm that women almost never voluntarily consider alternatives" (Gorsky 20). The alternatives to marriage for women depended on class status, but overall unmarried women were viewed as "old maids" or "fallen women" (Gorsky 61). For the most part, single women did not have the opportunity to establish themselves in the public sphere and be viewed and treated with respect.

As mentioned before, literature explores fantasies that cannot necessarily occur in real life. However, while these fantasies represent events that do not always happen, they stem from the author's present environment: "clearly literature has an author, a human being influenced by the beliefs and events of the time and whose writings are likewise colored" (Gorsky 4). What

[3] The Act moved divorce cases from ecclesiastical courts to civil courts. This change established a "model of marriage based on contract rather than sacrament and widened the availability of divorce beyond those who could afford to bring proceedings for annulment or to promote a private Bill" ("Matrimonial Act of 1857." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 11 Feb. 2013. Web. 4 March 2013.)

makes *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch*, and *Jude the Obscure* so popular is Brontë's, Eliot's and Hardy's abilities to take actual human emotions, events, and desires and translate them into a story that combines reality and fantasy, allowing the reader to relate to the characters but still enter into an imaginary world. As expressed by these novels, literature is more than just a retelling or representation of history and "to expect fiction to serve as a literal source of history is to ignore what makes it art" (Gorsky 5). Unlike history, which is an objective view of events and a presentation of facts, literature is a platform for the combination history and fantasy in order to engage the reader in actual situations but take reality one step further and allow the reader to enter a world in which the events and outcomes are not necessarily true. Through an analysis of Jane, Dorothea, and Sue, it will become evident that *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Middlemarch* (1871-72) were written prior to many of the significant reform acts; whereas *Jude the Obscure,* written in 1895, demonstrates a more liberal outlook on the plight of the female characters. In order to understand and appreciate the fantastical and historical elements of the books and how they complement and contrast with each other, the reader must have a comprehensive overview of the type of woman that Jane, Dorothea, and Sue were based on.

Throughout the criticism on Victorian novels there is constant reference to the "ideal Victorian woman" however, there is rarely an accompanying definition and she seldom appears in literature. There are many aspects that comprise the Victorian woman, ranging from her wardrobe, to manners, to social status. Expectations for women also changed based on class. For working-class women, they were expected to "provide indirect economic support through the care of her children, the purchasing and preparation of food and the making of clothes" (Vicinus ix). For upper- and middle-class women, "a young girl was brought up to be perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant...Once married, the perfect lady did not work" (Vicinus ix). While

Dorothea is clearly an upper-class woman, Jane and Sue are middle-class women since they come from families with money, but since they do not receive any of the money they must work to support themselves. They have an education and are able to support themselves through jobs such as being a governess and a teacher. However, despite the different expectations for women of varying social classes, "the perfect lady's sole function was marriage and procreation…Young ladies were trained to have no opinions" (Vicinus x). In her book *The Early Victorian Woman: Some Aspects of Her Life*, Janet Dunbar outlines the proper way for women to act from marriage to leisure time. She reminds wives to "never contradict him, dear, but fall in with all his little wishes and whims" and "husbands did not as a rule require brains in their wives; they demanded charm, a high sense of domestic duty, admiration for and submission to themselves, and the usual accomplishments necessary for entertaining friends" (Dunbar 20). In addition to being submissive and subservient, women were expected to sew well, write neatly, and speak eloquently. Women during the time also enjoyed reading. They had access to a variety of different types of books and used the opportunity to hold book clubs. Given that the "ideal lady" must live up to these standards and perform certain functions, it was "impossible for the working-class woman to attain the ideal of the perfect lady" (Vicinus xii). Also, most working-class women could not read until after 1870. Both Jane and Sue must work given their social status, which automatically eliminates them from becoming a perfect lady. While women had options for how to enjoy their leisure time, their husbands controlled the majority of their existence. Despite the notion that all women subscribed to this model, and those who did not were outcast, critic Martha Vicinus argues that "the clearest characteristic of the mid-Victorian period was how few women of character fit the ideal lady" (xi). Vicinus' observation supports Jane's, Dorothea's, and Sue's actions. Part of being an ideal lady involves getting married and

giving up independence and individuality. However, what made Jane so happy during her marriage was that she was an equal and did not have to give up part of her self to be with Rochester. In her first marriage to Casaubon, Dorothea eagerly played the role of a dutiful and submissive wife in hopes of living up to the image of a Victorian woman, but over time when she realized her goals for the marriage were not being met, she started to reinforce her independence and individuality. Although Dorothea marries Will, her second husband, out of love, the narrator indicates that Dorothea feels a sense of sacrifice of her independence because she could have done more with her life had she not been married. Sue, someone who is adamant about not getting married in fear of giving up her independence, ultimately rushes to get married in order to gain the status of a proper Victorian woman. She hesitantly gives her body up in order to fulfill the role of a wife. Brontë, Eliot, and Hardy are all well aware of the restrictions of marriage on a woman's identity but let their characters navigate the social system and try to fulfill their goals in their own ways.

The changing attitudes with regard to a wife's role and independence exhibited by Jane, Dorothea, and Sue stem from the evolving women's movement of the nineteenth century, which developed over a long span of time and in different stages. The movement was not a radical anti-male crusade, but rather "its campaigns were concerned as much with promoting that optimistic self-image with a simple call for equality with men" (Levine 13). While there was the general women's movement, there were so many individual aspects of equality that needed attention such as education and employment rights that various campaigns started occurring on their own but all under one large umbrella. In order to achieve its goals, the women's movement had to operate as a cohesive whole, and a key factor recognized by Lady Frances Balfour, that often marred political or male-centered movements, was that she "never saw nor heard any symptom

of a jealous spirit; women had no temptation to fight for place, or honours" (Levine 20). The amicable spirit of the movement allowed them to focus their energies on significant topics of reform such as education. During the time "women saw education as the key to a broad range of other freedoms" (Levine 26). Women constantly faced disparaging remarks about their intellectual capabilities and educational reform goals, but by the late 1840s, women's schools became increasingly widespread and popular. In addition to educational reforms, female activists ardently fought for the right to vote, which many "historians have tended to see…as the dominant feature of both nineteenth- and early twentieth century feminism" (Levine 58). Although women were able to hold Parliament positions by the 1870s, many saw the right to vote as the ultimate equalizer in terms of genders (Levine 57). Equality in employment presented more of a divide within the feminist movement because it had different implications for upper- and middle-class women than for lower-class ones. Upper-and middle-class women saw "the issue of employment [as] connected with their claims for independence, for a share in the public domain, and with the demand for an identity defined by self-respect" (Levine 82). However, lower-class women had to work in order to survive, making employment less about a means of independence and identity than a way of life. Although women were not treated equally in the work-force compared to men, a problem that many argue still exists today, Levine points out that "the employment by the close of the century of well-known feminists in a number of new areas—government, medicine, and printing…was a concrete vindication of some forty years of tireless campaigning" (101). Women such as Florence Nightingale and Angela Burdett-Coutts were the ultimate models of the feminist movement. Despite their upper-class backgrounds, they were pioneers in the fields of nursing and philanthropy and made the conscious choice never to marry, despite several offers. While these women were definitely the exception of the time, they

represent the independent nature of thinking of women as a result of the women's movement of the nineteenth-century. While *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch*, and *Jude the Obscure* rarely directly reference the women's movement of the time, the actions of the characters are direct reflections of the changing attitudes and sentiments by women and society. A unique aspect of literature is that it serves as a translation of historical times through fictional characters. These three novels serve as indirect political works but still have entertaining and emotional qualities that make them best-selling novels. There is only so much a character can do in terms of making a larger statement about social and political issues. The progression from Jane to Dorothea to Sue, which spans about fifty years, shows how women became more comfortable fighting traditional gender stereotypes regarding intellect and emotions and expressing their sexuality as a means of empowerment rather than shame.

While the women's movement represented a vast array of changes for women over the course of the nineteenth century, George Eliot argues that the female characters in the plots of many of the novels were relatively predictable and plain: "[the] heroine is usually an heiress…with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground…Or it may be that the heroine is not an heiress…but she infallibly gets into high society…The men play a very subordinate part by her side…For all this she as often as not marries the wrong person to begin with, and she suffers terribly from the plots and intrigues of the vicious baronet" (Eliot "Silly" 179). While Eliot's depiction of the plot and characters of a Victorian novel written by a woman seems comical and overtly simple, she is not far from the truth. Women were expected to fit a mold, and then within that mold try to carve out a sense of independence and individuality. The ways that Jane, Dorothea, and Sue go about

carving out their independence is what individualizes them while still connecting them with the same goal.

The three heroines represent very different types of women in terms of economic status, family background, ambitions, and overall mindset. Jane's life is the greatest "Cinderella story" of the three as she goes from being an orphan, to a governess, to marrying her dream man. However, as with Cinderella, things do not come easily for her, and she is in a constant battle with herself over maintaining self-respect and psychological independence and following her heart. In the end, she believes she can attain psychological independence by marrying Rochester, as he treats her as his equal. Dorothea perfectly fits Eliot's description of someone who marries the wrong man, which makes sense since *Middlemarch* was written after "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" was published in 1856. By marrying Casaubon, Dorothea, the beautiful heiress, sets herself up for a life of misery and control. A clever and outspoken woman, she sees marriage as a means to further her psychological independence and individuality as it will afford her educational opportunities and the wisdom provided by her husband. However, what she fails to realize is that the restrictive nature of marriage overpowers her hopes of independence and ultimately backfires as the codicil in Casaubon's will limits her future actions and economic independence. Sue feels the strongest that marriage is not the answer to independence. She holds off on marriage as long as possible, and once married, she hesitates to fulfill the duties of a wife. She struggles to maintain her psychological and physical independence by withholding sex from her partners. She sees sex as her one means of control over a man, but in the end she resigns to society by marrying Phillotson again because she knows marriage is the only way to redeem herself as a proper woman. Sue's fervent efforts to maintain her independence by rejecting male figures becomes counter-productive because she refuses to acknowledge any potential benefits of

marriage, such as love and companionship. All three women negotiate independence and traditional forms of marriage in drastically different ways. The novels prove that there is no single answer to how to best carve out independence within a relationship but prompt the readers to ponder the subject and reevaluate the benefits and disadvantages of marriage.

Although marriage during the Victorian era appears to be overly restrictive and limiting for a woman, "marriage was the most desirable goal of virtually every woman's life and a natural part of every man's" (Gorsky 19). Unmarried women were considered spinsters and social outcasts, titles that no young woman wanted. While modern critics see a woman's way of life during the era as mundane and repressive, Victorian women did not know about anything else, and "women almost never voluntarily consider[ed] alternatives" (Gorsky 20). Marriage offered them the opportunity to be a wife and a mother, important and respected positions. For upper- and middle-class women, marriage also offered them entry into a new social sphere. They were expected to host dinner parties, be involved in charities, and be strong representations of their husbands. Even though laws increasing women's rights in the public and private spheres became more prevalent throughout the century, "many women believe[ed] marriage [would] improve them" (Gorsky 53). Marriage was a means of becoming economically dependent and not having to worry about debts, property, security, or employment. Women had this notion that the only way "to find significance for her life [was]---through a man" (Gorsky 54). Once one has some insight into why women chose to marry, the actions of Jane, Dorothea, and Sue become more understandable. There was no right or wrong reason to getting married during the time and as seen through Jane, Dorothea, and Sue each woman had different reasons and different experiences. Their varying interactions with men and society lead them to develop diverse and even opposing views on marriage. The three authors use the evolving nature of the social and

legal changes of the era as a means of shaping the characters, their expectations, and their ultimate views as to whether or not marriage is a form of defeat to a woman's independence and individuality.

Chapter 2

Dispelling the Perception of Marriage as a Means of Individual Imprisonment

Jane Eyre: An Autobiography draws the reader into the emotional journey of Jane's life as she fights to establish her independence while falling in love with Rochester.[4] Jane's quest toward independence is a complicated process, as unequivocal independence for women was not a reality during the Victorian era. Independence for Jane exists in a variety of forms: legal, economic, and psychological. As Jane encounters the different stages of her life, she confronts the range of forms of independence that are both available and not available to her. While Jane's actions throughout the novel can be interpreted as overly aggressive and forward given her status as a single woman, Brontë frames Jane's acts of independence in the context of a patriarchal society. Almost all of the instances when Jane asserts her independence are in response to a male-dominated situation. Jane's resistance to these encounters leads to the self-creation of her independence. However, Jane's independence is limited to the opportunities she has to resist and to react. Jane does not go out and form her own path toward independence; rather, her path is formed for her by the patriarchal regimes she faces. The limits to self-creation and independence arise from social expectations and norms that exist in society. Jane can only act so rebellious without completely defying social norms and her image as a woman. Novelist of the time Anna Maria Hall warned women who took part in the budding Women's Right movement that "an unwomanly woman is always avoided" indicating that they would be socially outcast (Dunbar 172). Many critics believe that the character of Bertha Mason represents Jane's true desires, but

[4] All citations in reference to "Brontë " are from the edition: Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 3rd ed. Ed. Richard J. Dunn. New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2001. Print.

the ones she must withhold in order to be accepted into society. It is in, through, and with the novel that Charlotte Brontë critiques contemporary society, presenting Jane as having "a passionate, turbulent nature…full of anger at injustice and tyranny" (Campbell 84). Brontë's depiction of Jane is "radically different from the contemporary view of woman as passive, passionless beings" (Campbell 84). Brontë not only criticizes the view of women but also the patriarchal nature of relationships: "in *Jane Eyre* [Brontë] represents the contemporary situation through the series of male-dominated regimes that Jane moves through in her quest for self and independence" (Campbell 85). While Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* as a representation of the social and political climate relating to women's rights and the need for change and reform, she does not portray Jane's independence in an unrealistic manner. Jane does not have legal independence; her financial independence is inherited rather than self obtained; and her psychological independence is heavily influenced by the men in her life. However, given her limitations Jane makes the best of her situations and tries to establish independence and a sense of individuality when the opportunity arises.

Despite these obstacles, what makes Jane, Dorothea, and Sue so different and interesting is how they negotiate their independence given the surrounding limitations and how their actions ultimately impact their views on marriage. For Jane, she considers herself "blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine" (Brontë 348). Jane's happiness shows her positive view on the institution of marriage and that she realizes and appreciates its benefits such as love and a committed partner. Jane demonstrates the ability for women to fall in love and follow their hearts without giving up their independence and individuality. Although many would consider marriage to be the antithesis of independence, Jane is able to be truly happy in her marriage because in her mind she is an independent woman in

economic, physical, and psychological ways and sees Rochester as an equal rather than a detracting factor. While Jane's quest for independence and happiness does not come easily, as she is constantly repressed and must face and react to laws and cultural perceptions, the struggles she faces allow her to have the confidence and the self-esteem needed to view marriage as a positive and uplifting union.

Jane's life can be divided into five main stages, each representing the different locations in which Jane spent a significant amount of time. Her early years at Gateshead are marked by alienation, oppression, bullying, and loneliness. Jane grows up with her cousins, the Reed family, as a result of her parents' deaths when she was very young. Never fully accepted into the family by her aunt or cousins and under the rule of the younger John Reed, Jane suffers years of physical and emotional abuse and intellectual oppression. It is during her time at Gateshead that Jane first develops a sense of resistance in order to protect herself from her cousins. While Jane's move to Lowood, the second chapter of her life, offers her a chance to restart her life, she encounters a repressive environment in which individual identity is frowned upon and discouraged. The uniformity enforced upon the girls, from their clothing to thoughts, exemplifies further the oppressed role women were expected to play in society during the era and how this mindset started at a relatively early age. Through the encouragement of Miss Temple, Jane's teacher, Jane begins to explore her talents and realizes there is more to life than the limited opportunities at Lowood. While Jane's decision to leave Lowood is a sign of her fight for independence, in many ways she is reacting to the oppressive nature of her environment and leaves because Lowood cannot benefit her in the future.

Jane's experience at Thornfield marks a new phase in her life regarding her maturity and individuality. Her relationship with Rochester forces her to confront her competing feelings of

love and self-respect and identity. Their relationship highlights Jane's ability to speak her mind and not be completely subject to another patriarchal authority. The emotional turbulence that Jane experiences causes her to evaluate her needs and make decisions that allow her to continue to mature and develop. However, her decision to leave Thornfield and wander alone and unprotected into the unknown territory of Morton results from the predicament in which Rochester has put Jane; Jane does not make the decision to leave completely on her own, but rather reacts to Rochester's actions. Her actions still demonstrate her growth as an individual and her desire to maintain her self-respect. Moor House symbolizes a significant turn in Jane's life: there she discovers she has a family, separate from the Reeds, and that she is the heir to a large inheritance. Her quest to be psychologically independent reaches a turning point when she realizes that she is now economically independent: her mindset about herself as an individual and her future drastically shift "independence would be glorious…---*that* thought swelled my heart" (Brontë 326). As she navigates the complexities of her relationship with St. John Rivers, yet another superior male figure, Jane does not let herself fall victim to his demands. She rejects his proposal and follows her heart back to Rochester. Given Jane's newfound economic independence, she feels more comfortable making decisions based on what she truly desires rather than what is expected of her. Yet Brontë conveniently makes Jane's wishes and what society believes one and the same. Her return to Rochester and the start of a marriage and a family is what was expected of a woman during the time. Once Jane returns to Rochester, who now lives at Ferndean, she is met with an unexpected surprise: a handicapped Rochester. Jane suddenly becomes the dominant figure in the relationship, as Rochester needs her as his "hand" and his "eyes." The fact that Rochester must be physically incapacitated for Jane to be the dominant one in the relationship suggests that the roles of men and women have not changed

drastically. However, this also shows his trust in Jane and her position as an equal. While Brontë portrays Jane as a strong and independently minded woman, a closer look at Jane's actions reveal that they are more reactionary rather than self-initiated.

In many ways *Jane Eyre*, and specifically Jane, becomes Charlotte Brontë's conduit for "a passionate declaration of women's equal right to a life of activity and interest" (Campbell 27). Brontë's outspoken nature and ideas stem from her childhood, during which she was raised and encouraged by her father to "think for [herself]…and given the freedom…to allow [her] imagination to soar" (Teachman, xi).[5] As Brontë continued to evolve as a writer and let her imagination be the source of her ideas, she became further convinced that men and women needed to be treated as equals. However, a clear contradiction exists; Brontë published under the pseudonym Currer Bell in order to hide her identity as a woman. By publishing under a male identity, Brontë sacrifices her individual identity in order to get her larger and more expressive message out about the need for gender equality.[6] Under the pseudonym, Brontë felt more comfortable creating a character like Jane that had feelings such as "[women] suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation" and "it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings" (Brontë 93). Another possibility for publishing under a pseudonym is that many might interpret *Jane Eyre* as the "not-quite-written, "raw" experience[s] in Brontë's life" (Jeffers 38). Brontë did not want to be connected with the female heroine, but many of Jane's actions are influenced directly by Brontë's personal life. Given that Brontë was not a staunch political

[5] Teachman further explains that the creative and imaginary world that Charlotte Bronte grew up in was hardly typical of the time period. Bronte's father provided his daughters with "an exception that writing imaginary tales was an acceptable behavior" (xii).

[6] Campbell references the limitations of the literary field during the Victorian Era and how perceived notions of women's lack of intellect made it difficult for women to become published authors (83). However, Bronte knew that her pseudonym did not always work and once said to critics "I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex" (83).

activist, her novels serve as a vehicle for her ideas to be read and discussed by the greater public. One of the most impactful lines that expresses Jane's desire for independence and equality is "women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do" (Brontë 93). Brontë created Jane to be "plain, small, and unattractive, in defiance of the accepted canon" (Gaskell 247). Jane's lack of physical attractiveness indicates that actions and thoughts should be the defining factor of a heroine rather than beauty. According to Henry James, author of *The Art of Fiction*, "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life" (James 5). Charlotte Brontë not only makes *Jane Eyre* a representation of life but also adheres to James' sole requirement for a novel: "to make it interesting" (James 8). As a work of literature and art, Brontë combines fiction and fact in order to create a novel that focuses on Jane as an individual and a romantic, showing that a strong woman like Jane can in fact be independent and in a romantic relationship that does not undermine her role as a woman.

For Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* was not just a pipeline for her social views, but also a way for her to integrate her story through the persona of a fictional character. While Brontë claims that she "never drew directly on her personal experiences for her novels," there are several similarities between Jane and Charlotte that give the reader a better insight into the author's famously private life (Campbell 15). Although Charlotte never fell in love with a character similar to Rochester, she did attend Cowen Bridge School, which serves as the basis for Jane's experience at Lowood, and worked as a governess for two different families (Teachman, xiii). Charlotte's first hand experience in many of the environments that Jane encounters adds a sense of legitimacy to her work: Brontë's "experiences, together with those of her sister Anne, gave her a clear understanding of the restrictions involved in the life a governess

was supposed to lead…all these experiences, combined with her own ideas of romantic love...create[d] the novel *Jane Eyre*" (Teachman xiii). It is highly possible that the emotions and bursts of outrage that Jane exhibits throughout the novel are in fact Charlotte's feelings toward the oppressive patriarchal regime that women were forced to endure. Doreen Roberts highlights Brontë's ability to "provoke marked reactions of sympathy or hostility from the readers. The reason, apparently, is that the narrator's personality is communicating itself through the style with unusual directness" (34). The strong emotional connection that Brontë establishes with the readers allows her to make her point about larger issues in a less direct and harsh way, but rather by first appealing to the readers' emotions and hearts. Heather Glen argues that what made *Jane Eyre* so well received was the fact that Jane represented what "'millions' have felt" (1). One critic describes his experience reading *Jane Eyre* as "we forgot both the commendations and criticism, identified ourselves with Jane and all her troubles, and finally married Rochester about four in the morning" (Glen 2).[7] While Brontë says that "we only [allow] reality to suggest, never to dictate," her personal experiences that guide her creation of Jane work to her advantage (Campbell 15). The emotional connection she establishes with the readers cannot be falsified, as part of what makes Jane so relatable is the piece of Charlotte Brontë that exists within her. However, Brontë does not limit Jane to the details of Brontë's life but allows her to develop and find her own identity separate from Brontë's.

While Jane embodies some of the characteristics and thoughts of Charlotte Brontë, Jane is undeniably her own character. From the beginning of the novel, Jane protests society's attempt to "impose an identity on someone, so that his individuality is lost" (Shapiro 685). Although the significant obstacles she encounters, such as the patriarchal regimes, ultimately shape her fight for independence and identity, Jane remains determined to be true to herself. As discussed

[7] Unsigned review in Fraser's, December 1849, in Allott (ed.), Critical Hertiage, p. 153.

before, independence has several different meanings and associations. Independence also cannot be viewed in a singular way. For Jane, independence results from monetary freedom: once Jane learns about her inheritance, only at the very end of the novel, she rejoices "independence would be glorious" (Brontë 326). However, Jane's monetary independence is not earned, but rather inherited. This information plus the fact that her inheritance also appears very unexpectedly and late in the novel further indicates that Jane is not in complete control of her economic independence. Her economic freedom is dependent on her uncle. Unlike most women of the era whose goal was marriage and a family, Jane's was "to save enough out of my earnings to set up a school some day in a little house rented by myself" (Brontë 169). Jane's monetary independence is directly connected with her psychological independence. Due to her newfound wealth, she feels empowered to act as an individual and is confident in her status as an economically independent woman. Her main goals of working and being single were highly atypical of the time but consistent with Jane's sense of individuality. While Jane now sees herself as independent in the eyes of society, her previous actions indicate that she has been striving for psychological independence all along. Jane portrays to the reader that her emotional independence is highly connected to her economic independence, as once she inherits the money, she becomes feistier and more outspoken in her interactions with St. John Rivers than ever before. Although Jane is making strides in her quest for independence, she knows that money cannot break social laws and cultural expectations. However, her actions are all part of her image as a "new woman."[8] She is not breaking any social or political barriers, but she is pushing the boundaries and showing that women can fight back when a situation arises.

[8] The term "new woman" was created by speaker and author Sarah Grand in 1894. It came to represent women and ideas that were different, and at times opposite, of those of the traditional Victorian woman.

Beginning at a young age, Jane "resisted all the way" when asked to do things against her will (Brontë 9). Given the limited role of women in society, Jane's outbursts and emotional expressions were seen as highly unconventional and inappropriate for her gender. Jane's outspoken nature continues to increase as she is confronted with more repressive male figures. As Rochester expresses his love for Jane, who feels uncomfortable because of his demands for her love, Jane replies, "I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you" (Brontë 216). Jane's continuous claims of her individuality and independence are seen again in her interactions with St. John Rivers; after rejecting his marriage proposal multiple times she finally says, "I will not marry you. I adhere to my resolution" (Brontë 351). Despite Jane's emphasis on the importance of being independent, she ends up marrying Rochester. Although marriage, especially during the Victorian era, had connotations of lack of independence and individuality, Jane's actions highlight her independence because she is making the choice based on her own free will. Yet these examples of Jane's decisions also demonstrate how her independent attitude stems from reacting to male remarks. While Jane seems to make the decision to return to and to marry Rochester on her own, feeling empowered as a newly financially independent woman, it is only once she hears Rochester's voice calling "Jane, Jane, Jane" that she decides to return to him (Brontë 357). However, she hears her name being called rather than Rochester's saying that she must return. She is confident enough in herself and in her position as an individual to return to Rochester because she loves him rather than out of necessity or fear. By rejecting St. John River's proposal and following her heart back to Rochester, Jane demonstrates how women can exercise their independence and make choices that make them happy. Happiness for Jane is not equated to being independent from men, but rather being in control of the situation and making the independent decision of which man to be with. She wants

to reap the benefits of marriage such as love, companionship, and family rather than being single and viewing marriage as a harmful trap to independence.

Despite the fact that Jane is Rochester's employee, her relationship with Rochester evolves from one defined by subordination to one of perceived equality. However, the foundation of this relationship makes complete equality unattainable, as Rochester, no matter how kind he is to Jane, will always be in an elevated social role. The two, while they are unequal socially, will also never be equal legally. Despite the inherent inequality of the relationship, Rochester's eventual treatment of Jane as his equal rather than his inferior helps Jane develop a sense of identity and independence. Jane's role as a governess, "the fate that awaited any middle-class woman who failed to marry," automatically sets the tone for her initial interactions with Rochester (Poovey 43). From their first few encounters, Rochester establishes his superiority over Jane: "I claim only such superiority as must result from the twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience" (Brontë 114). Rochester does not address Jane in a demeaning fashion, but makes clear that he is older and therefore wiser. In the early stages of their relationship, Jane suppresses her own voice and shows complete deference to Rochester. Her responses to his questions are often "do as you please, sir" and "instead of speaking, I smiled" (Brontë 113-114). However, Rochester's dissatisfaction with Jane's complacent attitude and his interest "to learn more of [her]" propels him to get Jane to open up and showcase her own voice and emotions (Brontë 113). Rochester's actions are atypical of the time and confuse Jane: "I was thinking, sir, that very few masters would trouble themselves to inquire whether or not their paid subordinates were piqued and hurt by their orders" (Brontë 115). Critic Mary Poovey argues that Jane's role as a governess is much more than just a mundane occupation; rather, it is the foundation for Jane's autonomy and "the basis of Rochester's attraction [to Jane]"

(44). Brontë does not focus much on Jane's role as a governess and its implied consequences. Instead she uses the role to show how Jane has risen above the inferior position by "subordinating Jane's poverty to her personality and to the place her character has earned her in Rochester's affections" (Poovey 44). Jane's rise toward independence begins before she becomes economically independent: once Rochester demonstrates his fascination and eventual infatuation with Jane, she feels more comfortable unleashing her individual nature, showing the possibility of carving out independence while in a relationship.

The legal system of the era prevents Jane from becoming Rochester's equal as well as independent. Jane and Rochester's relationship highlights that marriage should be about equality between partners and not merely a legal contract. However, critic James Phillips argues that equality in a relationship cannot occur unless the two partners are legally equal as well. The main legal dilemma in the novel is Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason, which prevents him from marrying Jane. Rochester is handcuffed to the law because "divorce was not an option" during the Victorian Era (Teachman 159). He has no means of breaking free from his marriage to Bertha: divorce would require an Act of Parliament and would become a very public matter (Teachman 159). Although Rochester enters his wedding to Jane fully aware of his legal quandary, Brontë uses the event as a way to "urge a new claim to the institution of marriage" (Phillips 204). Brontë also represents marriage in neither a "crude [n]or ethereal" manner, but rather in a realistic one (Phillips 205). After the failed wedding, Rochester proposes to Jane that they leave and go to the south of France; however, Jane's refusal shows her skepticism about true love without the legal marriage contract. Marriage was such a central part of the Victorian culture that Jane was not going to waste her time as a mistress, "because she fears the sentimental equality would not survive this acceptance of unmarriageability" (Phillips 205).

According to Dr. Laura Otis, the social consequences of Jane's decision to be a mistress or single were both drastic: "If they had stayed together, no one would have received them in his or her home. If they had separated, she would never have been able to marry or to get another job as governess and might have been forced into prostitution to support herself."[9] Both Brontë and Phillips emphasize the fact that there is a contradiction between marriage and equality. While Rochester wants to marry Jane in order to make her his equal, there was nothing equal about the status a wife in a marriage: a woman was the "actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so-called" (Mill 31). In order for marriage to be the foundation for sustained love, the entrenched inequality that exists within the laws must be erased (Phillips 205). However, marriage did elevate a woman's social status. It may not have awarded women equality but it presented new social opportunities that did not exist for them before. According to Lucasta Miller, *Jane Eyre* is a "story of a woman's struggle for independence" (Ward 72).[10] Jane's quest for independence is essentially derailed by the revelation that Rochester is married, because she is no longer in control of her future, but rather at the mercy of the legal system. Her decision to leave Thornfield as a result of the legal complications of the marriage shows her being independent and strong, but also having to react to a larger legal barrier which ultimately dictates her actions.

Although Phillips argues that Rochester is trying to make Jane his equal, there are several episodes throughout the novel that point to his continued patronization of her. Firstly, he often refers to Jane as his "little friend" or "good little girl" (Brontë 185, 224). While this can be interpreted as a term of endearment, it is also very belittling and a constant reminder of her inferiority to him. He speaks to her in childish terms, not as an equal. Secondly, he knowingly

[9] Dr. Laura Otis's comment was part of her edits of a draft.

[10] The quotation from Miller comes from: Glen, Heather. *Charlotte Bronte: The Imagination in History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print. Page 52.

toys with Jane's emotions by discussing his marriage to Blanche Ingram with her and then telling Jane he wants to marry her instead. Rochester is aware of Jane's feelings for him but disregards them as he complains that once he is married he worries that "the cord of communion [between them] will be snapt" (Brontë 215). His mixed messages force Jane to threaten to leave Thornfield because she cannot endure the emotional torture. It is only once he proposes that she stays. Finally, the fact that he does not tell Jane the truth about Bertha and subjects her to the public humiliation that occurs at the church is the ultimate sign of disrespect. Jane's independence is also dependent on Rochester because he has information regarding his past that directly affects Jane about which is she unaware. She is in a helpless position when he tells her about Bertha because she did not have access to this knowledge before and he did. If he truly thought of Jane as an equal, he would have informed her before about the situation and let her make a decision about her future. However, Rochester puts Jane in a situation that causes her emotional distress and ultimately disrupts her entire life. Given the importance of marriage for a woman during the time, Rochester takes away something more sacred than just a proposal: Jane's new social status as a married woman. The underlying fact is that Jane and Rochester will never be equal because of the marriage laws as well as Jane's lack of wealth and family status (Leggatt 174). Critic Richard Chase argues that, "Jane is a coward when she runs away from Rochester, unable to meet his love's challenge" (Shapiro 681). In his limited analysis Chase fails to acknowledge that it is Rochester who puts Jane in the predicament and that Jane is not a coward, but merely reacting to a situation in which she must leave if she wants to demonstrate her individuality. While Shapiro disagrees with Chase's interpretation, Dr. Laura Otis correctly points out that Shapiro offers a rather limiting depiction of Jane "reflecting the old-fashioned outlook that women who refuse sex, marriage, and motherhood are afraid to realize themselves as women.

Usually the women are thinking about how to maintain some control over their lives and not become economic thralls."[11] In Jane's case she does not refuse sex, marriage, and motherhood, but rather controls her desires for all of them and accepts them once she feels she has established herself enough as an individual.

Jane's relationship with St. John Rivers exemplifies further how her self-creation is limited by her male interactions and social environment. When Jane arrives at Moor House, she is arguably at her lowest point in life as she has been "stripped of everything—home, money, possessions, employment and friends" (Campbell 49). The misery that Rochester has caused Jane allows her to spend time reflecting on what is best for her and to have a clean slate; she assumes the alias Jane Elliott in order to conceal her identity and will not give the Rivers' details of her past. In many ways Brontë creates St. John to be a test of Jane's strength and to prove how she refuses to be subject to another patriarchal figure. St. John has a "domineering, sometimes even bully character…[and] is sure that he knows what God thinks and wants" (Campbell 51). Initially, St. John Rivers provides Jane with shelter, food, and a job. He offers her aid when she most needs it. Yet Jane and St. John's relationship takes a turn for the worse when St. John Rivers decides that Rosamond Oliver "would not make [him] a good wife" and instead he sets his sights on Jane (Brontë 318). St. John does not approach the topic of marriage in a romantic way, but in a distant way that allows him to find a wife who will be suitable for his vocation as a missionary. St. John appreciates and admires that Jane is "not timid…[and] there is something brave in [her spirit]" (Brontë 319) and urges her to go to India with him. Once Jane rejects St. John's invitation to go with him, he becomes horrifyingly angry and demanding: "God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife…you are formed for labor not for love. A

[11] Dr. Laura Otis's quotation comes from a revision of a draft.

missionary's wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service" (Brontë 343). Jane's testament to her individual nature and independence strengthens as she continues to reject St. John's proposals and reasoning, eventually saying "I repeat: I freely consent to go with you as your fellow-missionary; but not as your wife; I cannot marry you and become part of you" (Brontë 347). According to Judith Leggatt, the important change in Jane lies in the fact that she recognizes St. John's attempt to trap her in a loveless marriage, and she rebels before that happens (174). Having experienced emotional torment with Rochester, Jane is not willing to give in to St. John's will at the expense of her happiness. Jane admits that her decision to reject St. John's proposal was not easy and required emotional restraint: "I was tempted to cease struggling with him—to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own" (Brontë 356). Jane's strength highlights how women do not need to compromise their happiness just to follow social conventions and get married, but rather they need to take into account their independence and desires. Susie Campbell argues that Jane's fear of losing herself to St. John is the same thing that happens with Rochester and his wanting her to be his mistress. Although these situations are not ideal for Jane, they allow her to develop a sense of maturity and independence in order to "preserve her autonomy of self" (Campbell 56).

James Phillips furthers Susie Campbell's argument by presenting the law and Jane's emotions in a parallel context: "Rochester offered Jane marriage without the institution…[and] St. John offers her the mere institution" (208). Jane quickly rejects Rochester's proposal for her to be his mistress. She is willing to accompany St. John on his travels, but not as his wife. Jane reflects on St. John's offer, saying, "can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt he would not scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite

absent?" (Brontë 345). The two offers from Rochester and St. John present an ideal situation when combined, but only half of what Jane is looking for individually. Her options are limited to the two that are presented to her; it would be unusual for a woman of the time to reject both offers and lead a single life by choice. On the one hand, she can be legally married, but live a loveless marriage, and on the other, she can have the love and emotions but not the legal sanctity. While Phillips acknowledges this as a predicament for Jane, he sees her larger issue in determining which relationship will offer her a greater chance of being an equal. Although Rochester continually pronounces Jane his equal, "the respectability she would have had to forgo as Rochester's mistress she would be entitled to enjoy as a missionary's wife" (Phillips 208). Given Jane's strong desire for independence and individuality, her dilemma lies in which relationship will offer her a greater sense of respectability and self-respect. Jane's strong sense of independence and self-respect arises as she "meets with experience, solves complex problems and emotional tangles, and takes on new challenges…gradually acquir[ing] a knowledge of herself and her capacities, and a secure sense of who she is" (Campbell 62). Given that she was an outsider to the Reed family at a very early age, Jane realized the harsh reality that she had to fight for herself since no one else would. Although other women certainly grew up in Jane's position and encountered many patriarchal relationships, Jane's awareness at an early age that she was an outsider to the Reed family and needed to defend herself gave her the unique desire to be independent and maintain her self-respect. Although when presented in this way, the clear choice for Jane seems to be St. John, Jane is saved from the agony of the decision when "the struggle is cut short through Rochester's cry" (Phillips 208). Brontë suddenly removes Jane from a logical mindset to one that obeys the patriarchal regime. When Rochester calls out her name, Jane's immediate response is to go to him, indicating that he controls her happiness and

individuality. Jane justifies her actions to return to Rochester by focusing on the lack of "respectability of a loveless marriage" (Phillips 208). Whereas Rochester views Jane as his equal, even without being legally wed, Jane fears that "without St. John's love, she would become merely his instrument in turn, rather than his equal" (Phillips 208). While Brontë frames much of the novel as a representation of the unequal political system, especially in terms of marriage, Phillips believes that the fact that Jane ends up with Rochester highlights that "without correspondence of the mind, marriage is, as Milton puts it, rather 'two carcasses chained unnaturally together'" (210). However, what Phillip does not acknowledge is Jane and Rochester are truly in love, which is not something that was true for every Victorian couple. While they may not be legally equal, the fact that they treat each other as equals is all that matters for Jane: "all my confidence is bestowed in him; all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result" (Brontë 384). Jane demonstrates how legal rights become less relevant when a woman is with a man who loves and respects her.

The ending of the novel, in which Jane returns to and marries Rochester after fleeing to Moreland for some time, can be interpreted as a contradictory action in terms of Jane's quest for independence and individuality. Described as one of "compromise and constraint," the end shows Jane making the independent choice to return to Rochester but also submitting herself to the patriarchal system that she previously detested (Leggatt 170). Many feminist critics argue that Jane's return to Rochester at Ferndean limits her freedom because it reduces her independence by the fact that she returns to a male figure. However, Judith Leggatt proposes an interesting interpretation of Brontë's message in the ending: "that in the modern nation-state women will find a more active role in the production of culture but that the role will also demand that they become implicated in the larger mechanisms of social control" (170). What makes

Jane's return to Rochester somewhat acceptable to Brontë is that Jane is now financially independent, thus more equal in status to Rochester, and that Jane is now more of a partner rather than an employee. She is also making the choice to return rather than complying to a demand or force. However, he is still the husband and has full control of her legally, diminishing any possibility of equality. Within a few minutes of seeing Rochester, Jane announces that she is now "an independent woman…[and] her own mistress" (Brontë 370). The twist that occurs in the end is the role-reversal between Jane and Rochester. Rochester has become blind and is missing his left arm due to a fire caused by Bertha. Jane sees his disabilities as another sign cementing their equality: Rochester is "dependent upon Jane 'to be helped—to be led'" (Pell 417). While Jane has the role of the equal, in many ways she becomes his master: Rochester "no longer acts the role of master exclusively because he has learned something about the limits of his own power" given his humbling disabilities (Pell 417). However, as previously mentioned, Jane and Rochester are not equal, because he is not in his full and healthy form. He is damaged, which diminishes his power, only then making Jane seem equal to him. A defining moment in the shift of power between them occurs when Jane cuts Rochester's "shaggy black mane" in an attempt to make him "decent" (Brontë 373). Leggatt compares this scene to when Mr. Brocklehurst cut Julia Severn's red curls and said: "it is time some one undertook to re-humanize you" (186). In the situation with Jane and Rochester, Jane is Mr. Brocklehurst, demonstrating how women are becoming implicated in the larger picture of social control. In order for a shift in society to occur, making it less patriarchal and hierarchical, everyone, including women, must take part in the change. Jane, who spent so much time avoiding the conventions of society, "is now charged with humanizing the male, making him conform to society" (Leggatt 186).[12] Arnold Shapiro

[12] James Diedrick compares *Jane Eyre* to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and argues that *Jane Eyre* can "be read and taught as a fictional counterpart to Wollstonecraft's manifesto" (23).

acknowledges Jane's "affirmation of her own individuality and right to self-expression, and, most important, her very refusal to turn away from humanity" (683). While Jane's individuality may be shaped by the different situations she encounters, she takes the opportunity to define herself and demonstrate the power women have rather than becoming a pawn in the patriarchal realm. Her actions also show that marriage is not a prison sentence but offers women happiness and love, crucial emotions that get overlooked because of the restrictive natures of the marriage laws.

In addition to Jane's sense of independence becoming apparent in the evolution of her relationships, Brontë also uses the narrative method of the novel to highlight Jane's growing autonomy. The first sign of female control and assertiveness comes in the subtitle: *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. This implies that Jane has control over her own story and how she wants to be perceived. Also, the fact Jane uses "I" "give[s] the reader access to Jane's thoughts and emotions" (Campbell 68). Jane's story elicits sympathy from the reader as she wins the readers over from the tyrant men. However, Susie Campbell acknowledges a dilemma with this structure; "Jane is writing this about ten years after being married, so what the reader thinks are Jane's current feelings and emotions are actually based on memories, many of which could have been shaped and reconstructed to best express her story" (68). Jane does not try to fool the reader into thinking the story is written as she lives her life; in chapter two she interjects the story of the incident in the red room by saying "I can now conjecture readily…" indicating that she is retelling the story years later (Campbell 69). Nancy Pell views the interjection of Jane's adult voice as a major weakness to the story: one that "sounds like an ironic gesture toward fairness and deliberately fails to convince" (401). Although Jane does her best to recreate accurately the

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Wollstonecraft's desire was that women would "grow more and more masculine" everyday (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women* 8). Wollstonecraft defines "masculine" in terms of rationality. She wanted women to understand reason and be able to understand their role in society.

scenes, the language she uses, especially in the red-room scene during which she is only about seven or eight years old, is not fitting for a child that age. She uses phrases like "penetrating some aperture in the blind," which work for the purpose of conveying the story but not in terms of representing a young child (Brontë 9). Given that much of the novel is meant to appeal to the reader's emotional side, both Campbell and Doreen Roberts agree that the structure of the sentences helps convey Jane's message. By the language being "highly literary and consciously rhetorical, yet at the same time vehement and perfervid" Jane is able to come across as eloquent and lady-like as well as emotional and disturbed (Roberts 36). Roberts also points out that the mix of stylistic components such as "the unusually lavish use of the dash…[and] short sense-units and like paratactic clausal or phrasal arrangements…cannot possibly flow" (37). The novel reads more like "a sustained series of small explosions" (Roberts 37). The commentary regarding the lack of traditional writing style is consistent with Jane's character. She is not a conventional Victorian woman and tends to do things her own way. Occasionally, she will play the role of a proper woman, just as she sometimes writes in highly stylized verse, but more often than not she is doing something to make a statement. Had Jane followed a more conventional style of writing, her actions as a reformer would have been diminished.

While Jane becomes increasingly independent and outspoken throughout the novel, Nancy Pell argues that, "Brontë's romantic individualism and rebellion of feeling are controlled and structured by an underlying social and economic critique of bourgeois patriarchal authority" (399). Pell's argument is correct in the sense that Brontë raises awareness about individualism through the patriarchal authorities that Jane encounters. Brontë uses these tyrannical relationships between Jane and older male figures to suggest that modified independence for women is possible but is limited to their responses to the encounters. Jane has three main

patriarchal authorities: John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, and St. John Rivers. Rochester is the only one who offers Jane status as an equal, although he knows it is not possible. Jane's initial encounter with the patriarchal regime occurs very early when she is a young child at Gateshead. She is continually at the mercy of John Reed, whom she describes as "a murderer…a slave driver…like the Roman emperors" (Brontë 8). It is as a result of the endless torture she undergoes at Gateshead that Jane develops such an intense anger against her superiors and learns the importance of independence. Jane knows that her "place in the house is uncertain and vulnerable," causing her to fight for herself since no one else would (Campbell 1). At one point she says "I resisted all the way: a new thing for me" (Brontë 9). Her time at Lowood is meant to extinguish all of the early signs of resistance: "the individual is reduced to the most common denominator…[and] the girls are to forgo their identities" (Shapiro 687). It is no surprise that Jane disregards Mr. Brocklehurst's attempts to strip her of her identity, which only adds fuel to Jane's fire to rebel. Unable to conform to Lowood's intention of complete oppression, Jane becomes even more strong-willed while at Lowood: "when we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard" (Campbell 21). Jane's increasingly rebellious nature is Brontë's way of showing that identity oppression and control can backfire and have opposite consequences. Once Jane arrives at Thornfield, she is given an identity as a governess and develops a relationship with Rochester. Her decision to leave him highlights her desire to maintain her self-respect, but ultimately stems from his actions following the complications with the marriage. The interaction between Jane and Rochester when she announces she is leaving him shows how her decision is not initiated by her but by his actions:

> ‘I do love you,’ I said, ‘more than ever: but I must not show or indulge the feeling: and this is the last time I must express it.’
>
> ‘The last time, Jane! What! do you think you can live with me, and see me daily, and yet, if you still love me, be always cold and distant?’
>
> ‘No, sir; I am certain I could not…’
>
> ‘Mr. Rochester, I must leave you’ (Brontë 259).

This conversation between the two lovers demonstrates that Jane does not want to leave but has no choice given the situation imposed on her by Rochester. While it seems like a brave act of independence to go and to start a new life, Jane is solely reacting to the situation. Similarly, her encounter with St. John demonstrates her need to resist and react to his actions in order to form her identity. Jane refuses to be “a fitting fellow-labourer in [St. John’s] Indian toils,” because she sees herself as more than an object, but rather a lovable human (Hardy 320). By rejecting his proposal, Jane makes the same statements as she had at Gateshead: she will not submit to unequal and unjustified authority. Brontë uses these examples to show that Jane was not just a woman on a mission to become independent, but rather her encounters with such men left her no choice but to defend herself and her individuality. Jane’s relationships with these men and her subsequent reactions prove Pell’s statement that Brontë’s notions of individualism and rebellion are in fact a reaction to patriarchal authority. Given that Jane’s independence stems from reactions rather than actions she pioneers on her own, Brontë suggests that a woman’s attempt at maintaining individuality and independence is limited to the confines of social roles available and expectations. Jane does not try to escape the confines and initiate her own independence; rather she acknowledges her position and makes the most of it and carves out her independence

and individuality within the boundaries of her role. She does her best to work within the system rather than trying to completely disregard its existence.

Many critics have dubbed *Jane Eyre* as a novel against "all that would stifle or repress the individual" (Shapiro 683). Brontë makes a clear effort to emphasize Jane's valiant efforts to become her own person while navigating the patriarchal regimes she encounters. However, the one impediment to Jane's independence is Bertha Mason. Critics have argued extensively about the actual role and purpose of Bertha in the novel. Elizabeth Harkins views Bertha as "one of the 'gaping flaws'" in the novel as she represents "the hidden wishes of an intolerable life;" whereas James Phillips regards Bertha as a representation of "the savagery of the formalism of the law" (Pell 420, Phillips 210). Another popular interpretation of Bertha, as expressed in *The Madwoman in the Attic,* is that she represents the hidden passions withheld in Jane. As much as Jane appears to be independent in the novel, she controls her sexual desires in order not to be cast out by society as a prostitute or unsuitable lady. Brontë creates Bertha as an extreme character in order to demonstrate that in addition to laws, societal conventions and expectations were forcing women to withhold part of themselves, ultimately not allowing them to be completely independent. Debra Teachman accurately describes Bertha's role in *Jane Eyre*: "[she] accomplishes what Jane, as a respectable woman, is incapable of accomplishing for herself" (114). While many consider Bertha to be mentally unstable and socially unacceptable, she is in this state due to the extreme restrictions placed on women and their ability to express their natural desires for sex. Because Jane is a refined young woman, she does not outwardly express these feelings causing Brontë to create Bertha in order for the reader to see the other side of a Victorian woman's feelings.

Due to the rigid and strict divorce laws of the time, Rochester is left with few choices

about what to do with his wife and ultimately decides that she be kept in the attic.[13] Described as a "debauched creature of wild, unrestrained appetites," Bertha "symbolically represents part of Jane's own self" (Campbell 45). Bertha brings to life Jane's fears regarding the implications of sex, especially as her wedding day nears. Women feared losing their sense of freedom once they gave up their virginity, being regarded as overly promiscuous, and even dying during childbirth. When Bertha sets fire to Rochester's bed, Campbell interprets this action as "the nightmare version of what Jane fears might happen if her own desires and appetites were unleashed" (46). The same interpretation can be associated with Bertha's tearing Jane's wedding veil and the divide between Jane's fears about losing her virginity versus those of unrestrained passion. Just as Bertha is forcibly restrained by Rochester on his wedding day with Jane, Jane is restrained by Bessie and Miss Abbot during her times at Gateshead and called a "mad cat and a wild animal" (Campbell 46). Jane does not openly discuss her independence in terms of sexuality and passions, but Brontë suggests that no woman can be fully independent without the ability and freedom to express and to act on her inner and subconscious desires. Bertha, because she is portrayed as "mad," represents the highly significant but unspoken passions of Victorian women. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, justify Brontë's use of Bertha as a way for Brontë to transmit her personal emotions: "by projecting their [female authors'] rebellious impulses not into their heroines but onto mad or monstrous women (who are punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the structures of patriarchal society and to reject them" (Gilbert 77-78). While this is very possibly the case, especially with Brontë as she transmits much of herself

[13] The divorce laws of the time made divorce extremely difficult, regardless of the mental stability of the spouse. Rochester cannot divorce Bertha on the grounds of insanity because she was able to consent to the marriage at the time it occurred. It is not until 1937 that English Law allowed insanity to be grounds for divorce. Even in New York State today, divorce on the grounds of a spouse being mentally ill/unstable is illegal.

in the novel, Debra Teachman argues that "the madwoman is not, however, merely a representation of the author's 'anxiety and rage.' She also represents the anxiety, rage, frustration, and will to an active, though respectable, life that other women also feel" (112-113). Teachman's point is supported by the previous accounts of Bertha's actions and their abilities to represent Jane's suppressed passions, ultimately highlighting that Jane cannot be fully independent due to the constraints of cultural expectations.

Brontë devotes the majority of the novel to Jane's evolving sense of independence and identity within the confines of society. However, Teachman discusses the limitations of Jane's independence. Although Jane is economically independent in the way that she can financially support herself, the presence of Bertha suggests that she is not emotionally independent. If Jane is forced to repress a significant part of her emotions, particularly her sexual and passionate desires, she cannot be considered truly independent and is still at the heels of society. Jina Politi sees Brontë's attempt at establishing Jane's independence and individuality as a failed one. Going against the budding feminist sentiment of the time, Politi finds the novel "one by which the social arrangements and dominant ideological assumptions of early nineteenth-century England are, in the end, not questioned, but endorsed" (Glen 13). She argues that Jane's story is not one of "rebellion, but of 'quiescent socialisation'" (Glen 13). Brontë does not create a completely unrealistic character that is suddenly equal to men and can live outside the limitations of the law, but rather someone who is relatable to the readers and offers them a glimmer of hope that, they too, can exercise their independent natures. Numerous critics agree with Politi, including Leggatt, and find Jane's story to be one of a continuation of the societal ideas rather than a declaration against them. Brontë uses Jane's struggle for individuality to show how societal ideas are the forces confining women's independence. She highlights that individuality

is extremely complex and depends on a variety of factors, ranging from societal attitudes to laws. While Brontë pushes the boundaries and shows how these patriarchal relationships can be damaging for women, she is not stating that all women should be or can be completely independent of men. If anything, Brontë introduces a new type of woman, one who is "full of anger at injustice and tyranny. When she resists, it is with strong feeling and even violence" (Campbell 84). It is because of Jane's self-creation being reliant on the interactions with men that she is angered by her inability to form her own life. However, it is this anger that allows Jane to push boundaries and to attempt to establish her independence, allowing herself to develop a better sense of who she is as an individual.

James Phillips accurately describes the key to Jane's transformation throughout the novel: "Jane needs others, not in order to complete herself, not in order to know herself, but in order to recreate herself" (214). Jane's relationships starting from John Reed to St. John Rivers allow Jane to establish a sense of independence and individuality that she could not have developed alone. She quickly learns that she must be rebellious and determined in order to survive the patriarchal authorities that she encounters and carve out her much desired independence. The discoveries she makes about herself along the way serve as the foundation for her journey toward independence. The influences of these men provide Jane with the direction for her future. Jane's biggest obstacle occurs when she is confronted with the fact that she cannot be legally married to Rochester because he is married to Bertha. The legal obstacle she faces demonstrates that she cannot escape the limitations of social laws and her actions are in reaction to these blocks. In addition to the restrictions of social laws, Jane is not completely free from societal conventions, as demonstrated with the character of Bertha. Jane is forced to suppress many of her animalistic and natural desires pertaining to sex in order to be accepted in society.

However, Jane takes each opportunity of repression as a means of establishing herself as an individual. It is through her fight for independence that she is able to realize who she is as an individual and what she wants in life. While she may not be legally equal to men, she realizes that true love offers her more happiness than anything else: “to be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth” (Brontë 379). By having Jane narrate the story in first person, her ebullience about her marriage comes through as believable and relatable. Jane’s true happiness in the end indicates that as a result of her paramount struggles and obstacles, she has developed a strong enough sense of herself to appreciate the benefits that marriage has to offer.

Chapter 3

When Love is not Enough: The Overruling Power of Independence

The epic story of *Middlemarch: A Study Of Provincial Life* represents more than its subtitle suggests; the novel discusses the social and legal complexities that women, mainly Dorothea Brooke, must face and negotiate on a daily basis during the Victorian era.[14] Although Dorothea's character is highly complex and undergoes the most change, Rosamond Vincy and Mary Garth are also able to negotiate the system and fight for what they want. Dorothea, Rosamond, and Mary represent three different types of women with varying ideas about independence and marriage, as they have individual expectations and experiences as wives. The eight books that comprise the novel take the reader on a gripping journey through the marital, reform, and economic struggles that the residents of Middlemarch encounter. Eliot decidedly veered away from a "feel-good" novel and instead wrote a book for "grown-up people" (Hornback 12). She does not idealize Victorian society, but rather gives her readers "criticisms on life" (Carlisle 98). Eliot calls social conditions of the time "moral imprisonments," and focuses on Dorothea to highlight the difficulty of balancing these societal conditions and expectations while attempting to achieve economic, physical, and psychological independence. Eliot modeled Dorothea on her belief that "we ought, each of us, not to sit down and wail, but to be heroic and constructive" (Browning 119). Dorothea constantly battles her desire to be independent and heroic with her frustration about her position in life as Casaubon's wife.

[14] All citations in reference to "Eliot" are from the edition: Eliot, George. *Middlemarch*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2003. Print.

Dorothea proves to be heroic by following her heart instead of money, but she never seems completely satisfied with the outcome of her life.

Dorothea, Rosamond, and Mary offer the reader very different perspectives on marriage. Initially, Dorothea sees marriage as an opportunity to enhance her education and improve her cultural knowledge. She views it as a gateway to larger opportunities and as a positive step in her life. However, she quickly becomes disenchanted by the reality of marriage and realizes it is the key to defeating her independence and individuality. Her second attempt at marriage offers her an opposite experience and viewpoint. She realizes that true love is possible and takes steps to realize her independence and follows her heart. However, whereas Jane expressed unconditional happiness and joy while being married to Rochester, Dorothea lacks the same excitement and passion. She sees marriage as a positive union, as it offers her love and companionship, things she did not have with Casaubon, but she indirectly expresses a sense of resentment and unhappiness that she could not fulfill all her dreams. Rosamond views marriage as a means of attaining a higher social status. She does not view it as an institution that limits her independence as a woman but rather one that will afford her new opportunities. She sees it as a practical union but becomes disheartened when she realizes that Lydgate cannot fulfill her expectations. Rosamond does not discuss marriage in terms of her rights as a woman and her independence, as she is content with the system since she believes it can benefit her in a quest for a more elegant lifestyle. Mary also views marriage as a beneficial and positive union. Whereas most women saw marriage as a form of defeat to their identity, Mary expresses herself actively to Fred and makes him comply with her demands, giving her the power. Mary also realizes the importance of true love and values Fred's devotion to her, ultimately giving her confidence and self-esteem. What gives Dorothea, more so than Rosamond and Mary, the ability to fall truly in love and shift her

view on marriage from one of incarceration to shared happiness are the obstacles and the limitations to her independence that she encounters and fights through. By attempting to carve out her independence and individuality within the confines of patriarchy, Dorothea has confidence in herself and views herself as worthy of an equal partner. She knows what makes her happy and what she expects out of a marriage.

As stated earlier, independence is a highly complex term with a multitude of meanings and implications. Independence for Dorothea is not defined by money, but rather by her ability to act of her own accord. Part of her ability to act on her own involves her access to information, which becomes a significant obstacle to her future plans. Whereas Jane Eyre did not know about Rochester's marriage to Bertha, Dorothea is unaware of the codicil in Casaubon's will which prevents her from marrying Will Ladislaw if she wants to keep her inheritance. Jane's lack of information humiliates her and causes her emotional pain, but Dorothea's dependence on this information drastically impacts her future and her actions. Casaubon wanted to restrict Dorothea from marrying Will and withheld the codicil from her so she could not react while he was alive, putting her in a position of inferiority to and dependence on him after his death. Whereas Jane Eyre claimed independence once she received her inheritance, Dorothea believes, "it is not a sin to make yourself poor in performing experiments for the good of all" (Eliot 12). Eliot's first reference to Dorothea describes her as "remarkably clever," indicating to the reader that Dorothea is going to be more than a wallflower character, and one with her own thoughts and opinions. In conversation with Sir James Chettam, Dorothea proudly proclaims, "I shall never correspond to the pattern of a young lady" (Eliot 17). From that point forward it becomes clear that Dorothea is not a traditional Victorian lady who is willing to abide blindly by social standards. Despite the overwhelmingly negative responses to her engagement to Casaubon, as

she is often told he is "no better than a mummy" (Eliot 52), Dorothea ignores the chatter and sticks to her desire and decision to marry him. Given that Dorothea was properly educated and raised in an "unquestionably good" family, it is somewhat surprising that Dorothea has this outspoken and unconventional nature; however, as critic Kerry McSweeney suggests, the reader must accept Dorothea's "ardent nature" despite knowing from where it stems (101). Dorothea's strong personality does not just come out when reform is being discussed but she constantly speaks of "learn[ing] new ways of helping people" (Eliot 71). Her desire to do something is part of Eliot's goal for her to be a reformer. Her plan to build cottages for the poor is not taken seriously by the men since it was very rare for a woman to have such ambitious plans during the era. While women during the time were allowed to have their individual dreams and opinions, the narrator in the novel states that, "the great safeguard of society and of domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on. The conventional wisdom of the enclosed world in which Dorothea finds herself…says that sane people did what their neighbors did" (Eliot 5). Although charity work was considered acceptable for women during the Victorian era, men defined the parameters of the work. Dorothea presents herself as an independent woman when she does not follow suit and does the unexpected: she rejects Casaubon's money and moves to London with Will. Many women, like Rosamond, married for the chance at social and economic mobility, but Dorothea demonstrates that happiness and love trump money and control. Mary Garth has a similar mindset to Dorothea as she refuses to marry Fred just for money, but makes sure they truly love each other. By escaping the enclosed world of Middlemarch, Dorothea makes her mark as an individual who wants to rebel against the confines of society. However, this side of Dorothea does not emerge until the end of the novel, after she has been through a tumultuous relationship with Casaubon and has learned more about herself and her capabilities. McSweeney accurately

explains part of Dorothea's transformation: "there is no creature whose inward being is so strange that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it" (51). There is little argument that Casaubon and Will do not heavily influence Dorothea's actions; however, it is the results of the actions such as marrying Will and moving away that allow Dorothea to show herself as an individual who now regards marriage as a means to love, romance, and happiness. However, while Dorothea does not question the romantic part of her relationship, the narrator hints at the fact that Dorothea could have accomplished more in life had she not remarried.

Similarly to *Jane Eyre*, which through the character of Jane highlights the issues of women's independence and patriarchal regimes, *Middlemarch* is an intricate novel that uses several different plots and characters to convey to the readers the issues surrounding societal reform. *Middlemarch* was originally written as two separate novels: *Miss Brooke* and *Middlemarch*. Eliot's decision to combine the separate stories of Dorothea Brooke and Lydgate allows Eliot to further her attempt at highlighting the independent struggles of both men and women in relation to the Reform Bill. The novel was set in 1829, a few years prior to the passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832, which aimed to "extend voting rights and representation to the unenfranchised" (Schwartz xxi).[15] It was then published in 1871-72, four years after the Second Great Reform Bill of 1867, when the Bill was still a heavily debated topic that needed as much support as possible. While the Reform Bill is not the central theme of the novel, Eliot intertwines the topic into conversations of the Middlemarch residents and makes the need for change known and discussed amongst the characters. Throughout the novel Dorothea embodies a sense of independence and reform that is often masked by her relationships. Her fundamental belief is

[15] The "unenfranchised" referred to in the Reform Bill is "virtually everyone other than the wealthy landowners who controlled both houses of parliament" (Schwartz xx). Eliot sets the novel in the year preceding of the Reform Bill to highlight the need for social change and then decided to publish the novel around the time of the Second Reform Bill. The Second Reform Bill further extended voting rights.

"what do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other," emphasizing the need for reform to start on an individual level in order to then spread to institutions and society (Eliot 698). Critic Bert Hornback correctly states that, "Dorothea's determination to live by her ideals is what makes *Middlemarch* such a great novel. In that determination lies her heroism" (90). The unique aspect of Dorothea is that she is not just fighting for political reform but also for society to "enlarge our human sympathies" (Hornback 90). She knows her place in society and does not try to be an ardent reformer; instead she uses her feminine qualities such as sympathy to promote change. Although Eliot uses Dorothea as a way to emphasize the need for reform on a societal and a personal level, Dorothea's actions are restricted to her interactions with men, making a need for reform harder to notice. If Dorothea had stayed single and followed her dreams of building cottages, she would have been seen as more of a reformer and less of a standard Victorian woman.

As opposed to the character of Jane, who echoed the ardent and strong-minded nature of Charlotte Brontë, Dorothea is a far cry from the highly independent George Eliot. Born Mary Anne Evans in 1819, George Eliot was from Warwickshire and raised in a middle-class family. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot's characters resemble the figures in her actual life. While immersing herself in the literary culture growing up, she met Dr. Brabant, an elderly man and "a learned man who used up his literary energies in thought and desire to do rather than in actual doing," a possible inspiration for Edward Casaubon (Schwartz xxv). While Dr. Brabant suggests a strong model for Casaubon, there has been significant discussion over who actually inspired the character, and Eliot goes as far as to claim that he is inspired based on herself. Other male characters in *Middlemarch* are modeled after male figures in Eliot's life. The inspiration for Will most likely stems from Eliot's relationship with George Henry Lewes, the true love of her life.

Lewes had a "lively, engaging manner…some found him lightweight, even frivolous" (Schwartz xxvii). Although Eliot was never able to marry Lewes, they spent twenty-four years together. It was not until the end of her life that she met and married John Walter Cross (McSweeney 3). While the connections between her real life influences and the characters do not provide much insight into the story, her creation of Dorothea is the most interesting and surprising of the personifications. While some describe Dorothea as "intellectual like her creator," others see Dorothea as "another day-dream ideal self" of Eliot (Hornback 21, 11). Eliot knew that she was untraditional in her actions and thoughts but tried to create Dorothea as a woman who represented a hybrid of her's and society's views. Claudia Moscovici argues that, "George Eliot's serious novels and her unconventional lifestyle illustrate that the author herself did not fully subscribe to this perception of women" (517).

Eliot's denunciation of the perception of women is best seen through her views on marriage. An interesting connection between Eliot and Dorothea is their defiance of the law in relation to marriage. Dorothea consciously rejects Casaubon's legal attempt to keep her from marrying Will Ladislaw. By defying the clause in his will and rejecting the property, she is following her heart instead of money. Eliot, similar to Jane Eyre, lived with a man who was legally married. Because divorce was not a reasonable option during the Victorian era, George Henry Lewes, Eliot's lover, had an open marriage with his wife and spent the latter part of his life with Eliot. Lewes' wife "had been openly having an affair with his associate…and several of Lewes's six children were illegitimate" (Schwartz xxvii). While both Eliot and Dorothea are in different situations, they ignore social expectations and laws in order to have true love. Both women engaged in scandalous activities in order to follow their hearts and maintain a sense of individuality. Moscovici makes an interesting point regarding Eliot's portrayal of women: "her

depiction of strong women as still dependent upon men to enrich and even justify feminine existence through their professional accomplishments reveals the author's characteristic mediation between her (more or less) egalitarian ideals and their possible realizations in contemporaneous society" (517). The struggles that Dorothea faces in the novel with the development of her identity reflect Eliot's effort to balance her personal views of women with the competing ones of society. In her essay, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," Eliot praises the art of fiction because "fiction is a department of literature in which women can, after their kind, fully equal men" (204). She recognizes that women do not promote their achievements, particularly education, to the best of their abilities: "A really cultured woman, like a really cultured man, is all the simpler and the less obtrusive for her knowledge; she does not make it a pedestal from which she flatters herself that she commands a complete view of men and things, but makes it a point of observation from which to form a right estimate of herself" (196). In *Middlemarch* Eliot strikes a balance with her female characters, particularly Dorothea, Rosamond, and Mary, by making them intelligent and outspoken, but also conscientious of society's view of women's roles and abilities.

The prelude of the novel references St. Theresa and presents two opposing ideas for the development of Dorothea's character. At one point, the narrator speaks of Dorothea as a "later-born Theresa whose 'spiritual grandeur' must be 'ill matched with the meanness of opportunity' in our modern world" (Eliot 1). Later on, the strong-natured image of Dorothea is undermined by the possibility that "she may also be the 'foundress of nothing,' a pathetic creature whose 'ardour' for the good will 'tremble off and [be] dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering on some long-recognisable deed" (Eliot 2). These competing images of Dorothea are in line with Eliot's attempt to create a complex character that tries to enact change while not removing

herself completely from society: whether or not that is possible remains the issue for Eliot and ultimately Dorothea. A more indirect but powerful comparison to St. Theresa is the famous statue called "The Ecstasy of St. Theresa," by Bernini. The sculpture is highly erotic and shows the dual sides of St. Theresa—pleasure and pain. This statue captures much of the contradiction that Dorothea feels throughout her life and especially with Will. She has this burning passion and desire for him but also must restrain herself in order to conform to society. Although the sculpture is not mentioned in the novel, many of the readers and Eliot herself were most likely familiar with the famous statue. Moscovici brings up the idea that "the initial comparison to Saint Theresa, and her attraction to a long-outdated scholastic academic method all suggest Dorothea's ideological displacement from nineteenth-century England and her need to acquire a flexibility that would enable her to adapt to her environment without significantly losing her potentially subversive singularity" (523). Her dramatic shift once she becomes engaged to Casaubon suggests that she has temporarily lost all signs of individuality.

As with Jane, Dorothea's awareness about independence and individuality occurs early in her life. Although she does not confront many of the same hardships and repressive relationships that Jane does, Dorothea faces her uncle's demeaning remarks about women and her family's objection to her marriage to Casaubon. She develops an uncharacteristically strong personality prior to her marriage as she constantly feels a need to defend herself and prove she is more capable than expected. However, her first attempt at establishing her independence, by marrying Casaubon, is a catastrophic mistake and one that makes others question her ability to act for herself as an independent woman. Dorothea sees a multitude of possibilities for herself by marrying Casaubon. She thinks she will be able to further her education, given his wisdom and research, as well as get to focus on her charity projects. Her naïve view about marriage indicates

that she is not in fact ready to be an independent woman, as she does not have a realistic view of life. Once Casaubon dies and Dorothea becomes aware of the codicil, she is forced to make another decision that will greatly impact her independence and individuality. She chooses to disregard the codicil and follow her heart and marry Will. Her choices to ignore the codicil and then marry Will are surrounded by intense scrutiny and judgment. Dorothea's ability to follow her heart and then accept the consequences makes her, at the time, a strong, independent woman. Like Jane, Dorothea ends up with the man she truly loves. Through encountering such obstacles, Dorothea evolves into a woman who knows herself and has the confidence to do what is best for herself.

Whereas it takes Dorothea a failed first relationship to realize the potential emotional and psychological benefits of marriage, Rosamond Vincy quickly recognizes the benefits of marriage as "a prospect in rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people" (Eliot 157). Rosamond is not bothered by the restrictive laws placed on married women and does not want to change the system, but rather strives to be a perfect Victorian wife. Rosamond presents herself as "polished, refined, docile," all the qualities of a proper Victorian woman, but her true self is manipulative and self-involved (Eliot 155). Her desire to be a perfect wife stems from her time at "Mrs. Lemon's school, the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female" (Eliot 89). Rosamond is a calculating and smart woman who knows how to get and keep what she wants. From early on in their relationship, Rosamond establishes a sense of control over Lydgate. Although Rosamond claims her "mind is raw," Lydgate is perceptive enough to notice her intelligence and flatters her by saying "an accomplished woman almost always knows more than we men" (Eliot 151). This attitude of admiration expressed by

Lydgate is drastically different from the one expressed by Casaubon when he meets Dorothea. After meeting Rosamond a few times, Lydgate becomes infatuated with her and falls under her control. Although Lydgate comes from a respectable family, he is not financially successful on his own, which worries Rosamond's family and ultimately causes a strain on their relationship. Rosamond's agenda and Lydgate's demise are apparent from the moment they get engaged: "he left the house an engaged man, whose soul was not his own, but the woman's to whom he had bound himself" (Eliot 287). While Rosamond sees marriage as a means of social mobility, Bernard Paris accounts for Lydgate's quick submissiveness due to his "suppressed need for love" (64). This conflicting nature between Rosamond and Lydgate is what causes Rosamond to have complete control over Lydgate's emotions and future. Paris writes that in *Middlemarch,* "men's fates lie in the women's hands;" however, when looking at Rosamond and Lydgate this does not hold completely true (76). Because Lydgate fails in the professional field, he causes Rosamond to become extremely upset and to lose confidence in him and their marriage. Rosamond's egotism is the main cause of her unhappiness. She wants Lydgate to provide her with a more elegant lifestyle, full of fancy furniture and money. However, her stereotypical view of men and their roles in society leads her to rely on her marriage to Lydgate to fulfill her goals. When he fails to meet her standards she suffers the consequences of misery.

While Bernard Paris argues that many of the characters in *Middlemarch* are highly egotistical, "Mary Garth is perhaps the chief foil to the egoists" (83). Although Mary's character plays a secondary role to Dorothea and Rosamond, she presents a stark contrast in terms of her attitude toward and relationship with Fred versus Rosamond's caustic disposition and sad relationship with Lydgate. Unlike Rosamond and Dorothea, Mary comes from a lower-class family and is a humble character. When she receives a compliment she dismisses it "as

ridiculous, having early had much exercise in such dismissals," which makes the reader question her background and the hardships she has endured (Eliot 548). Whereas Rosamond and Dorothea are depicted as being beautiful, Mary is described as "a dreadful plain girl" (Eliot 95). Mary's cynical personality stems partially from her bitterness about her unattractive appearance. In an effort to give the readers an overview of "provincial life," Eliot uses Mary to show that despite unfortunate circumstances such as her appearance and her family's "poverty and low social status," Mary is able to stand up for herself (Eliot 548). Although she realizes that marriage is her best escape from her financial and status situations, she refuses to marry Fred until "he shows himself worthy of her love" (Paris 92). For a woman ridden with self-doubt at times, she realizes the importance of a relationship and the need to be respected, something missing with Dorothea and Casaubon. Although Mary seems to be exhibiting a strong sense of independence by dictating the conditions under which she will marry Fred, she is really putting herself in a position in which she is dependent on Fred because "if Fred does not reform, Mary's life is ruined" (Paris 92). Mary is trapped between her desire to be with Fred and her loyalty to her parents, who disapprove of Fred. The Garths who are "independent, self-reliant, and industrious," do not want Mary to submit herself to someone who is going to stymie her individual nature; however, they fail to realize the importance of love for Mary and her feeling that "she loved Fred best" (Paris 94, Eliot 550). While Mary realizes the importance of her independence and individuality, she negotiates with Fred in order for her to feel comfortable giving up herself for him as long as he conforms to her terms. Mary views marriage as a means of both love and social mobility. Like Jane, Mary does not see marriage as the confining trap that many do, but rather sees it as a way to happiness and opportunity given that she marries the right person. She refuses to give into Fred's demands and switches the roles and sets the demands

herself. She presents herself in a superior position to Fred and makes him work for what he wants, rather than quickly giving into his desires. Mary also shows how love and family do not need to be separate but can work together. She does not disregard her family's wishes for her but rather makes Fred live up to their standards. Whereas Dorothea marries Casaubon, despite being told everything that is wrong with him, Mary considers herself worthy enough of an esteemed husband and holds him to a high standard.

The shift that Dorothea undergoes once she becomes engaged to Casaubon negates the independence and individuality that she proudly spoke of as a single woman. Suddenly, "Dorothea seems strangely passive in her own affairs: a feminine obverse of the masculine egoism so evident in …Casaubon" (Ermarth 36). Her talk of helping others and doing what is best for the good of everyone suddenly shifts to questions such as "could I not be preparing myself now to be more useful [to Casaubon]?" (Eliot 57). As part of her role as an upper-class married woman, Dorothea expected to have social responsibilities that included charity work, a longtime passion of hers. However, she is highly disappointed when she arrives at Lowick and "there was nothing for her to do" (Eliot 71). She transfers her fervent passion for helping others to "showing an ardent submissive affection which promised to fulfill his most agreeable previsions of marriage" (Eliot 57). The narrator comments that Dorothea's inability to recognize Casaubon's questionable intentions and commitment to love makes her childlike and even stupid, undermining her clever nature (Eliot 45). Dorothea conforms to the idea that marriage is an inherently unequal match and constantly questions her place in the relationships, making herself the inferior spouse: "how can I have a husband who is so much above me without knowing that he needs me less than I need him" (Eliot 81). In her article "Allusive Mischaracterizations in *Middlmarch*," Claudia Moscovici brings to light Dorothea's feelings of

frustration and unexpected actions: “what the author implicitly criticizes is not so much (what she considered to be) the unalterable fact that the great majority of women had to define their identities through their husbands, fathers, or brothers but that Dorothea chooses to subordinate herself to a man who clearly is her inferior but views himself as her superior: in other words, to the wrong kind of man” (521). Dorothea is blind to all of Casaubon’s faults and justifies her actions by “having convinced herself that Casaubon was altogether right” (Eliot 81) without questioning his opinions. Eliot uses Dorothea’s relationship with Casaubon to highlight that the old ideals of marriage and a woman’s place in society do not hold true anymore, but instead are the source of unhappiness. While it appears that Dorothea has completely given herself up to Casaubon, Moscovici argues that “by shaping Casaubon's image rather than merely helping him fulfill his projects, Dorothea finds a relatively independent mode of exercising her imagination in a manner that neither adheres to nor obviously violates dominant social prescriptions” (524). In the following scene, Dorothea attempts to assert her individuality with Casaubon but is ultimately hindered by her knowledge of her position as a wife:

> “Before I sleep, I have a request to make, Dorothea”
>
> “What is it?” said Dorothea, with dread in her mind.
>
> “It is that you will let me know deliberately, whether, in case of my death, you will carry out my wishes: whether you will avoid doing what I should deprecate, and apply yourself to do what I should desire”
>
> “She did not answer immediately.”
>
> “You refuse?” said Mr. Casaubon, with more edge in his tone.

> "No, I do not yet refuse," said Dorothea, in a clear voice, the need of freedom asserting itself within her; "but it is too solemn—I think it is not right—to make a promise when I am ignorant what it will bind me to. Whatever affection prompted I would do without promising" (Eliot 454).

The dialogue between Casaubon and Dorothea shows her desire to be independent without alienating Casaubon and her duties as a loyal wife. However, it is only because of Casaubon that Dorothea has situations to react to which allow her to mold her independence. Her unhappiness as his wife also allows her to reevaluate what she wants in a partner and make a better-suited choice when she marries Will. She realizes that marriage does not have to be the restrictive partnership that Casaubon presents it to be, but in fact it can be between two equals.

Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon is not and never is a highly passionate and romantic relationship. Hornback goes so far as to say that "Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon is not a relationship at all" as Dorothea has unrealistic expectations for her marriage and once married, Casaubon "withdraws from everything except the formalities of a marriage relationship" (125). Dorothea sees marriage as an opportunity to become more educated and learn about culture: "I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by" (Eliot 24). However, conflict arises when Casaubon does not offer Dorothea the ability to further her knowledge by excluding her from his projects. While in Rome, Dorothea struggles with the fact that "Mr. Casaubon was certain to remain away for some time" and she was left to educate and entertain herself, not what she had in mind as part of her wifely duties (Eliot 183). Whenever she offers to help, Casaubon quickly and harshly rejects her input, telling her to instead "rely on [him] for knowing the times and the seasons adapted to the different stages of

[my] work" instead of having her help with his work, which is what she hoped to do (Hornback 53). Part of Casaubon's rejection of Dorothea's help may be a sense of intimidation from such a strong-minded woman. He quickly makes his independence of Dorothea known to her by continually insulting her opinions as "superficial judgment," causing Dorothea to realize the bleak future of their relationship (Hornback 53). Although she talks about doing whatever necessary to be of help to Casaubon, she does not willingly tolerate having her thoughts disregarded and insulted. The strain on the relationship stems from the underlying issue that "what was fresh to [Dorothea's] mind was worn out to his" (Hornback 52). Partly because of their large age difference, Dorothea's excitement about exploring a world beyond Lowick seems trivial and mundane to Casaubon who has already had many impactful experiences. Dorothea and Casaubon are on two different paths and are married because of societal expectations rather than true love. The fact that "she was as blind to his inward troubles as he to hers" highlights the fact that they do not know each other past the titles of husband and wife (Eliot 190). Critic Cara Weber believes that Eliot does not create this relationship to show an unhappy Dorothea, but rather as an "indication of the ordinariness of Dorothea's suffering early in her marriage… [she] insists upon the pervasiveness of women's unhappiness in marriage as a problem" (1). However, a weak character would have ignored the signs of a hopeless marriage and accepted her fate as trapped. Although it takes Casaubon's death for Dorothea ultimately to regain some of her individuality and independence, Weber acknowledges that "clarity of self-definition depends upon contact with others;...the 'I' depends upon exchange with 'Thou'" (7). Dorothea would not have been able to realize her potential as an individual if she had not been in the repressive marriage to Casaubon. As with Jane, who through her interactions with the Reed family,

Lowood, and St. John Rivers, discovers her independent nature, Dorothea uses her situation to carve out her independence and change the course of her future.

While Casaubon traps Dorothea in a repressive relationship both during his life and after, Rosamond does the same to Lydgate. Casaubon and Rosamond share the quality of control over their spouses. Just as Dorothea becomes overtly frustrated with her marriage and her situation, Bernard Paris points out that "Lydgate's submission to Rosamond is one of the most important causes for frustration of his ambitions" (73). Unlike Dorothea who becomes submissive because she believes it is her duty as a wife to play that role, Lydgate loses his independence because of his natural desire to be loved, an emotion he cannot control. During a conversation with Dorothea, Lydgate expresses his conflict about his relationship and the unhappiness it is causing him "it is impossible for me now to do anything—to take any step without considering my wife's happiness" (Eliot 728). Just as Dorothea constantly wants to be there and to help Casaubon, Lydgate yearns to make Rosamond happy and will do anything not to "see her miserable" (Eliot 728). Paris continues to highlight the similarities between Dorothea and Lydgate regarding the sources of their unhappiness: "[Dorothea and Lydgate] are drawn into disastrous marriages by emotional hunger and illusions about the partner, both become disenchanted, and both are unable to resist the partner's demands" (74). However, according to the narrator, "Rosamond's discontent in her marriage was due to the conditions of marriage itself, to its demand for self-suppression and tolerance, and not to the nature of her husband" (Eliot 716). While this may be true, Rosamond does not outwardly express problems with the institution of marriage but rather with her husband and his inability to provide her with the financial status she desired. While Dorothea and Lydgate share many of the same problems, Dorothea also experiences unhappiness in her marriage because she is forced to suppress her thoughts and actions, much like Rosamond.

The narrator and Paris present interesting views on the reason for Lydgate and Rosamond's unhappiness. The narrator faults the institution of marriage for making Rosamond suppress her individuality, ultimately leading to her discontent, whereas Paris faults Rosamond for causing Lydgate's demise. Although Rosamond exhibits an emotional control over Lydgate that Dorothea does not have over Casaubon, Rosamond and Dorothea are subject to society's expectations of wives and women. The difference between the two women is that Dorothea eventually establishes her independence whereas Rosamond has little interest in being independent and individual but rather wants to be a proper, elegant wife.

Rosamond and Dorothea are dependent on their husbands for information, which puts them in an inferior position. As mentioned before, Dorothea does not know about the codicil in Casaubon's will until he dies and Rosamond does not know the extent of Lydgate's financial problems until it becomes a serious issue. By not having this information, the men assume a position of control over their wives and put the women in a helpless position. Although Dorothea and Rosamond enter into relationships with very different men and treat their relationships differently, they are both unhappy due to the failures of their husbands to meet their expectations. However, Casaubon's death allows Dorothea the opportunity to break free from her unhappy state and reshape her role as a woman and a wife. She regains her sense of independence and individuality by making choices that best affect herself rather than someone else.

After Casaubon's death, the original Dorothea that the reader is introduced to in the beginning of the novel reappears. She returns to her ambitious self and "wishes to exert [her]self" (Eliot 465). Now a "wealthy, independent-minded widow," Dorothea believes she is in a position to make her own decisions and act on her own accord (Eliot 465). However,

Dorothea's newfound freedom is abruptly stalled when she learns of Casaubon's codicil to his will which says, "the property was all to go away from [her] if [she] married… Mr. Ladislaw, not anybody else" (Eliot 466). The laws during the era that allowed Dorothea to remain in charge of the property still gave Casaubon the right to amend his will and place restrictions on his widow. Casaubon makes this amendment to his will as a way to continue to control his wife after his death and as a form of revenge against his cousin Will. Constantly plagued by jealousy of Will's and Dorothea's relationship, Casaubon could not take extreme actions while he was alive, because it would have been socially unacceptable to alienate his relative. However, he always considered it his "duty to hinder to the utmost the fulfillment of [Will's] designs," meaning his potential marriage to Dorothea (Eliot 401). Upon receiving the news about the restrictions placed on her future, Dorothea does not go into hysterics and outrage, but rather reevaluates her future and the possibilities she now faces. What Casaubon unintentionally did was make Dorothea's relationship to Will much more of a possibility. Until Dorothea knew of the codicil, "it had never before entered her mind that [Will] could, under any circumstances, be her lover" (Eliot 467). However, the codicil stated that Dorothea could not marry Will; it did not stipulate that she could not have other relations with him. Casaubon's restrictions were intended to keep Dorothea single and apart from Will. Yet Casaubon never intended for Dorothea to disregard his provisions and reject money for love. Throughout her relationship with Casaubon, Dorothea was shielded from the outside world and its excitement; his death offers her the opportunity to regain a place in the center of society and rejoin the world from which she was separated. Casaubon tries to minimize Dorothea's interaction with the rest of society by limiting her potential relationships, yet Dorothea's individuality and independence outweigh Casaubon's restrictions. Critic Henry James presents a superficial argument that "Mr. Casaubon's death befalls about the middle of the

story, and from this point to the close our interest in Dorothea is restricted to the question, will she or will [she] not marry Will Ladislaw? The question is relatively trivial and the implied struggle slightly factitious" ("George Eliot" 164-165). What James fails to realize is that Casaubon's death and the decisions that Dorothea makes represent much more than a trivial decision but are a larger commentary on her individual nature given the restrictions on her independence. Just as Jane Eyre was forced to react to the legal barriers that plagued her marriage to Rochester, Dorothea must react to Casaubon's codicil and find a way to assert herself within the confines of the law.

Dorothea's relationship with Will presents a contradiction for her in terms of her fight for independence and her emotions. Dorothea is in a position in which she must balance and ultimately choose between true love and adherence to social expectations. She is under the watch of Middlemarch society and knows her relationship with Will raises questions about her loyalty to Casaubon while they were married. This inherent challenge for Dorothea leads her to be indecisive in her actions with regard to Will, ultimately causing him to appear overtly frustrated and even demanding about their future. Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon was fairly standard in terms of their respective roles and did not afford her the opportunities to assert herself and be independent. Yet the limitations of the relationship are what ultimately draw Dorothea to Will. He offers her an escape from her misery and also a chance for her to rebel against the Victorian notion of a proper woman. Dorothea's relationship with Will Ladislaw evolves in two different stages. The first stage is while Dorothea is married to Casaubon. Will plays the role of the tempting but off limits figure trying to lure Dorothea away from Casaubon. At first, Dorothea and Will have conflicting interests and attitudes about work and life. The first time they meet, Dorothea "annihilated [Will's] poor sketch with [her] criticism" (Eliot 195).

After that, Will quickly dismisses Dorothea as an "unpleasant girl, since she was going to marry Casaubon" (Eliot 73). Hornback draws on the fact that Dorothea's "sense of duty and her desire to grow 'wise' by submission to the wisdom of others plays against Will's insistence on independence and his own free growth" (35). This description is true of when Dorothea and Will first meet, but eventually, his desire and persistent struggle for independence are what make Dorothea attracted to him. Dorothea was stuck in a loveless and confining marriage; once Will comes along she sees a relationship offers more possibilities than what she has with Casaubon.

Despite their rough beginning, Will gives Dorothea a second chance when they meet again in Rome because he acknowledges her vulnerable state: she is constantly crying and saddened by the reality of her marriage to Casaubon. Rome represents more than just a honeymoon for Dorothea and Casaubon; it brings about deep and emotional thoughts in Dorothea about the connections between the ruins and majestic art and architecture in the city and her personal emotional tumult: "all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals…mixed confusingly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her…and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion" (Eliot 185). While she is in a dark emotional place, Will offers Dorothea the company and companionship that she expected from her husband but slowly realizes she most likely will not attain. The narrator subtly hints at the budding attraction between Will and Dorothea. Given that Dorothea prides herself on being a dutiful wife, she would never act on her feelings, but after speaking to Will, Dorothea notices that his "smile was irresistible, and shone back from her face too" (Eliot 195). Part of what makes Dorothea so attracted to Will is that he offers her "a source of greater freedom…his young equality was agreeable and also perhaps his openness to conviction" (Eliot 199). Dorothea is stuck in a loveless marriage to Casaubon and does not see

an end in sight. Will serves as her reactive stance against Casaubon's actions. Had Casaubon been a more attentive and loving husband, Dorothea would not have been as drawn to Will's presence and felt "like a lunette opened in the wall of her prison" (Eliot 343).

The second stage of Dorothea's relationship with Will comes after Casaubon's death. During this part of the relationship, Dorothea's struggle to balance her emotions toward Will and fulfill society's view of her as a widow becomes more explicit and complicated. While the codicil in the will seems unfairly controlling and repressive to Dorothea, Dorothea's and Will's actions caused the codicil to exist in the first place. Casaubon did not create the codicil from his imagination, but rather from the rapidly evolving relationship he witnessed between his wife and his cousin. Will is very forward in his actions and feelings toward Dorothea and does not hold back despite her status as a married woman: he "only wanted her to take more emphatic notice of him; he only wanted to be something more special in her remembrance than he could yet believe himself likely to be" (Eliot 207). He goes further in conveying his thoughts of Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon to her: "I suspect you have some false belief in the virtues of misery, and want to make your own life a martyrdom…you will go and be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick: you will be buried alive," commenting on her misery and the wretchedness of her husband (Eliot 210). It is interesting to notice the play on words with Will's name and the relation to Casaubon's will. Although Will is trying to free Dorothea from her relationship with Casaubon, he is the cause of the restrictions in the will. If it weren't for Will, Casaubon's will would not limit Dorothea's future. Will's presence reinforces Dorothea's determination "not to let Casaubon's cruel attempt to harness her to his failure corrupt her ambition of her life" (Hornback 42). Upon hearing about the codicil, Dorothea "compared her experience at the moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was

undergoing a metamorphosis…everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feeling toward him…and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw" (Eliot 467). The irony is that the one man who offers Dorothea a sense of freedom and happiness is the same one who causes it to be taken away from her.

Dorothea's choice to forgo her inheritance and marry Will is her way of defying Victorian societal expectations and declaring her independence. Many critics consider Will to be the biggest disappointment of the book; Virginia Woolf described him as "hav[ing] no independent status of his own—he can't be said to exist; he merely represents, not a dramatically real point of view, but certain of George Eliot's intentions…he is not substantially (everyone agrees) 'there'" (Haight 24). Although Will may not be on the same social level as Casaubon, the critics fail to realize that his simplicity and love for Dorothea are what make Dorothea so attracted to him. Their relationship is based on passion and love. His character serves to show how true love is strong enough to complicate Dorothea's quest for independence and her will to never remarry. Despite the fact that Will is legally restricted from being with Dorothea, he never gives up and admits, "that a secret longing for the assurance that she loved him was at the root of all his words" (Eliot 602). Dorothea's choice is driven by something that she never had with Casaubon: romance. However, Dorothea is not rash in her decision and spends a significant amount of time contemplating her relationship with Will. Ultimately, Will's persistent nature allows Dorothea to realize her love for him. He continually says he is leaving Middlemarch but is unable to depart from Dorothea and keeps coming back to see her: "I fear you think me foolish and perhaps wrong for coming back so soon" (Eliot 767). Knowing that they have passionate feelings for each other but are not supposed to act on them, they approach each other with a restrained sense of emotion: "he was in a state of uncertainty which made him afraid…and

Dorothea was afraid of her own emotion. She looked as if there was a spell upon her" (Eliot 766). Everything changes for them when on a stormy night during which "leaves and little branches were hurled about, and the thunder was getting nearer. The light was more and more somber, but there came a flash of lighting which made them start and look at each other and smile" leading them to kiss (Eliot 768). Despite the ominous background, which is highly reflective of the darkness and disruptions that have plagued their relationship, Dorothea realizes that the she is in love with Will and says "oh, I cannot bear it—my heart will break" when he says goodbye (Eliot 771). Finally being able to express her passion with Will, she tells him "I don't mind about poverty—I hate my wealth" indicating that she is willing to marry him and disregard the codicil in Casaubon's will (Eliot 771). Dorothea's decision adds to the complexity of her character and what Eliot wants the readers to understand. Although Dorothea prides herself on her independence and individuality, her marriage to Will shows that she is taking a step that she has been scared to take for a long time. She is not sacrificing herself as an individual, but rather making the independent decision to be with him. Will offers Dorothea happiness that she never had before, highlighting that money cannot fill the missing void in her heart.

The larger issue that plagues Dorothea is the members of Middlemarch society and their expectations of her as a widow. The whole town knows about the codicil, which inhibits her from acting on her emotions toward Will sooner. There is also speculation surrounding the need for the codicil. Casaubon must have had a reason to insert the codicil in his will. The reason most likely was Dorothea's inability to act appropriately with Will while she was married to Casaubon. As a proper widow, she is expected to uphold the legacy of her husband. She is well aware of the negative backlash she will receive once she announces her engagement but decides

that her love for Will is stronger than her image in society. Sir James tells Celia, Dorothea's sister, that he "cannot bear to see [Dorothea] again; it is too painful. It hurts me too much that a woman like Dorothea should have done what is wrong" (Eliot 775). In addition to the fact that she is breaking the codicil, she is willingly giving up her social status by marrying someone poor and forgoing her inheritance. Celia repeatedly tells Dorothea that she "will be so poor" and grapples with the fact that someone would willingly choose to give up her money (Eliot 779). The Rector is the only person who defends Dorothea's decision, saying "nobody would have said anything if she had married the young fellow because he was rich" (Eliot 777). By moving to London, Dorothea and Will do their best to escape Middlemarch society and start a new life together. Dorothea's acts of independence take a drastically different form once Casaubon dies and she marries Will. However, her actions are still in reaction to the general attitude of society rather than self-initiated.

Eliot does not try to create an ideal picture of marriage. She balances Dorothea's pressure to fulfill the role of a dutiful wife and the emotional struggles that accompany being in a relationship. Once Dorothea marries Casaubon, she becomes a pawn in his game of life and remains under his control until Will appears, and now she is under the watchful eye of society. At no time in either relationship is there a moment of pure bliss and happiness. The constant fights and feelings of inequality that each character endures characterize the relationships. The fact that Will often brings up his and Dorothea's economic incompatibility causes tension between them. Dorothea voices Eliot's dislike of marriage after experiencing the unjust actions of Casaubon: "marriage is so unlike everything else. There is something even awful in the nearness it brings…marriage stays with us like a murder" (Eliot 757). The fact that Dorothea ends up marrying Will after making these statements highlights the contradiction in Dorothea's

character and the constant battle for independence and individuality and love faced by women in Victorian society.

Whereas *Jane Eyre* had mixed reactions from critics in terms of being a feminist novel, there is also significant debate over *Middlemarch* as one too. Critic Suzanne Graver is hesitant about calling *Middlemarch* a feminist novel; however, she now sees "George Eliot as a feminist who in *Middlemarch* dramatizes and explores values inherent in two of the major feminist traditions available to Victorian women while also offering a new vision of her own" (65). Similar to Charlotte Brontë, Eliot is not trying to reinvent the women who already exist in society but rather to show there is room for a new type, one who fights for independence despite the social and legal confines. Jerome Beaty astutely points out that Eliot did not make up history and the actions of women during the time, but rather "present[ed] history indirectly, in keeping with the way her characters and most of us typically experience it" (Graver 65). A character like Dorothea was not unheard of during the time. Had she left her marriage to Casaubon or ended up single, she would have been much more of a social pariah. Rosamond and Lydgate also represent a fairly typical marriage of the time; neither spouse is overly content with the marriage but deals with the issues because divorce is not a conceivable option. While Eliot ensured that Dorothea followed the conventions of society and got married and eventually had a family, her idea of a "new woman" stems from Dorothea's outspoken nature and Dorothea's desire to do what is best for her. Critic Alison Booth raises an interesting point about how women made progress in society while still maintaining their expected images and roles. She believes that Eliot highlighted women through their "great historical influence but seldom through their own public achievements" (Booth 136). Booth points out that "Ladislaw becomes an effective political reformer because of Dorothea, who, as a wealthy widow, also directly assists Lydgate and

Farebrother" (Booth 137). While women indirectly assert their power, the parts of the book that are left out also have significant meaning. In most novels, the hero marries the heroine, leading to a predictable and conventional ending. However, the fact that Dorothea does not marry Lydgate proposes the idea that marriage cannot be fit into a mold and that it is more about the individual. While Eliot makes strides in producing more feminist literature she, like Charlotte Brontë, maintains a sense of realism in the stories and characters. According to the critic Miss Bruum, *Middlemarch* maintains a realistic aspect because "it is a representation of life, but not a symbolic representation" (Swann 282). Both female authors demonstrate "the harm of wasting female talent, punish the domineering man who wants a plaything for a wife, yet restores order in a union between a man of 'feminine' sensibility and a woman of independent means and a 'masculine' strength of character who still adapts to a subordinate role as a wife" (Booth 137). Dorothea does not reject the institution of marriage but rather uses the hardships she faces in her previous relationships and the confines of society to carve out her individuality and establish a relationship in which she tries to fulfill her desire to be happy, ultimately realizing marriage entails an inherent sacrifice between love and ambition.

Critic Zelda Austen strongly disagrees with the notion of *Middlemarch* being characterized as a feminist novel. In her article "Why Feminist Critics are Angry with George Eliot," Austen argues that Eliot's flaw that prevented the novel from promoting feminist beliefs was that "she did not permit Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* to do what George Eliot did in real life: translate, publish articles, edit a periodical, refuse to marry until she was middle-aged, live an independent existence as a spinster, and finally live openly with a man whom she could not marry" (549). It is true that Dorothea's life does not imitate Eliot's, but that was not Eliot's goal. As mentioned by critic Jerome Beaty, Eliot was interested in representing history. Eliot

acknowledges that Dorothea is not a fully independent woman, but rather one subject to the restraints of society. In the Finale, the narrator comments that "a new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life," indicating that Dorothea will not be able to escape the life that society has created for her (Austen 552). Austen offers a compelling and sensible explanation as to why Dorothea is not the outstanding character that Eliot was in real life: for characters like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, "their fortunes are what might happen to more than one girl of intellect and spirit who was lucky enough to be recognized for what she had beyond beauty of face and form," yet, "'Miss Brooke' was every girl of exceptional aspiration who must fit that aspiration to the forms that already existed, and 'this petty medium of *Middlemarch*' is one of those forms" (553-554). Despite the fact that she didn't fit the traditional mold of a modern feminist, Dorothea is still considered an exceptional and heroic character. The heroines in the other novels were much more ideal and had unrealistic fortunes that were possibilities but not standards. Eliot was not a standard woman of the times and did not want to create a character that represented fantasy rather than fact. She does not claim for her novel to be a great work of feminine characters, but rather a work of the "history of man." While Eliot did not necessarily set out to create a feminist novel, her creation sparked discussion and interest amongst feminist authors and social critics. Both Dorothea and Rosamond and strong - minded women who were not created by accident, but for the purpose of highlighting different types of women and their struggles and abilities. Although her work is not necessarily pro-feminist, she does not write an anti-feminist novel either. The female characters exhibit qualities of independence and individuality but not at the level that feminist characters might express.

While most heroines tend to stand alone, Dorothea's character is framed and supported by the other leading female characters, particularly Rosamond and Mary. Dorothea's interactions

with these women allow the reader to see a different side of Dorothea and develop a more complete understanding of her complex character. Because Rosamond and Mary are such drastically different characters, Dorothea's emotions and actions change when she is in each of their presences. Mary Garth's story is more suppressed than Rosamond's and Dorothea's. Eliot skips the early and the developmental years of Mary's life and introduces her in the novel once "her character is fully unfolded; [and] since it is also unflawed there is no need for Mary to be subject of the extended inside views as Dorothea and Rosamond are" (78). Although McSweeney considers Mary's character to be "unflawed," Mary is not a plain and lackluster character; "her shrewdness had a streak of satiric bitterness continually renewed and never carried utterly out of sight" and "honesty, truth-telling fairness was Mary's reigning virtue: she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof" (Eliot 105-106). Despite Mary's good and virtuous nature, her independence is prevented by her lower-class financial status and her family's dependence on each other for support. She feels a duty to help her family rather than abandon them to further her own interests. Although Mary is a "more interesting character because of her acuteness of perception and trenchancy of judgment," she serves to show a variation of women during the time rather than being the "new woman" Eliot is trying to create (McSweeney 78). Unlike Mary who stays true to herself and her virtues, Rosamond Vincy "was by nature an actress…she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own" (McSweeney 93). Rosamond's highly egotistical nature presents a sharp contrast between herself and Dorothea, someone who was overly concerned with ensuring the happiness of her husband. Rosamond's breaking point, when she fears that Will no longer loves her, enables the reader to see Dorothea's true nature of compassion. Dorothea spends time counseling Rosamond, reassuring her that "[Lydgate] loves

[her] best/ The worst loss would be to lose that--and you have not lost it" (Eliot 759). Between Mary's secondary role in the novel and Rosamond's self-absorbed and often irrational decisions, Dorothea appears as the most level-headed and righteous of the women. She is not overtly judgmental and plays the role of a proper wife while she is married.

Eliot's goal for the novel was to present a piece of society during the era. She clearly states her intentions in the novel's subtitle: "A Study of Provincial Life" Having all three women characters, each with her unique qualities, allows the reader to create a more complete picture of provincial life. The subtitle in *Middlemarch* is very different from the subtitle in *Jane Eyre*, which is "An Autobiography." The subtitles give strong insight into the direction of the work and the representation of women. "A Study of Provincial Life" indicates an objective representation of provincial life, one more based on facts and observations rather than opinions. "An Autobiography" is highly subjective and puts the reader at a disadvantage because the narrator has the ability to omit/include certain details, leaving the reader to accept the story based on the author's reliability. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot creates several different female characters to give a fair representation of society during the era. Brontë takes a different approach and focuses only on Jane as her representation of a woman during the era. Based on the subtitles, it is clear that the representation of women is much more narrow and one-dimensional in *Jane Eyre* than in *Middlemarch.*

The Finale of *Middlemarch* succinctly summarizes what Dorothea has experienced throughout the novel and how her life has progressed. Eliot clearly states that Dorothea is not unhappy, but rather in a relationship in which "they were bound to each other by a love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it" (Eliot 791). Echoing the selfless St. Theresa discussed in the prelude, Eliot indicates that Dorothea had more potential than she recognized.

She was a selfless character that "had no dreams of being praised above other women" and believed it was her duty to be a loyal and helpful wife (Eliot 791). She is not looking for recognition from society or from her husband of her good deeds, but rather accepts her duties as part of a compromise that Victorian women had to make. Whereas Jane ends her autobiography gloating about her happiness with Rochester, the narrator in *Middlemarch* indicates that marriage afforded Dorothea great happiness but did not fulfill her the way it did for Jane. The fact that Dorothea's voice does not appear in the finale indicates that she has disappeared and is represented symbolically by the "unvisited tombs" (Eliot 794). Dorothea always wanted to do more in her life and constantly faced obstacles that prevented her from doing so. While she repeatedly expresses her love for Will, there is the possibility that she marries again because she concedes to society. She realizes that she cannot be a truly independent woman and build cottages as she once dreamed, so marriage is the next best option. Critic Mark Schorer partially attributes character development to "the testing pressure of social circumstance on individual choice…[also] there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life" (18). Dorothea is a clear example of someone who is molded by the pressures of society and the public sphere. Her development throughout the novel reflects her perceptions on how she believes she should act versus what she truly wants. Dorothea's actions highlight the fact that her individual character is "not cut in marble" but at the same time is still subject to the perils of society (Schorer 18). As much as Dorothea tries to distance herself from the typical life of a Victorian woman, the Finale of the novel mourns Dorothea's "failure to mark out for herself a life of public achievement," something she always wanted (Graver 73). Although Dorothea may not have achieved what she wanted in the public sphere, she achieved true love and happiness in the private sphere. Eliot portrays Dorothea's marriage to Will as an impediment to Dorothea's

possible achievements and sees true love as more of a complication rather than a solution to independence and happiness. Although Rosamond and Mary enter into their relationships by their own free wills, they do not have the opportunities Dorothea does to reflect on a previous failed relationship and use the lessons learned about independence and individuality to find true love. The repressive situations and obstacles that Dorothea faces allow her to carve out her independence and use that to her advantage. The novel ends much like *Jane Eyre* in which "the family was made whole again" (Graver 73). Jane and Dorothea establish their independence and individuality and make the conscious decision to get married and to have a family, exhibiting that marriage is not repressive and demeaning if both spouses respect and honor each other as individuals.

Chapter 4

When Social Pressures Win: Marriage as an Act of Conceding

The highly controversial novel *Jude the Obscure* brings to light the ongoing discussion between the roles of sex, marriage, and independence for women during the latter part of the 19th century.[16] Although the novel focuses on Jude, Sue Bridehead, an emotionally and psychologically complex character, offers a very different perspective on marriage compared to Jane's and Dorothea's. Jane views marriage as the most rewarding part of her life and a union that affords her complete happiness; while Dorothea also realizes the emotional benefits to having a partner, she is more hesitant to accept that marriage allows her complete happiness. Sue considers marriage as the ultimately act of defeat to a woman's independence and individuality. She realizes the ability of men to make her happy and keep her entertained, but she views the legal union as a betrayal of her independence as a woman. Just as Jane and Dorothea define independence in different ways, Sue believes independence is her ability to control her own actions. She capitalizes on her ability to withhold sex and physical intimacy in order to distance men and diminish her chances of becoming a wife. While many of Hardy's contemporaries consider his work to be an "unacceptable text" full of "grossness, indecency and horror," Hardy felt a necessity to comment on the rapidly changing cultural and political matters of the time (Boumelha "Jude" 70, Watts 90). Much like George Eliot, Hardy was not afraid to push boundaries and create a world in which marriage was problematic and social conventions were contested. He also went so far as to discuss socially taboo topics such as "pig-killing, child

[16] All citations in reference to "Hardy" are from the edition: Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. London: Penguin Classics, 1998. Print.

murder and suicide, and sexual repulsion," (Boumelha "Jude" 2) knowing he would receive criticism for his inappropriate subject matters. Critic Rosemarie Morgan recognizes the larger picture of *Jude the Obscure* and Hardy's writing: "*Jude* is concerned with the harsh Victorian codes that suppressed people, especially women, who were struggling to be independent in choosing their own way of life" (Adelman 24). Morgan's overview of Hardy's intentions perfectly captures Sue's character. Sue adamantly tries to overcome the social codes of the time, which encouraged women to marry and to be dutiful and submissive wives. In spite of her seemingly endless actions to maintain her independence and to resist the institution of marriage, she eventually accepts that within the confines of social culture she cannot be the fully emotionally, psychologically, and financially independent woman she strove to be and concedes to society by getting married.

Despite the fact that an anonymous German reviewer called Sue "the first delineation in fiction of…the woman of the feminist movement," she was hardly the first of her type to be written (Boumelha "Jude" 53). Given that *Jude the Obscure* was published in 1895, several novels including *The Rebel of the Family* and *The Bostonians* were published earlier and had similar heroines to Sue, representing the "New Woman" (Boumelha "Jude" 53). Sue's complexity arises from the fact that she desperately wants to establish herself as an independent woman who can resist social pressures to marry but she is not willing to separate herself from men. She tries to balance her desires by creating platonic relationships with Jude and Phillotson. However, this creates several problems in her relationships because she prevents a true emotional and physical connection from being established. By withholding sex she presents herself as a literally untouchable human who refuses to accept any potential benefits of love or marriage, all because of her fear of losing her control over her body and ultimately her independence. She acts

in such extreme ways because she believes that in order to be an individual woman, she cannot give into the temptations of men. Yet by denying herself physical and emotional pleasure she spends her life plagued by constant indecisiveness and unhappiness. Her inability and unwillingness to enter fully into a relationship and to realize the benefits of marriage turns out to be her biggest downfall. Whereas Jane and Dorothea continuously encounter repressive situations in which they are forced to react in order to carve out their independence, Sue does not experience the same sort of patriarchal figures. While Jane and Dorothea use their situations to grow as individuals and establish a sense of self-confidence and self-awareness, Sue believes she can establish her best possible self without the help of a man. The variations of independence that Jane and Dorothea achieve allow them to appreciate marriage and realize it is not a complete defeat to their independence but one that promotes happiness. Sue's refusal to enter willingly into a relationship ultimately hinders her growth and independence, as she is never able to realize the benefits that a partner can produce. She is her own patriarchal figure as she creates boundaries and limitations for herself, but unlike the other two women, she cannot benefit by reacting against her own situation. By remarrying Phillotson she indicates that she could not beat the system; instead, she concedes to the codes of society and to the institution of marriage. Sue offers readers the view that marriage is not always a joyous union, but one done out of convenience, necessity, and social pressures.

Sue's character develops around her relationships with Jude and Phillotson. However, the fact that her relationships with both men occur simultaneously adds to the complexity of her character and her unpredictable nature. Sue's relationship with Jude is plagued from the beginning: "the first reason was that [Jude] was married, and it would be wrong. The second was that they were cousins…the third…marriage with a blood-relation would duplicate the adverse

conditions, and a tragic sadness might be intensified to a tragic horror" (Hardy 90). Given that Jude outlines all the possibilities for failure in a relationship with Sue, there is little surprise when he actively pursues a relationship with her and it unravels into an endless chase full of heartbreak and frustration. Critic Cedric Watts accurately describes Sue's relationship with Jude: "she tantalizes him by behavior which oscillates between tender encouragement and temporary withdrawal" (Watts 75). Upon first meeting, Sue is eager to help Jude and befriend him; yet, once she realizes his romantic interest in her, she continues to indulge his feelings, despite her reluctance to commit to him. Sue's actions toward Jude stem from her internal conflict of wanting to be independent but also craving the companionship and attention of a man. Sue's relationship with Phillotson is drastically different from that of hers with Jude. Phillotson represents a more standard relationship during the era. He is significantly older, well established, and wants a younger wife. He treats Sue with the utmost respect and allows her to be independent by giving her a teaching job at the school and ultimately letting her live with Jude. Yet Sue is never fully emotionally committed to the relationship and turns to Jude in hopes of having him fulfill her emotional desires of attention and friendship. Phillotson exists in the novel in part to highlight Sue's stance against a traditional relationship and her fear of commitment. The fact that she marries, divorces, then remarries Phillotson, highlights her ambivalence about marriage and the struggles she endures about balancing her independence and her expected role as a wife.

While there is almost a fifty-year time span between *Jane Eyre* and *Jude the Obscure*, Sue faces many of the same social pressures encountered by Jane and Dorothea. Critic Marlene Springer describes Sue as "a woman with a twentieth-century mind controlled by a nineteenth-century view of self" (Adelman 50). From the beginning of the novel Sue is introduced as being

"terribly clever" and "the best teacher [Phillotson] ever had!" (Hardy 107-108). Sue is well aware of her intellectual capabilities but becomes flustered and overwhelmed when trying to control her relationships. Gary Adelman views Sue as "possibly…the most successful representation in Victorian literature of the dilemmas of women trying to escape their victimization" (12). Hardy does not create a character that has the answer to how to be an independent woman, but rather one that endures the struggles of a desire to be independent and the inability to do so. Sue represents the plight that many women during the Victorian era faced and she brings to life the conversations and the attitudes that the women were too afraid to have and to express. In comparison to Jane and Dorothea, critic Rosemarie Morgan points out that "Sue is psychically impaired as a result of the repression enforced by society and the men in her life, whom she pleases by adopting male-approved female roles" (Adelman 24). While society strongly impacts Sue's conflicting feelings of needing to conform to the role of a wife and striving to be an independent woman, the men in her life do not repress her in ways that drastically impact her behavior. If anything, the men are more subject to Sue's actions, which at times put them in positions of inferiority.

Both of Sue's marriages to Phillotson are examples of her feeling the need to conform to societal expectations despite her own disagreement. Jude has the foresight to know that Sue, despite her decrees against marriage, is "as enslaved to the social code as any woman [he] know[s]" (Hardy 241). Given Sue's entrapment into social expectations, she tries to maintain her independence by withholding sex from her partners. She sees her ability to provide sex as her only tool in establishing her role as an individual. Yet this need to have sexual control is also the cause of her failed relationships. Her primary reason for not marrying Jude is "largely because she fears that marriage would destroy spontaneity and deprive her of the right to deny him sexual

intercourse when she chooses" (Watts 76). Sue is not against love and being with Jude, and indicates that she wants to be with him by her constant flirtation, but is reluctant to act on her feelings in fear of being a dependent woman. Critic Patricia Ingham argues that, "Sue is identifiable as a New Woman, by her explicit awareness of herself as a member of an oppressed sex rightly seeking autonomy" (Adelman 63). While Sue embodies the characteristics of a New Woman, she is not free from the male-dominated society and culture of the time. She caves into social pressures but then turns to men, both Phillotson and Jude, to rescue her from the situations. As much as she tries to establish herself as an individual woman who has the power to make her own decisions regarding relationships and be in control of her actions, she ultimately resigns in her fight against society and accepts the institution of marriage. She realizes that her fight for independence is not bringing her happiness or a sense of fulfillment, but rather causing her to distance herself from society.

The progressive nature of the book was not as shocking for the time period as many critics claimed it to be. The political and social atmosphere of the time was rapidly changing when *Jude the Obscure* was published in 1895, and Hardy wanted to capitalize on the opportunity to discuss the ongoing debates. Gary Adelman notes that in addition to "the marriage question, women's rights, [and] the idea that women like workingmen were victims of oppression…the feminists' mission to overthrow the double standard had become in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century almost a crusade" (6). Although Hardy had claimed that *Jude the Obscure* was not "a manifesto on 'the marriage question' (although, of course, it involves it)" critic Ramón Saldívar rightly acknowledges that, "the novel is concerned with the marriage law in more than just a casual way" (33). For Hardy marriage is not the ideal institution that Jane Eyre, the character, portrays it to be; rather it is a complicated union that involves

unequal laws, conflicting desires, and unhappiness. Sue's resistance to marriage shows her acknowledgement of the inherent problems with the institution but her eventual resignation to it also indicates her defeat by society. Although Sue and Jude recognize their love for each other, Sue does not believe that is enough for her to stay with him:

> "We still love—you as well as I—I know it, Sue! Therefore our marriage is not cancelled"
>
> "Yes; I know how you see it…but I am going to marry [Phillotson] again" (Hardy 360).

While admitting that she still loves Jude and does not love Phillotson, "I do not love him," Sue shows how marriage for her is about practicality rather than love (Hardy 360). In comparison to Jane and Dorothea who gleefully express their love while married, Sue sees falling in love as a chore and an action that can be learned rather than occur naturally "I shall try to learn to love him by obeying him" (Hardy 360). In addition to representing marriage as convenient rather than emotional, Hardy also incorporates the novel legal action of divorce as a way of showing the progression in marriage equality laws and that couples were not always as blissful as they appeared. During this era divorce was becoming increasingly acceptable. Although it was still rare for a couple to get divorced, Hardy uses the divorce of Phillotson and Sue to highlight that marriage was not necessarily a binding agreement and marriages were not perfect.[17]

While many of Hardy's ideas stem from the political and the social environments of the time, his personal life also influenced *Jude the Obscure* and the specific characters. However, when asked by critics about his personal connection to the novel, Hardy instructed his wife to reply, "to your enquiry if *Jude the Obscure* is autobiographical, I have to answer that there is not

[17] The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 was the foundation for the new divorce laws. The Act "passed into law that year created a court with the power to dissolve marriages under certain carefully defined circumstance" (Savage 103). While this Act was a step forward for the independence of women, it still restricted divorce only on the grounds of adultery. While divorce was still unpopular, Hardy used the law to highlight the progressive movements in conjunction with women's rights.

a scrap of personal detail in it, having the least to do with his own life of all his books" (Watts 3). Despite his efforts to distance himself from the book, critics have found several details about Hardy's life that appear in some form in *Jude the Obscure*. Similar to Jude, who had dreams of attending Christminster, Hardy wanted to attend Oxford but could not to due to the social exclusivity of the University (Adelman 4). Hardy also took the time to learn Greek, focusing on the Greek New Testament, just as Jude had done while trying to attend Christminster (Watts 6). Gary Adelman argues that, "Hardy's attack on society's sexual codes and customs…particularly his attempts to idealize in Jude and Sue a love that is passionate without being sexual derive…from his own peculiar personal history" (7). Hardy had an Oedipal relationship with his mother. They were very close and he "developed an extreme emotional dependency" on her (Adelman 7). In addition to his questionable maternal relationship, Hardy is also described as having "developed sexually very late, if he developed at all, and that according to a family tradition he was sexually impotent" (Adelman 8). Hardy met many women but did not develop lasting relationships with them and did not engage in sexual relationships. The clearest inspiration for Jude's and Sue's relationship stems from Hardy's marriage to Emma Gifford. Over the course of their marriage, Hardy and Gifford grew to hate each other and led separate lives as much as possible. He felt restricted by Emma and resented her for "protest[ing] against his self-containment, his artistic temperament, his flirtations with society women" (Adelman 8). Although Emma served as inspiration for many of Hardy's later works, Adelman suggests that his despair over her could be "possibly rooted in [his] sexual impotence" (9). The influence of Hardy's marriage on Jude and Sue's relationship becomes clear once Hardy's past is exposed. Because Hardy possibly had a sexual issue, he creates Sue to be fearful of sex and view it as a destructive act. For Hardy sex was destructive because it caused a strain on his relationship;

whereas for Sue sex means the disappearance of her independence. Although Brontë and Eliot were female authors creating female characters, Hardy's ability to represent personal details in the character of Sue makes her just as relatable to readers as Jane and Dorothea.

Sue's relationship with Jude is highly complex due to Sue's desire for Jude as a person and companion but her rejection of him sexually. Upon first meeting, Sue is extremely friendly toward Jude and tells him "I am so glad we have met at last" (Hardy 103). Although Sue goes off and lives with Phillotson, she quickly realizes her mistake and turns to Jude for guidance and help. Sue becomes more aware of Jude's passionate feelings for her and grapples with the boundaries of their relationship, especially when discussing Phillotson: "I know you'll be angry if I tell you everything, and that's why I don't want to" (Hardy 134). However, Jude convinces Sue that he has no right to judge her and she should feel comfortable talking to him. Realizing that Jude is upset about her upcoming marriage to Phillotson, Sue tries to establish a boundary between them by telling him "we better not meet again; and we'll only correspond at long intervals, on purely business matters" but is unable to keep her herself separated from him (Hardy 134). Despite her relationship with Phillotson and the emotional torture she causes Jude, Sue begs Jude to "please still keep me as your friend and associate" (Hardy 159). Later on when Sue writes to Jude she signs her letter "your affectionate cousin," which brings their relationship back to family rather than lovers. Sue clearly struggles with the possibility of losing Jude due to her refusal to establish a relationship with him and uses their blood connection to ensure his presence in her life. When Sue asks Jude to give her away at her wedding to Phillotson, Sue reduces their relationship to a familial one instead of an emotional one. However, the act of Jude's walking Sue down the aisle reinforces for Jude the idea of marriage and the impossibility that he will marry Sue. This scene stems from Hardy's personal life as he wished to marry one of

his cousins but never did. Throughout her marriage with Phillotson, Sue continues to lament to Jude about her unhappiness and that it is "torture to live with [Phillotson] as a husband," putting Jude in the awkward position between consoling her and ignoring his feelings (Hardy 212). Sue acknowledges the complications of their relationship but insists that they are above the average members of society whose "views of the relations of man and woman are limited" (Hardy 167). Critic A. Alvarez believes that the reason Jude doesn't walk away from Sue and continues to endure her torturous games is that "this combination of nonphysical purity with exaggeratedly sharp intellect and sensitivity… preserves her for Jude as an object of ideal yearning…a yearning for his own lost innocence" (Adelman 45). Despite her overly flirtatious manner, Sue represents a physically pure woman. Jude relishes in her duality as a temptress and an intellect. She clearly knows what she wants and is not afraid to fight for it, something that Jude feels he has lost. Sue's continuous flirtation with Jude is her way of expressing her desire to be with him, but her fear of commitment due to the sexual responsibilities that she would be expected to uphold if married. Although Sue's psychological independence stems from her ability to act independently of men, her evolving relationship with Jude suggests that she is not as emotionally and psychologically independent as she thinks, but in fact she needs men to fulfill her emotions.

Jude's and Sue's relationship breaks the boundaries of friends and cousins when they "kissed each other" (Hardy 216). Although Jude is initially more forward about his romantic interest in Sue, her determination to repress her feelings is what causes Jude so much pain and angst. Before Jude even meets Sue, she has established a control over his emotions that he cannot escape. Jude approaches Sue with "the bashfulness of a lover" and describes himself as being "passionately enamored" by her (Hardy 100, 114). As their relationship evolves, Sue becomes aware of Jude's growing love for her and tells him "you mustn't love me. You are to like me—

that's all!" (Hardy 155) fearing that she will start to feel the same way despite her relationship with Phillotson. Sue later changes her mind and tells Jude "if you want to love me, Jude, you may," leaving the opportunity open for a relationship between them in the future (Hardy 155). At one point when Sue and Jude "clasped the other's hand again" Sue quickly moved hers away, demonstrating her internal conflict between maintaining her independence by withholding physical intimacy and following her heart (Hardy 202). Sue uses intimacy sparingly and as something that must be earned telling Jude "and you shall kiss me just once there—not very long" (Hardy 245). By instructing Jude when and where he can kiss her, she is negating his sexuality and role as a man. She is defying gender roles by taking charge and deciding when she can be kissed. Sue is well aware of the emotional torment she is causing Jude, especially once there are some aspects of sex associated with the relationship, but does not stop herself because she enjoys the level of control over his emotions and his mind. It is only once Sue's position in Jude's life is threatened by another woman, Arabella, does Sue change her ways and consider conforming to her expected role in society. She is willing to forgo her independent nature as she begs Jude to stay with her and agrees to get married in order to keep him for herself. Without a man present, Sue's independence does not exist. Her way of maintaining her individual identity is through the control she has over men by withholding sex; if she does not have a partner, her means of independence are irrelevant.

Jude's relationship with Arabella exists in order to highlight Sue's true emotions toward Jude and her inability to remain in control of him. Arabella is "vulgar, conniving, selfish, yet she also has earthy, humorous common sense," a more relatable and natural depiction of a woman than Sue (Adelman 39). Cedric Watts highlights that Arabella and Sue are contrasting figures yet "singular individuals who seek their own paths in life" (84). Yet in both cases, their

independence revolves around their relationships with Jude. When Arabella reappears in Jude's life, Sue suddenly becomes emotionally vulnerable and in a position of inferiority to Jude. Sue feels slighted by the fact that Jude brought her to the same hotel room in which he stayed with Arabella, but Jude reminds Sue that her feelings are unjustified because "by your own wish, dear Sue, we are only to be friends, not lovers! It is so very inconsistent of you to…" (Hardy 243). Jude also reinforces the fact that "[Arabella] was, after all, my legal wife," putting Sue in a secondary position to Arabella and also to Jude's feelings. Whereas Sue had full control over Jude prior to Arabella's arrival, now Jude is more confident standing up to Sue and telling her "don't attempt to detain me" when she tells him he cannot go see Arabella (Hardy 264). Jude capitalizes on the fact that he and Arabella were legally married and that is why he continues to see her and talk to her. When Sue tries to convince Jude to stay home, she argues that "[Arabella] is not your wife any more than I am" only to be proven wrong when Jude responds, "well, she is, rather more than you, come to that" (Hardy 265). Sue is in a position in which she has no control over the situation and is at the mercy of Jude. Jude tells her "I've wanted you to be [my wife], and I've waited with patience of Job, and I don't see that I've got anything by my self-denial" (Hardy 265). Jude's gracious treatment of Arabella causes Sue to feel "a jealous burst of disappointment" as she realizes she does not hold Jude's complete attention anymore and cannot control his actions the same way she once did (Hardy 265). For someone as independently minded as Sue, Hardy creates a situation in which her actions are now dependent on Jude. Jude has control of the situation and if she wants to be equal to Arabella, she must give into Jude's desire to marry legally, which would entail her being less sexually repressive and in her mind, less independent.

The fact that Sue and Arabella both return to their first husbands has significant meaning

in terms of the legal and social implications of marriage. Arabella views the whole situation of "marrying an old husband again" in humorous terms but makes an interesting observation about the role of men and women in terms of remarrying: "it isn't rum for a woman to want her old husband back, for respectability, though for a man to want his old wife back—well, perhaps it is funny, rather!" (Hardy 377). Despite the fact that Arabella moves to Australia and remarries, she and Jude are never legally divorced. She uses this to her advantage given that "she always did like him" and convinces him, after a long night of drinking, that he promised to marry her again (Hardy 377). Arabella's father deceptively questions Jude's honor about not remembering to marry his daughter, forcing Jude into a position to marry her in order to defend his honor as a man. By remarrying Arabella, Jude has "saved [her] honour" as an improper woman (Hardy 384). Just as Jude's remarriage to Arabella saves Arabella's honor, Phillotson's remarriage to Sue allows her to begin her "purification" (Hardy 363). Although Sue does not love Phillotson the way Arabella loves Jude, as she "shrank away" when he went to kiss her, she is eager to begin the process of reforming herself into a proper woman, with marriage being the first step "I can't wait long!" (Hardy 363). Sue initially marries Phillotson because she needs to save her reputation after she was caught sneaking out at night with Jude. This time, Jude is also connected to her need for reform. Their children, who were born out of wedlock, "were sin-begotten. They were sacrificed to teach [her] how to live!" (Hardy 363). Although Sue follows the steps of purification by getting married, she never wants this for herself. Her decision to remarry highlights her chilling masochism. She does it because society expects her to and she has given up her fight for independence.

Jude and Arabella's relationship brings the focus of the story back to the institution of marriage and the ramifications of a legal contract. Critic Patricia Ingham presents an engaging

theory on the "contrast between legalistic and natural marriage" in *Jude the Obscure* (26). The two legal marriages, Arabella and Jude and then Sue and Phillotson are drastically different in nature. While they are both equal in terms of the law, Jude and Arabella vow, "to believe, feel, and desire," whereas Sue sees her marriage as "part of the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in" (Ingham 26-27). To Sue, a legal marriage implies a committed sexual duty for the wife, so when she divorces Phillotson she claims the right to "a totally non-sexual bond and to a non-martial sexual relationship" (Ingham 27). Sue does not want to give up her independence by entering into a legal marriage contract and feeling pressure to conform to the societal expectations of a wife's sexual role. Although there is debate over Sue's sexual interest in Jude, Ingham highlights that the 1912 edition of the story offers the reader more insight into Sue's emotions: she had Jude kiss "long and close" and "she admits that she 'didn't dislike' him to kiss her'" (Ingham 27). Hardy might have created Sue to be more sexual in the later edition of the novel because society had become more open to women's sexual desires and needs. For Sue, the natural part of the relationship is stymied by the legal contract associated with marriage. Her fear of losing control prevents her from expressing her true emotions. Interestingly, while Sue does everything to avoid the ramifications of a marriage contract, Jude takes full advantage of them. Jude threatens Sue that he will use his conjugal visits with Arabella, that the law entitles him to, if she does not become more sexually available. Despite her avoidance of the law, Sue becomes subject to the law and her independence is under the control of society and Jude. Whereas she cannot avoid the ramifications of the legal system, Sue makes the choice to stay with Jude. She willingly puts herself in a position to fulfill his needs and comply with his demands. As previously mentioned, the legality of marriage also saves Arabella's and Jane's reputations as women. Being legally married allows them to be seen

as more respectable women, even if they are remarrying their first husbands. If anything, it shows a commitment on their part to reform and underlines the importance of the role of a wife.

In comparison to her interactions with Jude, Sue has a drastically different, but equally complicated relationship with Phillotson. Phillotson is similar to Rochester and Casaubon given that he is an older and established figure. However, the major difference between Phillotson and Casaubon is that Phillotson supports Sue's independence and allows her to follow her heart and to go live with Jude, whereas Casaubon does everything in his power to restrict Dorothea's independence and future life with Will. Similarly to Rochester, Phillotson treats Sue as an equal, allowing her to make her own choices, just as Rochester treats Jane. Sue originally marries Phillotson because that was what was expected of her during the times. She was a young and attractive woman and unmarried women were considered spinsters or pariahs. Similarly to Dorothea, Sue hopes to use her marriage in order to advance her position in society as a teacher: "Mr. Phillotson will use his influence to get me in a big school" (Hardy 133). There is no mention of love when discussing her upcoming marriage, but rather a sense of duty as she says, "I have promised—that I will marry him," leaving out any sense of emotion (Hardy 134). Once married, Sue feels trapped and dislikes that her identity is now directly connected to her husband's, as she comments, "I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counter-part of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies" (Hardy 205). In order to maintain her identity and individuality while married, Sue rejects any form of a physical relationship with Phillotson, in fear that she will become subject to her husband's expectations and lose the one thing she can control. Despite Sue's neglectful treatment of Phillotson, he admits to having "a wife I love" and even bears some of the responsibility for her hatred of him:

"she is not so much to blame as I. She was a pupil-teach under me…and I took advantage of her inexperience…and got her to agree to a long engagement before she well knew her own mind" (Hardy 229). Phillotson has such high regard and admiration for Sue that he is not bothered by her dislike of him and poor treatment but rather does what he can to ensure her happiness. His unending love for her ultimately saves her when she asks him "you will take me back?" (Hardy 363). As someone who once cringed at being called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, she now defends him as "a kind husband to me" and accepts being called by his name (Hardy 388). She admits to not being happy in the marriage as she "wrestled and struggled, and fasted, and prayed" but realizes he is the best option for her role as a woman (Hardy 388). She never loves Phillotson the way she loves Jude, as in her final interaction with Jude she begs him to "kiss me, O kiss me lots of times," something she never expresses to Phillotson (Hardy 389).

Elizabeth Knauer, author of the article "Unconscious Sue? Selfishness and Manipulation in *Jude the Obscure*," believes that, "Sue is a casualty of her own making, a manipulative woman who fails because of an unchecked desire to please herself" (41). Sue's selfishness, which manifests itself in her endless manipulation of Jude and Phillotson, ultimately causes Sue's demise as an independent woman because she focuses so much on her own desires and fails to realize her need for Jude and Phillotson. Both men offer her different things that she ultimately needs; Jude provides her love and physical intimacy and Phillotson offers her the legal option of becoming a wife, a necessity in society. By the time she remarries Phillotson she realizes she must give in to the role of a wife because she has no other choice. She views the tragic death of her children with Jude as a sign from G-d and society to reform her ways and to adhere to Victorian social codes: "their death was the first stage in [Sue's] purification" (Hardy 363). As part of Sue's "purification" she concedes to the role of her wife and announces that she

has “nearly brought [her] body into complete subjection,” which is the ultimate signal of her defeat (Hardy 388). As hard as Sue tries to resist complying with social codes, she encounters different scenarios that force her to realize complete independence from men may not be best way to be happy and self-satisfied. Sue fails to appreciate Phillotson’s continuous acceptance of her and that life with him is not as restrictive as she initially believed. When asked by his friends what he will do about his failing relationship with Sue, he responds by saying he will let Sue go and live with Jude because “something within [him] tells [him]… [he is] doing wrong in refusing her” (Hardy 230). Phillotson’s liberal view toward marriage is reflective of Hardy’s dislike of the institution. The conversation between Phillotson and Gillingham, during which Phillotson states his theory about Sue and Jude, supports Hardy’s views of “domestic disintegration,” a concept that was still novel and unpopular during the era (Boumelha, “Women” 138). In addition, Phillotson recognizes Sue’s ability to be an independent woman and comments that “a woman of full age, it was a question for her own conscience—not for me. I was not her gaoler” (Hardy 246). Phillotson could also be echoing Hardy’s personal feelings of resentment that he was in a marriage for so many years and could not sexually provide for his wife. Cedric Watts supports the argument that Sue’s “marriage to Phillotson flounders because of her sexual denial” (75). Despite Sue’s ardent efforts to maintain her independence by withholding sex, she is preventing herself from having fully developed and functional relationships and in turn relies on Jude for emotional support and companionship.

Sue’s lack of sexuality and her determination to repress her desires has been a widely discussed and analyzed topic amongst Hardy critics. Kathleen Blake presents an interesting and well-supported theory that “Sue is a passionate woman who restrains her sexuality to achieve personal emancipation. Sue practices sexual repression to avoid the prison of matrimony and to

widen to opportunities; her ambition is to live with men while escaping them" (Adelman 50). As seen with the examples of Phillotson and Jude, Sue goes out of her way to avoid having sex or any physical intimacy with her partners. While with Phillotson, she "hides in a cupboard and later leaps from a window" in order to escape having sexual relations with him (Watts 75). Sue fears that once she gives up her control over sex, she will no longer have a say in the relationship. She does not want to become a puppet that is merely used for sex, but wants to be viewed as an equal individual by her partner. She is also extremely fearful of having children and being forced to assume the responsibilities of a mother. Blake believes that "Sue is a pioneer, trying to save herself from the demeaning prostitution of marriage;" however, Adelman offers another perspective in which critics see Sue as "not exceptional and her collapse is not a social indictment. She is a nonconformist because she finds sex repugnant. Equality between the sexes does not interest her" (51). This is a compelling alternate theory but does not fit as well with Hardy's background and his personal interest in the New Woman and women's rights. If gender equality were of no interest to her, she would have been more promiscuous in her sexual relations and not as controlling. Sue makes a conscious decision to withhold sex as a means of control over her independence and her relationship with men. She strives to make a point that women should not necessarily enter into a relationship without establishing some version of control over their partner. If she weren't concerned about gender equality, she would have had no reason to make a statement about sex and its implications. When she tells Jude he can kiss her, she is engaging in physical activity but still maintains control over the situation. Although Hardy takes Sue's sexual repression to an extreme, he is making a point that she is a strong woman, who despite natural sexual desires can control herself not to be subject to men. Overtly sexual women were also considered socially unacceptable in society and were seen as sinners.

These women were considered "fallen women whose lives demonstrate the evil outcome of passion" (Gorsky 58). Just as Bertha was created to represent Jane's repressed sexual desires, Sue has the same passions but knows the importance of withholding them in order to be viewed as a proper woman. While attempting to break free from society's view of women, she is also conforming to cultural views of sexuality. Critic Terry Eagleton acknowledges that Sue's actions are not purely heroic but also self-destructive: "her freedom, as a result, is in part negative and destructive—a self-possessive individualism which sees all permanent commitment as imprisoning, a fear of being possessed which involves a fear of giving" (Adelman 50). Sue does not let herself benefit from the positives of having a relationship and is so set her in ways of independence that she suffers extreme jealousy when Arabella appears all because she refused to commit to Jude. In a letter to Edmund Gosse, Hardy discusses Sue's decision to be so sexually repressive: "one of her reasons for rearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses" (Boumelha "Jude" 62). Sue is not against sex, but is fearful of losing her identity and power as an individual once in a situation in which society expects her to perform a certain way.

Critic Ramón Saldívar argues that in order to understand Hardy's intentions with regard to the topic of marriage, it is critical to comprehend first the structure and form of the book. Hardy says that the plot is "'geometrically constructed' around the marital realignments of the four principal characters. They repeatedly change their relationships through their alternately prospective and retrospective visions of one another and of the options society and nature allow them" (Saldívar 33). Hardy's goal was to highlight the issues inherent in society and relationships rather than write a manifesto insisting on a new social order. Saldívar points out

that the characters are "poised between a desire for natural freedom and the need for a stabilizing social order" (33). According to Hardy the institution of marriage is highly flawed, but the people do not know how to adjust their desires while still following social codes. The geometric construction of the plot emphasizes the issues that marriage presents and the difficulty in having both legal and natural happiness. In Jude and Sue's relationship, Jude is the prototype of an "order loving man" whereas Sue "destroys the basis of their 'natural' relationship," which highlights the inherent difficulties in maintaining personal happiness and social order (Saldívar 42). Saldívar believes that "Hardy's novel persists in showing society's laws as open to subversion by the actions of the individuals who make up society…the necessary failure of the law to enforce its monolithic interpretations of the infinite variety of human behavior can lead to the subversion of the entire relational system" (44). Jude, Sue, Arabella, and Phillotson are not radical characters but exaggerations of the general sentiment of society during the time. They each struggle to find a balance in their relationships and cannot seem to find the equilibrium between legalistic and natural marriage. Critic Lance St. John Butler believes that the form of the novel exposes the characters' failures in developing throughout their relationships (Adelman 21). The four main characters' inability to progress reemphasizes Hardy's message that the institution of marriage is flawed and does not necessarily lead to growth or happiness. Whereas *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch* each ends with the creation of families and the return of Victorian values, Gary Adelman points out that "each of [Jude the Obscure's] six parts is an hourglass constantly turning upside down with hope and emptying into despair" (71). Hardy does not bring back the family in the end of the novel and the reader is left with a sense of hopelessness about the future. While he exaggerates the emotions and actions of the characters, he highlights the need for a reevaluation of the institution of marriage and the meaning behind the laws.

As with *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch*, *Jude the Obscure* received significant attention and commentary from the growing feminist movement of the time. The general sentiment amongst critics is that "tragedy derives from Sue's failure to live as a sexual being" (Adelman 24). While there has been much discussion over Sue's interest in sex, Hardy dispels those rumors saying, "there is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue's nature…her sexual instincts are healthy" (Adelman 24). Rosemarie Morgan attributes Sue's sexual repression to cultural forces: "she is thwarted not only by patriarchal mores but also by her father and by Jude" (Adelman 25). Sue's father rejected his wife and Sue at an early age so Sue suffers from the fear of sexual rejection that her mother faced. Sue wants to let her inner desires be released, but they are buried under so many layers of emotions and fears, and due to these dormant emotions her sexual deprivation is "a denial of full participation in sexual union, a denial of caring and sharing, and, ultimately a denial of sexual equality" (Adelman 25). Morgan argues that what appears as Sue's choice to withhold her sexual desires is merely a case of her inability to acknowledge these desires due to external forces such as society and the men in her life. However, Sue engages in moments of physical intimacy with Jude throughout the novel, indicating that she is making a conscious decision to control her desires rather than her inability to acknowledge them. Another contributing factor to Sue's figure as a feminist woman is her role as a mother. Sue considers motherhood an "enslavement of forms" and ends up having her own children in addition to Arabella's son (Hardy 400). Unlike most women who lived to have children, Sue questions her own capabilities as a mother: "I question my right to do it sometimes!" (Hardy 312). The only positive Sue acknowledges from motherhood results from the death of her children: "they were sacrificed to teach me how to live!" (Hardy 363). She even goes as far as to say, "my children—are dead—and it is right that they should be! I am glad—almost" (363). Her harsh and sadistic

words indicate that she is completely unfit for motherhood, which ultimately questions her ability to be a true Victorian woman. The fact that Arabella never plays a maternal role and is able to preserve her sexual freedom hints at the fact that Arabella is the more independent of the two women.

While Sue does become a mother, she and Jude do not have a traditional family unit. They are not married and to have children out of wedlock was highly controversial during the time. They also experience the tragic death of their children, which sparks discussions of Sue's inability to be an adequate mother, a necessary component to being a proper Victorian woman. While Morgan blames external forces for Sue's inability to discover her sexuality, Critic A.O.J Cockshut presents an opposing theory that focuses on Sue's inability as a woman to combat the obstacles of society; he "considers *Jude the Obscure* a refutation of contemporary feminist thought, and Sue Bridehead an illustration of Hardy's pessimism about women's attempts to defy the inexorable, 'natural' limitations of their sex" (Boumelha "Women" 70). Cockshut attributes Sue's mental breakdowns to the intensity of social pressure on married women, especially their need to have children. Mary Jacobus correctly depicts Sue's character: "the central aspect of Sue's character is not that in her the female is atrophied…but that in her the individual is highly developed" (Watts 101). While it is true that Sue does have a strong sense of individuality, in the end, she is not strong enough to fight society alone and must concede to marriage. Hardy felt strongly about women's rights but does not present the unrealistic view that emotional and psychological independence are necessarily achievable.

Penny Boumelha suggests that Sue is not part of the feminist movement but belongs "to the literary tradition of the New Woman" ("Women" 135). She defines the New Woman as someone who "despises the world, and men, and herself, and is superbly unhappy. In spite of her

purity she is not very wholesome; she generally has a mission to solve the problems of existence…" (Boumelha "Women" 137). Despite the exaggerated definition, Boumelha agrees that Sue does not have strong sense of purpose, but has tones of the other qualities. Sue's dilemma with her independence and sexuality is not a unique issue, but rather "a refusal of the sexual dimension of relationships can seem the only rational response to a dilemma…female-male relationships are invariably interpreted as sexual and…sexuality is controlled and channeled into a single legalised relationship" (Boumelha "Women" 143). In relation to the definition of a New Woman, Sue does not despise the world, but instead hates the conflicting nature of society and independence. Cedric Watts offers an additional definition of the New Woman as someone who is portrayed as "intelligent, lively, articulately forthright, capable of pursuing her own career, sexually daring, and resistant to the conventional claims of marriage" (43). This seems more in line with Sue Bridehead, given that she is highly intelligent, has a career as a teacher, and resists marital claims. Both definitions characterize the woman as being sexually promiscuous, which leads the reader to believe that Sue was not naturally a prude and shy woman sexually as Jude calls her "a flirt," but restrained herself due to social and patriarchal forces (Hardy 204). Elizabeth Knauer presents an opposing argument to both Watts and Boumelha, arguing that, "Sue Bridehead has little in common with the New Woman. She seeks identity and freedom, but not…for the purpose of bettering mankind…Her various opinions concerning marriage, employment, and education, issues tied closely to the New Woman movement, are never set forth to establish equality for females. Rather, they are implemented only in times of dire need in order to get Sue out of uncomfortable situations" (42-43). After examining Sue's relationships with Jude and Phillotson, Knauer's argument does not seem outrageous, but in fact offers a compelling alternative theory. Sue continually puts herself first

and unlike Jane and Dorothea who represent a larger population of Victorian women, Sue is solely concerned with herself. Hardy did not create Sue to be a pioneer as a New Woman but used her character to highlight his "sympathy for the independently minded young woman who seems to elude stereotyping and, on the other hand, endorsement of some traditional stereotypes" (Watts 46). This internal conflict for Hardy characterizes Sue's actions and ultimately direction of the novel.

Hardy was not a revolutionary author who intended for *Jude the Obscure* to be an outspoken manifesto on the rights of women. Rather, he wanted to bring attention to the changes occurring in society, particularly with the New Woman movement. Women were becoming increasingly focused on education, employment, and the possibility that they did not need to marry in order to be happy. However, as seen by the character of Jo in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), "Jo tries the independent life…yet love motivates her as much as her desire for independence" (Gorsky 66). Similarly to Sue who attempts a life of independence, she falls subject to external forces that ultimately dictate her future. Although Knauer disagrees that Sue is a "New Woman" she acknowledges that, "*Jude* is New Woman literature because it deals with issues like marriage, independence, morality, and motherhood" (43). These issues were the cornerstones of women's identity during the era, and Hardy uses the figure of Sue to show that not all women readily or willingly conformed to society's pressure for them to fit a specific mold. Sue is definitely unique in her obstinate refusal to engage in sexual relations with Jude and Phillotson, but Hardy uses her extremeness as a way of highlighting the few options women have to maintain independence while still being in a relationship. Hardy does not completely abandon the traditional views of women, as Sue does get married and have children, but in non-conventional situations. The fact that she divorces and has a child out of wedlock is Hardy's

attempt to stay true to Victorian ideals of family and motherhood but push the boundaries in a more open-minded view.

Whereas Jane's and Dorothea's views about marriage evolve as a result of the obstacles they face from society, Sue's opinions do not drastically shift. She subscribes to the feminist philosophy that marriage is the ultimate defeat to a woman's independence and individuality. She does everything in her power to prevent herself from becoming a victim of the institution but cannot distance herself from her desire for attention and companionship. In many ways she is her own worst enemy and ultimately responsible for her own unhappiness. Jane and Dorothea face countless barriers to their independence but are still able to make the most of their situations and find happiness through marriage. Sue is so trapped in her mindset that marriage can afford her no benefits that she torments herself emotionally and psychologically in order to prove a false point. Had she been more open to exploring Victorian social codes, she most likely would be much happier. She views her second marriage to Phillotson as a concession of her ideals and as a form of defeat to society. The independence that she fought so hard to maintain prevents her from exploring herself as an individual and acknowledging what she truly needs to make her happy.

Chapter 5

Jane, Dorothea, and Sue: Their Significance Beyond the Novels

According to critic Philip Davis "Victorian literature…is the most accessible of all, in terms of its commitment to a recognizably ordinary, mundane life. As such, it offers the portrait of such lives to real-life equivalents and identifiers as a form of emotional education" (14). This observation about Victorian literature allows modern-day readers to view the characters of Jane, Dorothea, and Sue in a different way. They are more than fictional characters whose life stories fill the pages of a book; rather they are gateways into the society and culture of the time period and offer insight into the emotional needs of the people. What makes these three characters so fascinating is how they represent and view one of the most important aspects in a woman's life: marriage. Adhering to Davis' outlook of the role of Victorian literature, the women's different feelings toward marriage are more than personal feelings but representative of the sentiments of a broader audience of women. During the forty-eight year time span between the publications of *Jane Eyre* and *Jude the Obscure,* women's thoughts regarding marriage, independence, education, legal rights, and employment evolved. They did not completely abandon their roles as wives and mothers, but many started to consider themselves as people independent from their husbands. As demonstrated by the actions and the views of Jane, Dorothea, and Sue, this mentality took a long time to develop and did not come to fruition until well after the Victorian Era when all women over the age of twenty-one were granted the right to vote in 1928.[18]

[18] The Representation of the People Act of 1928. It was an expansion of the same act of 1918, which gave women the right to vote for the first time. The Act of 1928 widened the parameters of who could vote, giving women who paid the same taxes as men the right.

From Jane to Dorothea to Sue, their views on marriage as an institution and a means of defeating their independence and individuality shift in accordance to the political and culture time periods. Existing during the 1840's,[19] Jane embraces marriage and views it as the greatest decision she has made in terms of allowing herself happiness and love. Although her character does bring to life the prevalent issues of the time of patriarchal control and lack of female independence and free-will, Jane offers readers the ability to both relate to her struggles and to learn from her determination to fight for her independence. She does not stray far from the norms of society as she gets married and has a family, but she pushes the boundaries and allows readers to open their minds to unspoken issues of the time. Dorothea's character is more complicated because Eliot wrote *Middlemarch* during the late 1860's but the story takes place in the early 1830's.[20] However, Dorothea's two marriages represent the evolving perception of marriage and women's quest for independence. Dorothea marries Casaubon in hopes of attaining a better future for herself and fulfilling her role as a proper Victorian woman. She is a submissive, humble, and subservient wife who is eager to please her husband and meet his demands. However, as time elapses she realizes she is not benefitting from the marriage in the ways she had expected, and the more independent Dorothea, representative of the later time period, begins to emerge. She starts to question his motives and ultimately declares her independence by disregarding the codicil in his will. Her marriage to Will does not revolve around her being a passive wife but rather around their love for each other. Despite their romantic relationship, which makes Dorothea sincerely happy since she did not have that with Casaubon, during the Finale the narrator indicates that Dorothea is not as fulfilled as she could have been if she had

[19] In 1848 the first college for women, Queen's College, was founded.
[20] In 1857 the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act passed, 1861 a law was passed that allowed women who were assaulted by their husbands to no longer live with him and obtain the property laws that applied to single women, 1866 Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon published *Reason for the Enfranchisement of Women*.

remained single and obeyed the codicil. She wants to do more with her life but feels restricted by her marriage. While there is no indication from Jane that marriage is a form of restraint of her desires, Dorothea presents a more progressive mindset while still following traditional customs.

Through the character of Sue, who represents the shifting social attitudes of the 1890's,[21] readers are exposed to a drastically different attitude toward independence and marriage. Sue expresses her view of marriage as the root of all evil in terms of women's independence and individuality. She believes that once a woman enters a relationship she is forced to give up her body to sex whenever the husband desires, thus losing her independence and sense of control. In order to prevent this, Sue fights to withhold her sexuality from men in order to remain in control. However, as a result she becomes entangled in a complicated relationship with Jude during which she has children out of wedlock. Sue interprets the death of her children as a sign from G-d and society that she must reform her ways and become a proper Victorian woman, which starts with marriage. Sue, for the first time out of all three women, voices her unhappiness about being married, something that was felt by many women but not expressed. It is evident that *Jude the Obscure* takes place during the latest years of the three novels because Sue's mentality and actions would almost never have occurred prior to the 1890's. While she is ahead of her time period, she gives readers a glimpse of the changing mentality of women during the era. Although the women's movement and their fight for independence kept evolving and gaining momentum, the fact that all three characters end up married, despite their different views on marriage, underlines the importance and the stability of the institution of marriage throughout the Victorian era.

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[21] 1870, women could sue separate from their husbands, the first Married Women's Property Act was passed (1870), Married Women's Property Act of 1882, Contagious divorce was now more possible (1884), Disease Act was repealed (1886)

While Jane's, Dorothea's and Sue's individual fights for independence and their views on marriage are interesting, why are people today still talking about *Jane Eyre, Middlemarch*, and *Jude the Obscure*? These novels did not reform laws, enact social change, or create gender equality. They provided an exaggerated representation of daily life during the Victorian era. Historical documents reveal the laws and the political systems of the past, but literature captures what cannot be communicated through a newspaper article or legal brief. Susan Gorsky offers an answer to the question of "why do these novels matter?":

"most literature, reflecting and commenting on issues of immediate concern, appeals just in its own time; it is relevant today only as a record of the past. But the best literature, outlasting that first life, has meaning for all time. Great literature lives as long as people can read…whether truthful or skewed…it taps into human experience. Such literature transforms life into art, and through that creative act it teaches us, arouses us, pleases us, nourishes us" (177).

Her answer imparts a sense of honesty and reality. Clearly not all literature is discussed forever, but what separates the ones that are and are not is the author's ability to connect with readers and reach their emotions. Jane's struggles as a child at Gateshead instantly create in most readers a sense of compassion and heartbreak for this young child. In contrast, one cannot help but smile at the end when she gushes over Rochester and her love for him. The same emotional response holds true for *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure*. As a reader, one wants to tell Dorothea not to go through with her plans to marry Casaubon because of the desire to protect her from disappointment. Next, when she finds out about the codicil in the will and sits there silently, there is a feeling of anxiety for her as to what she will do next. Sue does not offer the reader the

same opportunities to feel sympathy and care for her, but rather she engages the reader's emotions by being a frustrating and almost annoying character. Her continuous flirtation with Jude followed by her refusal to act on her emotions makes the reader irritated with her and her treatment of Jude. There are numerous scenes in each story that emotionally connect the reader with the characters. The emotions do not have to be positive, as negative ones are just as, or even more, powerful. The reader's ability to relate to the story and connect with it is why so many people are still talking about these novels today. The power of a novel to keep people entertained, happy, and emotionally stimulated is its ultimate test of success, not what it accomplishes for the greater good of society.

Creating a novel of this caliber that "taps into human experience" is not an easy feat (Showalter 3). Even if slightly exaggerated, the characters must be relatable to the readers. The nineteenth century, "The Age of the Female Novelist" was responsible for the creation of some of the most famous, talented, and respected female writers such as George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Jane Austen (Showalter 3). According to Jane Austen, women had a unique skill that made them so successful as novelists "the feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel" (Armstrong 7). The ability of women to understand other women and relationships and then translate that into novels was something men could not do as well. In a field that was dominated predominantly by men, literature saw a change in its author demographics during the nineteenth century. The women's literary movement, which began at the end of the eighteenth century, did not have a single theme or goal; rather women authors "have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors impinging on each individual" (Showalter 11). Because female authors did not have recognizable patterns or

styles that connected them as a group, these general themes allow them to remain connected by their abilities to relate to the issues they all experienced as part of a "minority group" (Showalter 11). In her effort to describe the progression of female literature, Showalter breaks down the authors into three groups: the feminine, the feminist, and the female.

The feminine, which is most relevant to this thesis, focuses on Brontë and Eliot as the leaders of the period of writing. Women who started their careers around this time period "were seeking heroines—both professional role-models and fictional ideals—who could combine strength and intelligence with feminine tenderness, tact, and domestic expertise…they perceived themselves and their fictional heroines as innovators who would provide role-models for future generations" (Showalter 100). Brontë and Eliot's contemporaries regarded them with both praise and scorn. As they paved the way for other female authors, many also resented their popularity and success. Brontë and Eliot showed other women and authors how to "depict a complete female identity" by using symbolism, narration techniques, and allusions to represent an aspect of the female complex (Showalter 112). The decline of the feminine period began with Eliot's death in 1880; however, society had changed and authors were ready to move on from writing about "escape and revenge" (Showalter 181). The rise of the feminist period, which presented "new ideas about self-preservation that went beyond fantasies of domestic murder to political organization" describes perfectly Sue's character in *Jude the Obscure* (Showalter 181). Although Hardy was a male, he was clearly influenced by the growing and powerful women's literary movement that was setting the tone for novels.

The Victorian era was a "transition between a world that seemed natural and one that had begun to go beyond such traditional bearings" (Davis 21). This transition is represented in Jane's, Dorothea's, and Sue's evolving views on marriage, the changing qualities that make a

novel important and successful, and the rise of powerful female authors. The push toward new social and legal codes over the course of the era was what the public saw as going beyond traditional boundaries. However, what also represented this drive for a change from the past were the private struggles for independence that Jane, Dorothea, and Sue all engaged in. In reference to Jane, Elaine Showalter believes "action is a step toward independence; even if it begins as escape, it is ultimately directed toward a new goal" (124). This can be applied to all three women. It is their actions and situations that make them different, but they are all fighting for goals; whether or not they achieve their goals is a different story. Jane's goal is to be economically and psychologically independent. She suffers several obstacles throughout her life, but ultimately each one makes her a stronger, more confident person who, by the time she hears Rochester calling her name, realizes that he is the best thing for her since she cannot have love alone. Her happiness in the end indicates she has successfully accomplished her goal. Dorothea's goal was to be able to act on her own accord. As with Jane, she encounters setbacks along the way, such as the codicil in Casaubon's will, but through these obstacles she is able to evaluate what she wants and weighs the consequences of marrying Will versus keeping her money. By marrying Will she chooses love over money, but is never fully satisfied with her life. The reader is led to believe she was capable of doing more than she did. She partially fulfills her goal, as she decides to marry Casaubon but is still not completely independent to act on her own.

Finally, Sue's goal is to control her own actions, particularly in terms of sex. She creates her own obstacles, which do not allow her to evaluate her true emotional and psychological needs because she is too preoccupied with withholding herself from sex in order to remain an independent woman. She fails to achieve her goal because she gives into her sexual desires that she can no longer control and has children out of wedlock. The death of her children causes her

to reevaluate her life and she realizes she needs a husband to be accepted by society. As stated before, there was little worse than being a poor women who was outcast by society. The struggles these women undergo influence their abilities to achieve their goals and impact their views of marriage. However, in spite of their different paths and end views, each character ends up married. While laws were becoming more progressive for women, being a single woman was still not accepted in society. As stated by Mill in the beginning of the thesis "marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house" (80). While marriage may have been a form of legal bondage when Mill wrote his polemic in 1869, marriage was more than a legal union. It allowed women happiness, love, companionship, and even a means of forming their identity. Jane is the most content with her marriage because she is able to establish her independence and individuality within the confines of society more fully than the other women, allowing herself to be confident and to appreciate marriage as a means of bliss rather than imprisonment. These three characters prove that there is no right or wrong way to view marriage, but despite the legal aspects, it can in fact, afford great happiness and foster independence and individuality.

The End.

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