

TOXIC MASCULINITY AND QUEERNESS IN *JANE EYRE* AND *EMMA*

by

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1. TOXIC MASCULINITY AND THE DESTRUCTION OF MARRIAGE

Gender studies define the term masculinity as “the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man” (Pilcher and Whelchan 82). This idea is represented in all forms of media, but the portrayal in literature has been essential prior to even the invention of the modern novel. The ancient poetic epics of *The Odyssey* and *Epic of Gilgamesh* examine the cultural ideal of manliness. Literature is performative of the society from which it is derived, and in the gender discussion, a culture’s literature is used as a tool to either reinforce the ideals, or to criticize them.

Modern gender studies examine the cultural paradigms responsible for defining masculinity and femininity. Much of these ideals are rooted within a series of generic characteristics, such as masculinity being associated with “the public”—what is seen by the world and its inhabitants—and femininity being associated with “the private”—what is hidden from public consumption (Pilcher and Whelchan 124). Men “have acted within the public realm and have moved freely between it and the private realm” while, in stark contrast, women “have been mostly restricted to the private realm and to the authority of the men within it” (124). Essentially, gender discussion examines the difference of power between men and women, and how each sex responds to their assigned expectation of power. As Herbert Sussman explains, at his birth, society “presents each man with a script that he must perform consistently and in all circumstances” (Sussman *Masculine Identities* 8). A script that includes, but is not limited to, the idea that men must be, metaphorically, but also at times literally, “the hunters leaving the home to kill animals

for food” (Sussman *Masculine Identities* 4). Survival once demanded that men be “physically strong and aggressive for hunting, defending the tribe, and expanding territory through war” (*Masculine Identities* 4). While such survivalist methods are no longer necessary, the mindset that inspired the ideals are not. They have, in fact, continued to be employed, sought after, and encouraged. Deviation from these norms results in social castration. As long as men uphold the standards set before them, as long as they stick to their script of masculinity, they are manly.

Masculine men are, simply by their virtue of being a man, put into a place of systemic power over women. Women are expected to bow down to their male counterparts and accept that, in this system, they are powerless. There are other considerations associated between men and women that follow this mode of thinking: men are expected to be aggressors, active pursuers of their desires, while the expectation for women is to be docile and reactive rather than proactive. The dichotomy in the expectations between men and women’s behavior has been prevalent, especially in media, for so long because it was thought of as “natural, either prescribed by God or a consequence of biology” (Connell 14). Society continually perpetrates the ideology, so much that it becomes the default, and any other paradigm is automatically Othered. The Victorians, especially, were concerned with prospective gender roles because there was fear that “if gender categories were not maintained as binary oppositions, catastrophic chaos would surely ensue” (Gill 109). According to Sussman, the Victorians defined manliness as “a hard-won achievement, a continuous process of maintaining a perilous psychic balance characterized by regulation of this potentially destructive male energy”

(Sussman *Victorian Masculinities* 25). Or, regulation of how closely they followed their assigned script. Assimilation was expected.

Though critics ascertain that modern gender studies did not exist until the late 1960s, having been “triggered by second wave feminism,” the idea of gender discourse is not a new phenomenon (Connell ix). Female writers, such as Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen, challenged the gender standards prior even to the earliest of the suffrage movements through their literature. Most of the conflicts their protagonists encounter are gender motivated: Jane Eyre and Emma Woodhouse struggle with finding their place in a society in which they do not fit the model woman they are expected to follow. Brontë and Austen tackle the same issues that modern feminist scholars are concerned with, such as the mode of patriarchy where “men have control over women’s bodies” (Pilcher and Whelchan 93). This idea relates to the motif of toxic masculinity that appears within the texts of *Jane Eyre* and *Emma*.

Though toxic masculinity is a relatively new term, and despite its exact origins being uncertain, the ideals that make up its foundation are not. Though gender is difficult to describe, as it lies on a broad spectrum that cannot be pigeonholed into simplistic either/or dichotomies, R. W. Connell defines the difference between men and women as “not fixed in advance of social interaction, but *constructed* in interaction” (Connell *Masculinities* 34, my emphasis). When we examine toxic masculinity, we are examining the hyper-masculine way some males treat one another, but especially how they treat women. Toxically masculine men will exaggerate their animal-aggressor status, conceding to the systematic roots when their expectation was to be a hunter, a predator. The behavior is rooted within their social script. Someone cannot be toxically masculine

on his own; instead, Connell continues, “such behavior is only relevant as it pertains to how said person treats those around them, often using, as some believe, ‘toxic’ practices, such as physical violence. . . to reinforce men’s dominance over women” (Connell and Messerschmidt 19). Toxic masculinity has also been blamed as the culprit for the idea that women are prizes to be won by men, as claimed by Arthur Chu, who states that culture taught men that “Women, like money and status, are just part of the reward” (qtd in Banet-Weiser and Miltner 172). Others claim that toxic masculinity is about men becoming aggressively territorial, much like an animal, over the “incursion of women and people of color into what were previously almost exclusively white, male spaces” (Weiser and Miltner 1).

Toxic masculinity appears repeatedly within *Jane Eyre* and *Emma* as an obstacle that Jane and Emma struggle to overcome. Brontë’s Rochester and Austen’s Knightley use their masculinity to impose their culturally sanctioned power over the female protagonists in an attempt to utterly control the women and get whatever it is they desire. Because there is an inherent and implicit power imbalance between the male characters and the female protagonists, and because the male characters use their power against Jane and Emma at every turn, it calls into the question the romantic narratives of the novels. There is too much of a power imbalance, cruelly abused, between the couples for there to be a genuine, romantic narrative. *Jane Eyre* and *Emma* are not romances because there is nothing romantic about the way Rochester and Knightley treat Jane and Emma. Jane and Emma are expected to behave in certain manners simply because they are women, and Rochester and Knightley are *allowed* to behave in certain manners simply because they are men. That is the position society ordained them. For either Jane or Emma to step out

their submissive circle is an act of social suicide, effectively Othering themselves. Jane and Emma struggle because they fight against the toxic masculinities they encounter; yet, their efforts prove futile, as they are the ones that have to sacrifice their independence to appease not only the men of the novel, but society as well. Jane Eyre and Emma Woodhouse are victims of their gender, condemned to a life of suffering at the hands of men who do not change and trapped in marriages that are inherently loveless because they are rooted in within a complex that cannot sustain love: toxic masculinity.

Jane Eyre

The gender ideology at play in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* are central to understanding the power imbalances that occur within Jane's varying relationships, with both men and women. Despite being written over a century before modern gender studies gained traction, *Jane Eyre* examines issues similar to the foundation of what modern gender studies examine: the way systemic masculinity and femininity influences the behavior of men and women. As Linda Gill states, *Jane Eyre* is "considered a very deliberate and self-conscious resistance to the categories of gender as they were defined, produced by and producing of patriarchal ideology" (Gill 118). *Jane Eyre's* harsh critique of such behaviors was not unnoticed, nor was it accepted with much critical grace. Contemporary critics bashed the novel, claiming it devalued a "well-ordered world" violating "its boundaries" and defying "its principles—and the most alarming revolution of modern times has followed" (Gill 118).

The antagonists Jane faces throughout the novel are mostly men. Yet, it is not their sex that makes them Jane's foe, but rather their masculinity. That is the tool used to oppress Jane. There are no virtuous male figures in the novel, and in its entirety, the

novel serves as a judgement towards an oppressive, patriarchal society. Jane repeatedly finds herself in a position of suffering and inferiority as she “comes under the power of people and institutions that want to break her spirit” (Leggatt and Parkes 169).

The novel can be dissected into four major sections with the setting changing as Jane changes in both age and experience. In each of these sections—the Reed house, Lowood, Thornfield Hall, and the St. John house— Jane is dominated by an overtly aggressive male figure that wishes to subdue or control her in some manner. John Reed, Brocklehurst, Rochester and St. John all are endowed with toxic masculinity, and they use it to abuse Jane. They each are obstacles Jane will attempt overcome in order to embrace her independence and fight against the patriarchy.

For example, Jane Eyre’s two male love interests, Edward Rochester and St. John Rivers, are so grossly affected by their own toxic masculinities that any possible romantic connotations of their relationships with Jane are obliterated. Their relationships are riddled with abusive behaviors, such as lying, coercion, and manipulation. Their inability to accept Jane’s independence, boundaries, and her refusals against their romantic advances, are a result of the toxic masculinity motif that appears throughout the novel, and such behavior calls to question the romantic nature of their relationships. To Rochester and St. John, Jane is, as Chu suggests, something to be conquered or owned in order to build their own status, not loved, and certainly not to be treated as an equal. Both Rochester and St. John embody what Herbert Sussman calls the “economic man.” Long past the days of nomadic hunter/gatherer society, the economic man lives in the world where “manliness. . . was judged by the acquisition of money. . . the business man [was] bound by compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory marriage” (Sussman *Masculine*

Identities 82). Neither Rochester nor St. John can attain total manliness until they marry. In this new world of stability, remaining single puts them in an economic deficit. Though they have wealth, they are poor in image. Sussman states that to the economic man, “even sexual desire is monetized: sex and money are fused” (*Masculine Identities* 92). The older Rochester and St. John grow, the more dire the situation becomes. It is imperative that they marry and marry soon. Their reputation is at risk, for “the unmarried man came to be considered unmanly” (Sussman *Masculine Identities* 94). Their careers are also at risk, because as Sussman states, “the creative prowess of man depends upon the appropriate regulation of their sexuality” (Sussman *Victorian Masculinities* 4). Because they are unmarried, they lack that systematic regulation, which in turn affects not only their perceived masculinity, but their inherent masculinity. Ironically, being celibate makes them more aggressive and domineering because they are seen as less of a man. Women, on the other hand, are “imagined in essentialist terms. Such qualities as passivity, emotional instability, mothering, and subordination were seen as innate. . . for women. . . marriage enables the essential nature of the woman to emerge and to be fulfilled in the bearing of children and in service to husband and family” (Sussman *Victorian Masculinities* 45). Yet, just as Rochester and St. John are not traditionally masculine, because they are not yet married, Jane is not traditionally feminine by the Victorian standards.

Jane is objectified by their ideals of what makes the perfect wife, the antithesis of everything Jane is; a bildungsroman, *Jane Eyre* is about Jane needing to discover her independence and rights as a human, in spite of the obstacles placed before her by the opposing, oppressive male characters. As she grows older, Jane repeatedly has

“confrontation[s] with masculine sexuality” (Gilbert and Gubar 465). Ironically, Jane catches the eyes of suitors because she is traditionally unfeminine, following in the mold of other Victorian heroines. As Beth Newman states, “Very often the woman who commands the attention, the love of the hero. . . is the one who refrains from being a cynosure” (Beth Newman 3). Newman’s theory also ties in with Sussman’s economic man, because as Newman claims, it was “the middle class [which] came to assert its cultural dominance. . . to calibrate all femininity on its terms” (Beth Newman 3). While Brocklehurst humiliates Jane for failing to adhere to his script of femininity, Rochester is drawn to Jane *because* she deviates from it. In his mind, Jane is one more attempt at female domination. Jane is his second chance; where he failed with Bertha Mason, Jane presents a new opportunity of success. Because of the toxic masculinities that infect each male character, *Jane Eyre* portrays heterosexual marriage as a negative reality of a world conquered by men; a world in which women have to suffer because there is no escape. Just as Rochester is unable to escape his societal script of masculinity, Jane cannot escape the script of femininity. As Sussman states, “normative. . . masculinity enforces compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory marriage” (*Victorian Masculinities* 5).

The story of *Jane Eyre* is told retrospectively. The Jane telling the story is not the same as the Jane being told of. This is an important part of the narrative tool because the older, narrator Jane admits, upon reflection, that Rochester was never truly romantically interested in her. Narrator Jane states, “I should have known that [Rochester] had nor could have sympathy with anything in me” (104). Similarly, St. John is not interested in Jane for Jane, but instead simply wants to marry her to bolster his own status. Not only does he need a wife to become a complete man, he believes he will be taken more

seriously as a religious leader once married. Brontë parallels marriage between male and female characters with Hell. When Jane refuses, understanding St. John's actual motivations, he attempts to coerce her in an angry tirade by threatening her with damnation "It is not me you deny, but God. Through my means, He opens to you a noble career; as my wife only can you enter upon it" (365). This line of dialogue encapsulates St. John's malevolency because it connects him with Brocklehurst, who also threatens a younger Jane Eyre with Hell, saying, "Do you know where the wicked go after death? . . . Should you like to fall into that pit and to be there burning forever?" (31). St. John is a man that is unable to get what he wants, a turn of events to which he is unaccustomed. In response, he throws a temper tantrum, instead of respecting Jane's wishes.

While St. John's toxic masculinity is more insidious and does not appear immediately, Rochester does not hide his. During his first interaction with Jane, he withholds his identity in an attempt to discover Jane's thoughts of him. Patricia Ingram writes "[Rochester] is without a doubt represented as the English ideal of a gentleman . . . he is rich, travelled, cultivated, universally respected" (150). Yet, Ingram notes that Rochester "dealt with his ward, Adele. . . by secluding her in the country with a governess. . . He controls Jane's activities. . . to the extent he can summon her at will to entertain him" (150). Rochester's ugly physiognomy foreshadows his inner darkness, and it is a feature of the novel that cannot be overlooked. Physiognomical science claimed to be able to "read a character through detailed examination of facial features. . . varieties of individual features were listed and assigned an intellectual or emotional meaning" (Ingram 157). Charlotte Brontë was obsessed with the study. She includes it as a feature in all of her novels as a way to distinguish between her heroes and villains. By

describing Rochester as ugly, Brontë alludes to his ugly interior. He is despicable with ulterior motives. It is not a coincidence that upon Jane first observing Rochester's physiognomy, Rochester acts out of his toxic masculinity. He lies to Jane about his identity for his own amusement, to see what she will do.

Rochester abuses his power of employer towards Jane to get her to speak of her past, causing such awkwardness that even Mrs. Fairfax notices and attempts to step in, as Jane explains "[Mrs. Fairfax]. . . knew what ground we were upon" (112). From this scene forward, every interaction between Rochester and Jane is a dance of power. Jane lets it be known that she is not intimidated by Rochester, telling him outright "I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me merely because you are older than I," and Rochester, in return, makes it known that he won't "allow" for Jane's independence and her attempts at defending herself (Brontë 123). Rochester despises Jane's independence because it diminishes his own masculinity. In Rochester's mind, Jane, who by virtue of being a young woman is systemically in a place of inferiority beneath him, attempting to speak to him on the same level is abhorrent. Jane is not just defying social scripts; she is deliberately defying him. As a result, he feels the need to put her in her place.

Ironically, Rochester's toxic masculinity is the catalyst of his supposed inner turmoil. He seeks retribution against those that belittle his manliness. Rochester refuses to accept that Adele as his natural daughter because the mother, Celine Varens rejected Rochester's marriage proposal and broke his heart. Rochester's response to that pain is to neglect Adele. Jane's response, instead, is to "lean towards [Adele] as a friend," which infuriates Rochester who desires Jane as a wife, but wants nothing to do with the child (Brontë 133). Rochester never recovers from Celine's rejection. He copes by sending

Adele away to various boarding schools. Therefore, he can pretend she does not exist and that the rejection never happened. This is a pattern of behavior Rochester continually repeats, as he does exactly that with Bertha. By locking her in the attic, Rochester can pretend she does not exist, he is not actually married to her, and then he does not have to suffer the blow to his ego that would come from having an ill, ethnic wife.

After having been betrayed by both Celine and Bertha, Rochester attempts to stop Jane from doing the same. He coerces Jane into parading her talents in front of his friends: playing music and showing off her art, ignoring Jane's reluctance to do so. Rochester is studying Jane, to see if she will fit his image of the ideal wife that Bertha failed. To him, Jane is not a human being, but an accessory to wear on his arm. Jane is only palatable to Rochester as long as she upholds his idea of that ideal wife. Jane "is more acceptable to him when she holds her tongue" and follows his orders, no matter how asinine, such as remaining absolutely silent as she tends to Mr. Mason's wounds (Freeman 694). Rochester is not in love with Jane; rather, he comes to the conclusion that "no one can come up to the criteria necessary for his sexual partner except an Englishwoman like Jane Eyre" (Ingram 150). Jane is simply the closest he is able to get to what he wants, and even then, he tries to shape Jane into something she is not, by breaking her down, bit by bit, until her independence and grit melts away completely. She leaves Thornfield in more despair than when she first arrived.

Despite the fact that Rochester continually manipulates Jane in order to achieve his goal of marriage, she is aware of his predatory nature. When Bertha's brother appears, Jane compares him and Rochester, noting that Rochester is like "a fierce falcon" or a "keen-eyed dog" while Mr. Mason, in contrast, is "a sleek gander. . . a meek sheep"

(Brontë 172). Jane, in her own analogies, specifically marks Rochester as a predator. It is not just a metaphor because throughout the novel, he is hunting and manipulating Jane. One of the more egregious presentations of Rochester's toxic masculinity is when he dresses as the feeble fortune teller, a female, to lure Jane into a false sense of security. *Jane Eyre* is a novel where the female-to-female relationships are more profound than any of the heterosocial ones, and Rochester's crossdressing is a means of exploiting Jane's comfort and security. Once again, he lies about his identity to play a mind game with Jane, to reinforce the notion that he has power over her. Rochester's attempts to wheedle out of Jane her opinions of him show that he is less concerned with what Jane actually thinks and is instead more concerned with his own image. He constantly tries to steer the conversation towards himself, and when that fails, he attempts to sow seeds of doubt into Jane's wishes for her future, claiming that a "small voice which interprets the dictates of conscience" will follow Jane for the rest of life if she remains unmarried. This notion will be repeated again later when Jane refuses St. John, who tells her she will be damned to hell if she does not accept. In this dialogue, though, the reader learns that Jane is disinterested in marriage, specifically calling the idea of it a "catastrophe" and that she "[Doesn't] care about it: it is nothing to me," Jane says (179). Jane's disinterest in marriage is vital to her character as it shows a "refusal to submit to her social destiny" (Gilbert and Gubar 465). Celibacy is how she maintains her independence.

Marriage with Rochester is equated with prison imagery. While Jane helps treat Mr. Mason's wounds, Rochester demands that they do not speak to one another, at the risk of Mr. Mason's life. Rochester then locks them inside the room and Jane "experienced a strange feeling as the key grated in the lock, and the sound of his

retreating footsteps ceased to be heard” (Brontë 189). Rochester is not a husband nor a suitor, but instead a prison ward. Jane has “doubts about Rochester the husband” (Gilbert and Gubar 476). Their relationship is not romantic because Jane is frightened of Rochester. Jane is terrified to see him again after they have argued; she says, “every nerve I have is unstrung: for a moment I am beyond my own mastery. . . I did not think I should tremble in this way when I saw him-or lose my voice or the power of motion” (219). With Rochester, Jane fears losing her autonomy, the facet of her identity that she fights to retain from all her antagonists, all her life, including John Reed and Brocklehurst from her childhood. If she marries, Jane would lose that independence, and she “[Jane] senses even the equality of love between two true minds leads to the inequalities and minor despotisms of marriage” (Gilbert and Gubar 476). However, she fears Rochester, enough that she fights to portray a certain image around him, observing of her own behavior, “Being scarcely cognisant of my movements, and solicitous only to appear calm; and, above all, to control the working muscles of my face-which I feel rebel insolently against my will. . . I have a veil—it is down” (220). Around Rochester, Jane makes an effort to hide her true feelings about all situations.

Rochester continues with his abusive tirades by continuing to play mind games with Jane: “Rochester continually bullies Jane and plays with her emotions in order to make her conform to his desires and will” (Leggatt and Parkes 174). Rochester fakes his wedding planning with Blanche and tells Jane she must leave Thornfield because of the impending marriage. He plays on Jane’s insecurities, knowing that she has nowhere else to go, no status to her name. Yet it is only when Rochester realizes that he will lose the game he crafted—Jane will leave Thornfield without fight, but with all her dignity

intact— does he tell the truth about Bertha. Jane calls him out on his abuse, declaring, “Do you think I am automaton? A machine without feelings? . . . Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?” (227). Jane’s dialogue here ties in with a similar address given at the beginning of the novel: “Women are supposed to be calm generally; but women feel just as men feel. . . it is narrow minded of their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making pudding and knitting stockings” (112). Jane simply cannot be happy under the bounds of femininity which society and Rochester want to place on her. Similarly, Adele also acknowledges Rochester’s abusive nature. After learning of their marriage plans, Rochester admits he plans to isolate Jane “Mademoiselle shall live with me there, and only me” (239). Adele responds, “You will starve [Jane]. . . She is far better as she is. If I were mademoiselle, I would never consent to go with you” (239). Adele’s comments in this scene are the only time anyone beside Jane calls out Rochester’s behavior, and the exchange questions the motives behind Rochester’s proposal.

Rochester is a compulsive liar who manipulates Jane throughout the entirety of their relationship. Upon their first meeting, Jane is unaware that she is in the presence of, as Freeman states, a “master prevaricator. The first words they say to each other. . . consist of a series of questions and answers controlled by Rochester. . . Jane’s straightforward speech and Rochester’s misleading questions. . . foreshadow the deceptions to come” (Freeman 693). He lies to Jane about every facet of his identity, and more than once forges another identity in an attempt to uncover Jane’s feelings toward him. Had his lies not been uncovered, he would have continued to keep Bertha in the attic, as well as manipulate Jane into marrying him. Jane’s independence is not something

he admires, but rather, desires to undermine, because Jane will not sacrifice dignity and independence for comfort and she makes it known to him on multiple occasions. The breaking point for Jane, though, is not after the discovery of Bertha, but the conversation she was with Rochester *about* Bertha. Rochester threatens that if Jane won't "hear reason" then he will "try violence" (271) which many critics have interpreted as a threat of rape. Rochester will never be content unless he can have sex with Jane—Jane's refusal, like Celine's refusal, is a threat to Rochester's masculinity. Jane is just one more woman that Rochester failed to win and he cannot stand it. Upon hearing Jane's refusal, Rochester's motives become apparent; he is only concerned with control. Ingram observes, "[Rochester] will not hear what he does not wish to know until [Jane's] resistance eventually enrages him. . . Rochester. . . is at the mercy of his emotions since, blinded by his sense of power, he cannot accept that, in his position as a rich man and someone of rank, he cannot control events" (Ingram 151). Rochester's relationship with toxic masculinity is that "men are superior *because* they are powerful" (Ingram 151). Yet, Jane denies him, and Rochester cannot stand that. Rochester needs to dominate Jane the same way he dominated Bertha, and if Jane fails to meet Rochester's expectations as Bertha did, she will suffer Bertha's fate—to be locked away and forgotten. It is that realization that finally convinces Jane to leave.

The toxic masculinity motif continues, not being limited to just Rochester. Jane suffers similar abuses under St. John, who also only wants to marry Jane for the image she would provide; there is no modicum of love. St. John, unable to accept her refusal of marriage, also attempts to manipulate Jane into marrying him by bringing God into the equation, asking Jane, "Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? Will He

accept a mutilated sacrifice?" (362). This act is similar to when Rochester faked his marriage to Blanche, a ploy to play with Jane's feelings and needle her insecurities. The difference though is that Jane is wiser now and understands what is trying to be done to her, and she refuses to play into his hand the way she played into Rochester's, especially when St. John threatens Jane with the wrath of God. She responds to his threats with the declaration: "I [Jane] will give my heart to God. . . *You* do not want it" (362). Jane acknowledges St. John's intentions better than she does Rochester's, reflecting that, "[St. John] prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon, and that is all" (361). She manages to escape "from [St. John's] ferrers [sic] more easily than she had escaped from either Brocklehurst or Rochester. Figuratively speaking, this is a measure of how far she has traveled in her pilgrimage towards maturity" (Gilbert and Gubar 484). Jane almost succeeds in upholding her independence. Yet, her return to Rochester unveils the inescapability of toxic masculinity in such a patriarchal society. Their positions are now inverted, with Jane being the rich, able party and Rochester being economically disenfranchised. Yet, Jane still locks herself down with a man that abused her and others, forgoes her dream of opening her own school to aid wayward souls like hers, and abandons Adele to a boarding school despite Jane's earlier claims that she would never do such a thing.

The novel's resolution has caused discourse, especially with feminist critics, who argue there is a "lack of freedom in Jane's marriage to Rochester, the way it threatens to remove her from the working world and turn her into a stereotypical Victorian angel in the house" (Leggatt and Parkes 169). Despite no longer being just boring, plain Jane, she still met the same fate: a married mother, dreams of employment and independence

forgone to assimilate with her proper place. The early defiance that withstood her cruel aunt and cousins, Brocklehurst, Rochester and St. John's earlier abuses, has vanished. Indeed, after their marriage, Rochester "becomes almost Neanderthal in his demand to possess her" (Gill 124). Can one say that Jane escaped Rochester's cruelty when, ultimately, Rochester gets exactly what he wants: Jane as his wife and mother of his child? Jane's dreams abandoned to the wayside, and little Adele left forgotten, out of Rochester's sight and mind? It is not as simple as Jane coming back to Rochester in a mode of superiority. Jane may have the physical strength and the money, but she still had to abandon everything else, and it is Rochester who reaps all the gains. Jane's freedom is illusionary because she still ends up exactly where Rochester wants her—his wife, mother of his male heir—and Jane still has to sacrifice her independence for him in the end. Gill states that even "fantasized female power is continually tethered and troubled by the realist narrative of social determination and patriarchal imbrication" (Gill 119). They live off Jane's inheritance, so even her art becomes useless; as Gill argues, "masculine desire. . . can be satisfied through a woman's marriage because transforming her into an object is equivalent to 'her annihilation as a subject'. . . She will certainly not be allowed to enter the public realm as an artist" (Gill 115).

The ghost of Bertha Mason lingers even after her suicide, for she was more than just Rochester's first wife, but a wraith personifying Jane's inner turmoil. Just as Thornfield Hall acts through the passive fallacy to unveil Jane's loneliness and unease, Bertha is Jane's own inner madwoman, led down a similar path of self-destruction because of her own marriage to Rochester. Bertha Mason is Jane's dark foil—her wilderness personified. Bertha only ever acts out when Jane is in a state of emotional

turmoil. When Jane starts having doubts about her impending marriage, it is Bertha who rips up the veil. Jane refuses to marry Rochester because of his marriage to Bertha. They only get married when wild, untamed Bertha has died, and perhaps too, Jane's inner madwoman.

Emma

Emma, like *Jane Eyre*, displays the conflict of a female character caught in a battle between her own desires and what society demands of her. Like Brontë, Jane Austen's works also focus on gendered expectations, with protagonists that rebel against the feminist tradition. Her novels examine the topic of "women's limited horizons and opportunities for action" (Karen Newman 705). *Emma* is a body of observations and critiques on the subject of marriage, with specific regard to the issue of who is allowed to marry whom and under what circumstance. In the case of *Emma*, it is the tale of a young, happily bachelorette's quest to see all her friends off into suitable marriages, until she herself stands at the altar, caught in the same trap as all her friends and neighbors.

Marriage is more central to the plot than in *Jane Eyre*, and as such, the plot of *Emma* relies more heavily on gender tradition. However, it examines many of the same themes as *Jane Eyre*, and the commentary on men, women, and society ultimately ends the same: marriage is an inescapable reality built on the foundation of toxic masculinity that is permeated into the fibers of their everyday lives. It is so prevalent that it puts a strain on the female-to-female relationships of the novel, as they each are trapped in a social battle royale about who gets to marry whom. Ruth Perry states, "the terms of the women's competition in the novel serves as a reminder of the patriarchal society within which women live" (Perry 193).

Like *Jane Eyre*, the male characters of *Emma* are obsessed with their perceived masculinity. The citizens of Highbury feel the need to posture their sense of intellectual, financial, and physical superiority over one another. This affects not just Mr. Knightley. *Emma* differs from *Jane Eyre* in that the female characters also perform toxic masculinity. It is a trait not limited to men, as it is not a biological function, but the performance of a social script. Sussman explains the idea of masculinity as “primarily social constructs rather than as expressions of biological qualities of male, then the script of masculinity can just as easily be performed by females” (Sussman *Masculine Identities* 154). Masculinity is composed of a set of behaviors, not determined solely by one’s sex. By performing these behaviors, Emma is able to be considered toxically masculine. Likewise, Megan Malone notes that Jane Austen “not only depicts female power . . . but also envisions a masculine ideal” (429). Emma has toxic masculinity because she is “willful, manipulative. . . a misarranger of other people’s lives” (Goodheart 589). Emma also “consistently questions the traditional parameters of desirable femininity” (Malone 435). Similarly, the other female characters are afflicted too, as they are all fighting with one another for specific hands of marriage. The relationship between Emma and Knightley is one of a constant power struggle: Mr. Knightley attempts to feminize Emma into something more suited to his idea of the ideal wife, but this battle of wills leads Emma to cling more fiercely to her masculine characteristics: her arrogance, stubbornness, presumption, and need to control those around her. Their relationship, and eventual marriage, are reliant on Emma relinquishing the independent and masculine aspects of her identity. For Emma, marriage means “submitting to. . . a more mature man” (Butler 386). She cannot overcome her character flaws via her own volition; the

novel's conclusion suggests she can only erase them through marriage as she "retreat[s] from 'playing man and marries Mr. Knightley'" (Korba 142).

Emma is a masculine female character. If Knightley is Sussman's "economic man", then Emma is an economic woman (*Masculine Identities* 82). Her circumstances lend her more independence than the average woman and that enables her toxic masculinity. Unlike the other female characters of the novel, such as Miss Taylor and Harriet, Emma does not need to get married to prosper in society. Being wealthy and educated grants her that coveted high social standing. There is also Emma's father, a hypochondriac pushover, with a body "emasculated by years of leisure" fails to uphold the masculine ideal of homeowner (Malone 435). Such a career, then, falls to Emma, who "rules the home and wields as much social influence as any man" (Malone 436). Emma behaves similar to a man because she has never had to worry about appearing more feminine to attract a husband and gain wealth, unlike those with less wealth, like Harriet, Miss Taylor, and Jane Fairfax. In her relationships with women, she takes on the masculine role of leader; the others look to her for leadership and guidance, giving her opinion more value than it is worth. Emma is arrogant and takes little consideration of the feelings of her friends and neighbors because she has never been in their position. Yet, her independence is framed as negative "the real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much of her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (Austen 5). It is because Emma is wealthy and independent that she is spoiled and arrogant. Had she been born poor, with marriage the only opportunity for advancement, she would be as docile as Harriet Smith. Instead, Emma Woodhouse

“reigns supreme and she consciously uses these moments of performance to make public her social influence” (Malone 439).

Emma also exhibits toxic masculinity in that she believes she knows what is best for people. She meddles into their romantic lives, despite being told more than once to stop by a myriad of characters. She tells her father that she “must” make romantic matches “for other people” (10). It is more than a compulsion. Emma is “a creature of fancy with an irrepressible need to rule her little world” (Goodheart 596). Emma’s sense of superiority masculinizes her and thus her innate independence is riddled with negative connotations. She is not simply unfeminine by society’s definition. She possesses an inherent, godlike desire to control those around her, believing too much in her skill as a matchmaker and having no care for the feelings of those involved. It never even occurs to her that she may be misreading the situation, as she does when she misreads Mr. Elton’s affection for her instead as affections for Harriet.

Emma’s matchmaking is committed less out of the goodness of her heart, and more so done because, as a wealthy woman with no need to work, she has nothing else to occupy her time. She does not need to work and her only hobby is gossiping with the neighbors. Like Rochester, who toys with Jane Eyre, Emma toys with those in her community. She uses her position of power as a tool for her own amusement. Harriet follows Emma around blindly, and Emma takes advantage of that trust, first by convincing Harriet to reject Robert Martin’s initial proposal, and again by encouraging Harriet to seek out Mr. Elton instead as her suitor. Emma’s privileged life has spoiled her and the result is that she has failed to “internalise any authority which can direct and control her” (Tanner 186). She thinks she can get away with doing whatever she wants

because she always has; Mr. Woodhouse is an incorrigible pushover and none of Emma's friends see her behavior as problematic. The issue though is not Emma's toxic masculinity, but the route she must take to overcome it. In order for Emma to improve as a person, for her toxic masculinity to go away, she needs to relinquish her independence and give in to being controlled because "Her will—her sense of the legitimacy of her own power—matches [Knightley's] at almost every turn" (Kobra 144).

This controlling force comes in the form of Mr. Knightley. Mr. Knightley is the only character to call out Emma's behavior as toxic, as Austen writes: "Mr. Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (Austen 9). Yet, Mr. Knightley's behavior is also a result of having a position of power and his own toxic masculinity. His commentary of Emma's behavior is not done out of a desire to see Emma better herself, and to spare the feelings of those involved in Emma's meddling, but because as a man, he feels the need to impose his power on her. As with Emma, his wealth leaves him bored and with little else to occupy his time, as Tarpley writes: "Mr. Knightley is financially the most independent man in the novel. . . as such, he possesses the main freedom of males in his position: an abundance of leisure time" (25). Emma's authority threatens his own, and therefore, "Emma must be brought down a peg, must be cured of vanity and arrogance, and by a man—Mr. Knightley" (Perry 187). Emma's struggle within the novel is not simply to learn to be conscientious of others' feelings and wants, to overcome her toxic masculinity and learn compassion, but instead, as a patriarchal society demands, to "negotiate heterosexual relationships" (Perry 187). That negotiation results in marriage, where she relinquishes her power and independence over to Knightley. Emma's own toxic

masculinity is the result of her having gone uncontrolled and undisciplined all her life, and it all comes to a head in her interactions with Mr. Knightley: he has to be the one to control Emma, to put her in her place. Because Mr. Knightley has to take on the role of Emma's disciplinarian, Emma is often put into an infantilized position around Mr. Knightley as he "finds himself mostly in the role of admonisher of Emma's behavior. . . it is hard to see how such a relationship can thrive in the long tenure of marriage. . . unless Emma outgrows that dear insubordinately willful part of her nature" (Goodheart 603-4). Indeed, within Austen's novels, marriage can often be seen where the man "reduce[s] *people* to utilities, valuing them for their usefulness to him rather than valuing them for themselves" (Tarpley 26, author emphasis). Knightley needs Emma to marry him to reach the status of Sussman's economic man, and Emma is the only woman around suitable for a man of his caliber.

Emma's inner conflict is between her personal desires and her social obligations and expectations. Emma does not want to marry, but she is the only possible suitor for Mr. Knightley. His needs overpower her wants. Emma is unable to find the balance between herself and the image society projects upon her. Because of this failure, she needs to forgo her masculine characteristics completely in order to become amiable enough for a man to want to marry her. The first half of the novel is devoted to Emma trying to scheme marriages for others. Emma sees no reason she needs to get married. Even Mr. Knightley observes that, "[Emma] always declares she will never marry" (30) until she suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, is inspired with the need to get married, and to Knightley of all people, when she realizes "the plot must justify a woman's submission to the authority of a husband" (Perry 190). Emma's independence vanishes in

the blink of eye, and she is instead feminized “for love, for physical fulfillment, for children” (Myers 230). Emma’s masculinity can only be overcome by another masculine force, in the vehicle of marriage.

In a battle of wills, it is Mr. Knightley that comes out the victor, as Emma realizes the futility of her defiance. Her marriage to Knightley is a depiction of her society: marriage is an inescapable reality for a woman. Not even a woman like Emma, who is independently wealthy and educated, is safe from the confines of marriage, and Myers points out “[Austen] seems to be warning [the reader] who feels that she, unlike all other women, can choose to keep her distance from the life force, that as a woman she will share the fate of her sisters” (229). In order for her to marry, she has to change herself at her core, so a man like Mr. Knightley would even desire to be her husband.

Emma’s independence and meddling are characteristics of her toxic masculinity, and it makes her an unpleasant person. Her desire to puppeteer romantic matches for her neighbors is a result of the power she does already possess as an independent woman; yet, despite possessing such power and independence, for Emma to overcome her own toxic masculinity she has to be overpowered by a man. *Emma* follows in the footsteps of Austen’s other novels, wherein her “parodic conclusions measure. . . the social realities of patriarchal power” (Karen Newman 708). Emma cannot simply desire to be a better person on her own merits, or because it is the moral thing to do. She is unable to change on her own. She must be changed by a man so that she conforms to society’s ideal woman, and Knightley’s vision of the perfect wife. Emma is his only option. Yet, despite being near equals in social status, Knightley does not treat Emma as an equal. He chastises her like a child “Mr. Knightley loves to find fault with me” (Austen 9). His

sarcastic belittling unveils a bleak contempt for Emma's behavior, saying, "I do not understand what you mean by 'success' . . . Success supposes endeavor. Your time has been properly and delicately spent if you have been endeavoring for the last four years to bring about this marriage" (Austen 10). Knightley's critiques are part of his process to mold her into his ideal wife.

Knightley objectifies Emma. He "love[s] to look at her" yet also sarcastically remarks "Emma shall be an angel" while criticizing her behavior (Austen 29-30). Knightley admires Emma's beauty, but has little to say about her as a person, except for critiques bred out of a desire to put Emma in her place because she rejects his idea of traditional femininity. Yet, Emma still accepts his marriage proposal, despite Knightley's callous treatment of her and despite previously claiming complete disinterest in marriage. By marrying Knightley, Emma is able to overcome her toxic masculinity, as she swears off her meddling, but this not a result of Emma yearning to become a better person on her own; instead, it is a result of her submitting to Knightley.

There is a brief moment when Emma believes that her friend Harriet might be in love Knightley. This news angers Emma and she looks for excuses as to why a marriage between them cannot happen, Harriet's lower social class being one; yet this unveils Emma's own hypocrisy: she had no qualms about attempting to match Harriet with Mr. Elton, who was also outside Harriet's social class just as Knightley is. Emma's jealousy is used a plot device to justify her sudden change of interest, for she declares that "Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!" (Austen 281). Prior to this declaration, Emma has had complete disinterest in marriage. She promises her father that she will "make [no matches] for myself," and others take note of Emma's behavior, observing that "[Emma]

declares she will never marry” (10, 30). Her one-eighty on the subject is the catalyst of jealousy towards Harriet, but also a result of the toxic masculinity rooted in their society. Other critics have noted that Emma’s sudden change of heart on the subject may be a result of how society has ingrained into the minds of women the need to marry and reproduce: Emma’s change in perception is needed to “[appeal] to the conventional image of the woman” (Brown 323). Emma defies the ideals that construct what society considers to be the ideal woman, and it must be remedied. Emma has to conform.

To Knightley, image and class are intertwined. Emma’s belief that she is better suited to be Knightley’s wife than Harriet comes from Knightley’s own admonishments of Harriet’s social stance, as he often criticizes their friendship because of Harriet’s background, claiming “this great intimacy between Emma and Harriet Smith. . . is a bad thing” (27). Knightley is concerned about the perception such a friendship presents, and the effect it will have on his reputation, as Tarpley states “[Knightley] is so focused on being right about Emma that he forgets to think about his solution could be *wrong* for her family” (36, author emphasis). Knightley is the one most concerned with social status, hence his revulsions at Emma and Harriet’s friendship, “[Knightley’s] thinking about Harriet is more utilitarian than liberal. . . [he] sees Harriet as a liability, who will make his friend [Mr. Martin] an inferior wife” (Tarpley 36). He cannot achieve full manliness if he is associated with the lower class, even indirectly. During Emma’s engagement to Knightley at the end of the novel “the intimacy between [Harriet and Emma] must sink” (332). The hierarchy has been established, and it will not likely budge to allow “the conceited, the pretentious, the vulgar—all will continue to have their say and way” (Goodheart 602). In the novels of Jane Austen “the story of women’s friendship has no

place in the novel of marriage” (Perry 192). Perry continues this sentiment “[Austen] put thwarted friendship at the center of her three marriage plots. . . to signal what is lost by woman’s complicity in marriage. . . the marriage plot inhibits the friendship plot” (Perry 192). The toxic masculinity in *Emma* is not as simple as men holding their power over the heads of women. Toxic masculinity is so rooted into the foundation of this society that it is simply expected for female friendships to end when a marriage happens. Man supersedes women even within female realms.

Also of note is that the wedding between Emma and Knightley is not one for cause of celebration, as “the wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery or parade” (333). There is nothing about this wedding in particular to stand out in the minds of any member of Highbury. Readers are to recall Mr. Knightley’s introduction, wherein he lays out what he believes is the foundation for a perfect marriage, being that the wife must “submit[ting] your own will and doing as you are bid” (28). Emma’s marriage to Knightley is not about her learning to be a kinder, more conscientious spirit—it is about her becoming submissive to Mr. Knightley. Knightley “belie[s] the recipe for a good marriage” (Goodheart 602). For Knightley, a marriage is only good if the man is in control the woman. While Emma lets go of her toxic masculinity by the end of the novel, she only succeeds in bolstering Knightley’s, as he now has what he wants: Emma in a subservient position. Emma’s marriage to Knightley is a result of societal constraint: society demands Emma marry, and it demands she marry someone suitable. Knightley is the one other person in Highbury equal to her in social status, and so, their marriage is an inevitable result of society’s demands, and less about any affection they may or may not have for one another. Emma’s disdain of

marriage for herself is disregarded as Knightley is put into a position of power over her- and it is only then that Emma is able to overcome her own faults regarding her toxic masculinity: not on her own terms, but instead needing a man to usurp it from her. Jane Austen's depiction of marriage exists within the realm of women's limited opportunities, regardless of their backgrounds.

Class influences toxic masculinity because wealth gives access to freedom. Emma does not need to marry for any practical or monetary reason. The novel's opening lines acknowledge her affluence. Her class status will not change were she to remain celibate. Unlike Knightley, who needs to marry to achieve full manliness, per Sussman's theory of the economic man, Emma gains nothing from marriage. She already has that coveted high social status. Emma is a standout Austen's repertoire of protagonists; yet Austen plays with the irony of Emma's situation. Marriage is still an inescapable fate, even for a woman of Emma's caliber. Emma has to marry Knightley, a man that harshly critiques her friendships simply because of the difference in social status, and cruelly admonishes Emma's bad choices as a way to enforce his power over her. Similarly, Knightley needs to marry to become a full man. In the age of industry, manliness is earned through money and marriage. Knightley has the money, and it influences his toxic masculinity because he is the manliest citizen in Highbury.

While Emma needs to understand that her meddling nature hurts people, Knightley's way about attempting her to stop is done out of a desire to control, as are his attempts to discourage the blossoming relationship between Emma and Harriet. Harriet is a poor and humble girl, and a friendship with her is the sort of thing Emma needs to become less arrogant, yet Knightley disavows this relationship. All marriages in the novel

end equally paired, with no one reaching outside their social class. These marriages are not the result of individual growth, but instead reveal the trap in which the society's women fall into: it is not enough just to marry. One also has to marry people socially suited to them. Biological and societal need for marriage and reproduction usurp personal desire, and ultimately, the marriage between Knightley and Emma is not an ending to celebrate because it contradicts Emma's wishes, and forces her to separate from Harriet and her father. In the realm of Austen, manliness happens when, in their marriages, men "practice the language of marriage and become fluent in the conversation of love, or genuine affection" (Tarpley 24). Knightley does not have genuine affection for Emma, otherwise he would not have worked so hard to attempt to change her. Yet, with the marriage he achieves total manliness.

In the world of *Emma*, the wants of women are inconsequential to the demands of a male-dominated, heterosexual society. Emma overcomes her toxic masculinity, but at the cost of everything else.

2. QUEERING THE FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS IN *JANE EYRE* AND *EMMA*: LATENT HOMORANTICISM AND THE INESCAPABILITY OF HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE

Though queer theory was birthed from the third-wave feminist movement of the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that it began to gain its own traction. Defining queer theory is not a simple task. It is an extremely nuanced topic, and even experts struggle with pinning down the specifics; however, in its simplest terms, it is probably best to define queer theory as “gestures or analytic models that dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire” (Jagose 3). In other words, queer theory examines how reality defies expectations, particularly those expectations of how people interact with those of the opposite or same sex. Queer theory’s goal “occupies a paradoxical position: while motivated by questions of identity. . . it is also skeptical of identity. . . meant to take apart categories like hetero-and-homosexual” (Kruger 336). While queer theory does borrow aspects from feminist theory, such as how characters are affected by their gender expectations, it goes deeper, with characters often defying social norms of heterosexuality, as “queer has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects” (Jagose 3). Though feminist theory is queer theory’s parent, it is important to note the distinction between the two. If feminist theory is focused on gendered issues, then queer theory is focused on issues of the self. Queer theory explores how characters break away from societal expectations and norms regarding their inherent identities. Essentially, queer theory distinguishes itself from feminist theory by focusing on same-sex relationships between both female and

male characters. Feminist theory is focused on how female characters are treated by a standard patriarchal society, and how those characters either rise up against the patriarchy, or fail and are forced to comply with it, while queer theory examines the multitudes of Others within a novel's framework.

Queer theory is also broader than feminist theory. Where feminist theory is concerned with gender, queer theory is not necessarily equated with homosexuality. A queer reading of a novel can examine topics of "cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity, and gender-corrective surgery" (Jagose 3). A character does not need to be homoromantic for a reader to conduct a queer analysis on them. Simply, they need to be ostracized, or in some manner defy, predisposed notions of explicit heteronormativity and binary gender norms. A character that remains celibate in a society where marriage and families are considered the norm, would be considered queer.

Even though queer theory is still relatively new in the world of literary criticism, the ideals that act as its foundation are not: women have been portrayed as having intense, romantic relationships between one another for centuries; long before queer theory was established and recognized as a new literary lens, without condemnation. It wasn't until independent women were perceived as threats to the patriarchy that their homoromanticism was taboo, as noted "Love between women was metamorphosed into freakishness, and it was claimed that only those who had such an abnormality would want to change their subordinate status in any way" (qtd in Jagose 14).

Homoromanticism between women threatened the patriarchal status quo of heterosexual marriage and gendered patriarchy, with a man placed in a position of power over his

wife. Female characters, such as Jane Eyre and Emma Woodhouse, are disliked by their male counterparts because their queerness completely eliminates the need for a man.

As queerness affects the characters, Steven Kruger states “the normal could not exist without the queer material it excludes” (337). In regard to the title characters of *Jane Eyre* and *Emma*, each protagonist is, in some manner, ostracized from the society in which they inhabit because they do not meet that definition of normal which is upheld by their society. Specifically for them, their distaste of heterosexual marriage queers them because they reject a social norm.

A queer reading can be uncovered within *Jane Eyre* and *Emma*, as their bonds with women are more poignant than their marriages with men. They each, at one point, reject the idea of marriage. They do not want to get married. Their interactions with men not only disenfranchise them, but work as a means of separation from their female love interest. Jane Eyre is constantly caught in a power struggle with men, and she finds relief in the company of women. Emma, willfully independent and wealthy, has no economical need for marriage. She does not need to play the game her acquaintances play in order to secure a husband, and that encourages her ferocity. As a result, Emma is constantly belittled by Mr. Knightley, who believes a woman’s role is to be submissive to her husband. In Jane’s story, it is her friendships with Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Adele, and her Rivers cousins that help her grow as a person. Similarly, with Emma, it is her intimate friendship with Harriet that helps her relinquish her meddling characteristics and see the damage such behavior inflicts, rather than Mr. Knightley’s constant scolding. Women empower women, and it is those relationships which help the protagonist gain true agency, rather than their heterosexual marriages.

Jane Eyre

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, there appears a motif of women usurping power from men, such as early on when Brocklehurst is demoted as headmaster of Lowood Academy and Miss Temple assumes the position of authority. Brocklehurst's demotion "helps feminize the school. Like Bessie, [Miss Temple] becomes a mother figure to Jane, and her power rescues the school. . . from the perception that it is owned and operated by men exclusively" (Laggett and Parkes 177). Similarly, Jane returns to Rochester having usurped his own power. Jane has the money and the bodily autonomy he no longer possesses. She is now in the dominant role over him. But Rochester is not the only man to fall below Jane. She also usurps power from St. John. By rejecting his marriage proposal, she denies him the ability of having the masculine image he desires, and therefore, degrades his position in society. As discussed in chapter one, St. John cannot attain true manliness until he marries, failing to fulfill the requirements for Sussman's "economic man" (*Masculine Identities* 92). Jane coming to power works to unveil the toxic masculinities of Rochester and St. John. Men with power will abuse that power the best they can, until they lose it. But before that power is lost, women rescue women from the abuses of men.

It is because Jane's relationships with men are toxic that she forms immensely strong, intimate bonds with women. Deborah Morse writes of the queer undertones in the novel, and examines why it is only recently that the novel is being viewed through this lens. According to Morse, a queer reading of *Jane Eyre* is unprecedented because it calls for readers to take into consideration that Jane is an unreliable narrator, that "may also not tell us what she really feels" (Morse 4). In the time of its publication, *Jane Eyre* was

criticized for its blatant depiction of feminine sexuality, but in actuality, such female heterosexual desire is surprisingly lacking throughout the novel. Jane does not care for romantic intercourse with Rochester or St. John and instead:

Jane Eyre's most insistent passion is lesbian. From her need to express her love for Helen Burns in physical touch and embraces through her erotic paintings of beautiful women to her intimacy with the Rivers sisters, Jane's emotional and inner erotic life is focused much more often upon girls and women than upon men. (Morse 6)

These female-to-female relationships possess the intimacy that would be desired in Jane's heterosexual relationships, which, comparatively, lack the necessary amount of emotional intimacy and support. Jane covets someone who will listen to her and accept her as she is. Within the realm of the novel, where men are often villainized and Jane's closest relationships being with women, the listener Jane desires is female. Jane, who continually addresses the reader throughout the novel, is telling her story to another woman and emphasizes the power of homoromantic friendship. Nowhere is this more evident than in the relationship Jane has with her schoolhood friend, Helen Burns. While this relationship may be the most intimately prominent, *Jane Eyre* is a novel where plot is centered on the varying relationships Jane forms during the different stages of her life, and one has to draw comparisons in order to decipher how Jane is affected by each. Again and again, the reader will see that Brontë paints all heterosexual relationships as being inferior to the homoromantic ones. A queer reading of *Jane Eyre* unveils a criticism of traditional marriage. For Jane, a heterosexual marriage does not provide her with the listener she desperately needs, and therefore, leaves her miserable and

unfulfilled. Her relationships with women, however, do meet that criteria. It is the homoerotic relationships that provide Jane with the intimacy she needs, both physically and emotionally, and it is these homoerotic relationships that do not ask Jane to sacrifice any parts of her being; with women, Jane can be just as she is.

Charlotte Brontë's other novels, such as *Shirley* and *Villette*, have in the past been analyzed through a queer lens, but it is only recently that *Jane Eyre* has received the same treatment, possibly because such a reading is so radically different to the status quo of the traditional criticism of the novel and because it entirely upends the marriage plots that overtake the latter half of the story; or perhaps because the "heroine's painstaking delineation of other women in sketches or paintings as well as in her narrative displays a transgressive expression of lesbian desire under the cover of conventional feminine auspices" (Morse 4). While Jane may be envious of female characters such as Blanche, her feelings about women go beyond passive admiration of their beauty or talent. She obsesses over them in her art work just as Rochester and St. John obsess over her, and she bonds with other female figures beside Helen, Miss Temple, Adele, and her cousins Diana and Mary. Each of these women serve as a counterpart to the male character Jane battles against for that section of the novel.

Jane often views other women through the male gaze. She obsesses over their beauty, which is heavily contrasted to her focus of ugliness of men. When she paints women, it is through the lens of the man, as evident when she paints Blanche Ingram, "sketched alone. . . with Rochester's gaze" (Morse 4). Jane is enamored with the beauty of women. She draws the reader's attention towards it, and she does it with several of the female characters, not just Helen: Miss Temple, Blanche, and Rosamund, are also

described in a hyper-sensualized manner. Jane paints Blanche's portrait in her bedroom at Thornfield.

Yet, it is Jane's relationship to Helen that is the foundation of a queer reading. The relationship is so unique in its purity that it calls for comparison to the remainder of Jane's relationships, and it was not unusual for real life women of the time to have same-sex relations under the guise of "metaphoric language of the family" (Vicinus xxix).

If Bertha Mason is a dark mirror to Jane's repressed sexuality (see chapter one), Helen Burns is Jane's light mirror: the perfect, womanly figure, Jane struggles, and fails, to become. Like Jane, Helen is an orphan, abandoned to Lowood Academy, yet Helen finds peace in religion and represents a New Testament ideal of forgiveness and love, which is purposefully contrasted to the Old Testament fire-and-brimstone punishment that Brocklehurst inflicts on the students of the Lowood Academy. Helen represents a feminine alternative of purity and acceptance against traditional masculine abuses. The novel is not anti-Christian like some of the original critics of the time claimed; rather, the Christian allegory lays hidden beneath the queer veneer. Helen embodies Christian ideals, such as turning the other cheek, and caring not for the opinions of man, but instead doing what is right in God's eyes, unlike Brocklehurst whom only is concerned with punishing sinners in a court where he is judge, jury, and executioner, regardless of guilt or lack thereof. The comparison creates a gendered motif of women being pure, angelic creatures and men being sinful, demonic ones, especially when one understands that Jane suffers under the hand of every major male character she with whom she interacts. Even after Helen's death, she remains the angelic ideal that Jane struggles to strive towards for the remainder of the novel. Jane draws this comparison, one between a sinful human being,

and a figure higher than herself, when she reflects, “I am a defective being, with many faults and few redeeming points, yet I never tired of Helen Burns” (73). To Jane, Helen is a being more moral and more worthy of life than herself.

Helen supports and encourages the recalcitrant facets of Jane’s identity—Jane’s independence and reluctance to submit to authority. Jane suffers at Lowood for not upholding Brocklehurst’s excessive ideals of femininity—that the girls must learn to be “hardy, patient, self-denying” as well as surrender to the womanly customs of cooking and cleaning (59). Jane is plain, and obstinate. She refuses to submit to the expectations of men, and Helen supports Jane’s identity and independence. When Jane is publicly humiliated for breaking a dinner plate, the other girls obediently ignored her, except for Helen, who, “lift[s] her eyes. . . and smile[s] at me” (63). This tiny smile, itself an act of subtle rebellion, is also an acknowledgment of Jane’s existence, which inspires Jane to muster the courage to withstand the humiliation, and it is the genesis of Helen’s angelic imagery, as Jane observes, “What a strange light inspired [Helen’s eyes]! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me up!” (63). Helen takes her own humiliation with stoic pride, like a Messianic figure, and becomes in Jane’s eyes “a martyr, a hero” (63).

While Rochester and St. John desire to control Jane and to limit her independence, Helen accepts Jane as she is. Helen loves Jane, and does not ask for any changes to be made. In *Jane Eyre*, self-actualization happens in the company of the female sex. Not only is it Helen’s love and friendship that assist Jane in accepting herself, Jane needs Helen to be happy; without her, Jane stumbles into a depressive mode that lasts for much of the novel, acknowledge when Jane states, “Helen Burns was not here;

nothing sustained me” (64). Jane and Helen are also more physically intimate with each other than Jane is with both Rochester and St. John. Jane and Helen are not afraid of physical intimacy and often touch, such as when “[Helen] chafe[s] my fingers gently to warm them. . . resting my head on Helen’s shoulders, I put my arms around her waist; she drew me to her” (65). This scene is, as Morse states, “the iconography of female tenderness and love” (Morse 7). Their physicality is intimate, but not overtly sexual, and that distinction draws the parallel as this relationship being utterly pure. Theirs is a connection of minds and souls, going beyond bodies, where it stops with the male characters. Sex and marriage are the goal of Rochester and St. John; Jane is a pretty accessory to wear at their arm, something to fulfill a checklist of societal demands, a required necessity to display a desired image, but the intimacy between Helen and Jane is genuine and selfless.

Rochester and St. John are each directly paralleled to Helen through a recurring line of dialogue. Each makes a note that they are “going to God” at their death (76). The first utterance belongs to Helen as she dies from tuberculosis; therefore, each invocation in all iterations is meant for readers to recall Helen’s existence, and her impact on Jane. The next instance is spoken by Rochester, as he tells Jane the story of his marriage to Bertha. After contemplating suicide, he tells Jane he desired to “break away and go home to God” (276). The last instance is in relation to St. John, who writes that “Surely I come quickly” to God (403). The line ties all three characters together, and again, it beckons readers to recognize it as a parallel of all Jane’s love interests. Yet, of the three, it is only Helen that treats Jane with respect. It is only Helen that that accepts Jane as she is, with

no requests to change. Helen, Rochester, and St. John are paralleled as love interests, but only Helen simulates genuine love.

Jane's relationship with Helen is the center of the Lowood Academy section of the novel, and though it is the most intimate, it is not the only significant relationship Jane has with a woman. This is emphasized by the significant time jump that occurs after Helen's death; one of eight years, pulling readers to Jane leaving Lowood for Thornfield. She leaves because Miss Temple, the only teacher with whom Jane connected, gets married. After Helen's death, it is Miss Temple whose "friendship and society had been my continual solace" (78). Again, readers discover it is the comfort of a woman that provides Jane with a reason to live. Miss Temple remains Jane's only friend and her reason for staying at Lowood as a teacher, even after Jane completed her studies. After Miss Temple's marriage, she moved "to a distant country and [is] lost to me" (78). To Jane, Miss Temple suffers a metaphorical death, just as real as Helen's. With Miss Temple's absence, Jane has no connections left at Lowood and abandons it entirely, where it is never mentioned again.

Yet, we also know that Jane returns and inscribes "Resurgam" on Helen's grave, located on the school grounds, fifteen years after her death—which, chronologically, would be several years into her marriage with Rochester. It calls on readers to ask the question: why would Jane return to Helen's grave so long after her death, when she is supposedly happily married, to draw an inscription that paints Helen into a messianic figure? She has not forgotten Helen Burns, even after all these years. Jane's heart still belongs to Helen. The novel is Jane telling her own story—self-described as her autobiography. The time jumps in the novel are relevant to what Jane feels is and is not

important to tell, and, after Helen's death, the next major time jump comes after Jane and Rochester have been married for several years. Married life is insignificant to Jane; even the birth of her first son is information passed about inconsequentially, given to the reader and then promptly ignored in favor to speak of Jane's female cousins, Diana and Mary. The last few paragraphs of the novel do not belong to Rochester, but instead St. John, who suffers to die unmarried and alone. Rochester becomes insignificant to Jane by the novel's conclusion, and St. John's final words are a callback to Helen, a final reminder to the reader that she existed and was important to Jane.

In the novel, the tenderness of women is contrasted to the brutality of men. *Jane Eyre* shows a series of women supporting women, regardless of their social status and own well-being. Jane cannot stand up for herself against Brocklehurst's unfair and sexist judgement, but she is indignant at Helen being treated the same way, as others note, "Jane reacts with fury and horror when Helen Burns also endures a corporal punishment" (Marcus 209). Seeing Helen suffer any indignation causes Jane immense, violent, vitriolic pain:

I ran to Helen, tore [the sign] off, and thrust it into the fire: the fury of which she was incapable had been burning in my soul all day, and tears, hot and large, had continually been scalding my cheek; for the spectacle of her sad resignation gave me intolerable pain at heart. (Brontë 69)

When they stand up for one another during these humiliations, Helen and Jane fight against men owning the other's body. Jane irrevocably affects central cores of Helen ideologies, because while Helen believes in obeying rules, she breaks them to comfort Jane. Making eye contact with Jane despite being ordered not to is not a feeble act of

rebellion—it humanizes and justifies Jane’s existence for the first time in her life; and Jane will rebel against the institution of Lowood for Helen, making Helen “a seductive threat” (Marcus 210).

Jane blatantly describes her feelings for Helen as love; after the two girls bond, Jane notes that “I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries” (70). The conditions of Lowood are horrific; unclean, little food, and a consumption epidemic on the horizon; yet, it is simply Helen’s existence at such an establishment that makes it preferable to where Jane came from. Jane also quotes King Solomon from the Book of Proverbs, emphasizing that “Better is a dinner with herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred within” (70). It is Helen who provides Jane with the love that makes Lowood, despite the abuses Brocklehurst inflicts upon her, a place better to live than Gateshead.

After hearing the news of Helen’s impending death, Jane breaks one last rule: after being denied visitation to see Helen in her dying moments, Jane sneaks into the room, despite the risk to her own health of catching tuberculosis. It is with Helen that Jane takes such a dangerous risk, but she would not do the same for Rochester or St. John. Jane acknowledges the danger, but continues anyway, stating, “I dreaded being discovered and sent back; for I *must* see Helen—I must embrace her before she died” (75, author emphasis). There is nothing in the sections after Helen’s death that rival the emotional and physical desire Jane expresses for Helen right in this moment.

Jane’s goodbye to Helen is phrase nearly as a marriage proposal “I’ll stay with you, *dear* Helen: no one shall take me away” (76, author emphasis). Brontë’s emphasis in this scene sheds light on the romantic implications of their relationships. Helen is Jane’s

soulmate, and Jane keeps her promise: she is not taken away from Helen. She is bonded to Helen ever after death, so much so that Jane visits Helen's grave over a decade later, married and with a son, to etch a note claiming Helen will "rise again" (77). The reason that the heterosexual relationships in the novel are lackluster is because Jane already gave her heart to Helen, and Helen's influence stretches beyond her death. Helen's ghost follows Jane throughout the rest of her life, weaving its way through Jane's later love interests, and by comparison, strengthening the romantic connotations of this relationship.

Not even death can take Helen away from Jane, and Helen's ghost makes the reader contemplate every action the male characters take towards Jane, makes the reader compare every interaction and motive. Jane and Helen's love is pure because it is built entirely upon wanting to better themselves and the other, while Rochester and St. John are concerned with their own image and their toxic masculinity that compels them to own women for the benefit of their image. Jane's marriage verbiage to Helen on her deathbed surpasses the proposals that Rochester and St. John make. Rochester's is done under false pretenses and St. John attempts to scare Jane with threats of hell.

Jane's ultimate marriage to Rochester at the end of the novel is not a comment on her feelings for Rochester, but instead on the restraints society forces on women. Heterosexual marriage is inescapable if Jane wants to continue to live in society and retain any amount of dignity. The conclusion of *Jane Eyre* ultimately leaves an uncomfortable space of liminality, where something is notably missing in Jane's happy ending. Helen's ghost surpasses the realm of her small section of a nearly four-hundred page novel and in doing so, unveils the toxicity of the relationships Jane finds herself in

thereafter with men, uncovering the space where the relationships of women are superior in every way to that of the common, heterosexual marriage.

Emma

Like *Jane Eyre*, Emma's most profound relationships are cultivated in her interactions between other women; and like in *Jane Eyre*, these female homoromantic relationships are forced to dissolve in order to propel forward the social commentary about the inescapability of standardized heterosexual marriages. Austen rejects the notion of the "passionless women," the sexless woman; rather, passionate sexuality is directed towards the female by the female (Eeckhout 28). There is little romantic spark between Emma and Mr. Knightley, especially in the first half of the novel. There, much of their interactions are tense and nuanced, and in comparison, Austen "has far less censure and for women's connections and communities [compared to women and men]" (Fulk 252). Of Emma, Austen claimed "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (qtd in Austen-Leigh 157). It is not just Emma's selfish and meddling personality that makes her unlikeable to the male characters of the novel, but also "Emma's infatuations with and preference for other women" (Korba 139). Korba continues this line of thinking, claiming "Emma's erotic predilection for members of her own sex can be traced throughout the novel," from Miss Taylor and Harriet, to even Jane Fairfax briefly, a relationship that is just as confrontational as Emma's relationships with men (148).

The first notable relationship readers are introduced to is that of Emma and Mrs. Weston (formerly Miss Taylor), Emma's childhood friend and former governess. The novel opens at Mrs. Weston's wedding reception, and readers learn that Emma was closer

to Mrs. Weston than her own sister “Between *them* [Emma and Mrs. Weston] was more the intimacy of sisters” (Austen 5, author emphasis). Especially since Emma’s biological sister had married and moved out years prior, she was extremely attached to Mrs. Weston, as Austen notes, “They had been living together as friend and friend very mutually attached” (5). Despite being the one to arrange Miss Taylor’s relationship with Mr. Weston, Emma is unhappy at the wedding. Austen describes it Emma as if she were at a funeral instead, stating, “It was on the wedding-day of this beloved friend that Emma first sat in mournful thought” (5). Being the first marriage of the novel, it sets the stage for the ones to come throughout, and through Emma’s eyes readers are shown that this heterosexual marriage “in not a positive light” (Fulk 252). Emma equates marriage with death. This funeral imagery associated with marriage continues through the end of the reception, as Emma feels a hole in her life, “The want of Miss Taylor would be felt every hour of every day . . . How was [Emma] to bear the change?” (Austen 6). Miss Taylor is dead. There is now only Mrs. Weston. Now that she is married, Mrs. Weston is a wife first and a friend second, as “matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable” (Austen 7). Readers are made aware of Emma’s feelings about marriage from the opening pages of the novel. While she recognizes its necessity for a woman in society, she harbors an incredible dislike of it. From Emma’s perspective, marriage forcibly separates friends. Miss Taylor was her good friend from childhood, and now she is lost to Emma. Miss Taylor’s marriage to Mr. Weston is also described in ways that portray it as a negotiation of goods. After the death of his first wife, Mr. Weston “obtained his [new] wife” (13). That single line objectifies Miss Taylor and portrays woman’s role in marriage as being an inferior to man. Her marriage to Weston is done

less out of any semblance of romance and more out of the fact that marriage is a survival necessity in this society. It also unveils the power dynamic that this society expects of a marriage: Mr. Weston looked specifically for a “well-judging and truly amiable woman”—a woman he could control (13). Like how Emma must change in her marriage to Knightley, Miss Taylor is expected to bend to her husband’s will until “There was no recovering Miss Taylor” (15). The relationship between Emma and Miss Taylor is just a brief blimp in the scope of the novel; Emma’s romance with Harriet is the true heart, but it will end just the same.

Heterosexual marriage continues to be portrayed as the ripping of two female friends from each other. The ending of the novel can hardly be considered happy when Emma and Harriet’s friendship must wither away, as each is isolated into the confines of their individual marriages. But Emma’s bond with Harriet is more emotionally intimate than her relationship with Mr. Knightley. Their first interactions invoke the formation of a quick, deep bond, despite the differences in their social class and education that would otherwise keep them from each other. Also, like *Jane Eyre*, Emma is more focused on Harriet’s appearance than Mr. Knightley’s, as Austen writes, “[Harriet] was a very pretty girl, and her beauty happened to be of a sort which Emma admired. . . Emma was. . . quite determined to continue the acquaintance” (18). Emma decides very quickly that Harriet is better than her social class would define her as, and that Harriet’s “natural graces should not be wasted on the inferior society of Highbury” (18). Emma also becomes quickly attached to Harriet “[Emma] was so busy in admiring those soft blue eyes. . . that the evening flew away at a very unusual rate” (19). Immediately, Emma’s connection to Harriet is more intimate than that of hers with Knightley. Whereas her

interactions with Mr. Knightley are antagonistic in nature, her first interactions with Harriet are rooted in mutual speaking and listening, as well as mutual admiration, of body and soul. Their ultimate goal is to bond with one another. Emma needs to spend only one evening spent with Harriet to become profoundly invested in her happiness “The happiness of Miss Smith was quite equal to [Emma’s] intentions” (19). When readers compare the difference in how Emma forms relationships between women and men, there appears a recurring theme of how her relationships with women, as Korba states, “exemplify her attraction to and her infatuation with docile and malleable members of her own sex. . . and her relationships with the male characters. . . serve to demonstrate Emma’s marked sexual indifference to them” (Korba 141). Emma pays not attention to the wealthy men of her society. She is oblivious to their affections towards her. Instead, her focus is on the women that surround her, their beauty, and their futures.

Knightley wishes to make Emma less selfish, but his critiques of Emma’s behavior solicit no change in her. Instead, Emma desires to become a better person for Harriet’s sake, after realizing how she had wronged her friend:

Such a blow for Harriet!—That was the worst of all. . . compared with the evil Harriet, all was light; and [Emma] would gladly have submitted to feel yet more mistake-more in error-more disgraced by misjudgment, than she actually was, could the effects of her blunders have been confined to herself.(Austen 95)

Emma wishing she could feel more pain to spare Harriet from feeling any is an intense upward shift in her maturity and a downward shift in her own selfish nature. She acknowledges the mistake she made and accepts that responsibility falls upon her for

daring to meddle on her own. She does not need to be told she made a grievous mistake; for the first time she understands how her actions can have negative consequences on her own. Knightley's stern admonishments make no change in Emma's nature, but wronging Harriet, and acknowledging she is at fault, do.

Yet, before Emma even discovers she misread the situation between Harriet and Mr. Elton, she discourages Harriet from accepting a proposal from Robert Martin, under the claim that Martin is actually below Harriet, but also because if Harriet marries, Emma "must have given [Harriet] up" (39). Critics note that "Harriet's beauty was one of the motivations for sabotaging the relationship. . . Emma feels Harriet is far too pretty graceful to be wasted on Mr. Martin" (Eeckhout 45). While Emma's motivations can be accounted to a multitude of sociological and economical reasonings, based on what readers know of the culture of Highbury, it is most easily understood in its simplest form: Emma is in love with Harriet and her deepest fear is in "losing Harriet to a man" as she lost Miss Taylor (Eeckhout 45).

Emma has just lost her friendship and intimacy with Miss Taylor, and she has no desire to lose what she has just formed with Harriet. Indeed, most of Emma's relationships with other women is "described. . . in terms that traditionally evoke the romantic heterosexual romance" (Korba 152). Korba corroborates this, noting that "As the focus shifts from [Emma's] feelings of loss at the marriage of Miss Taylor. . . to her growing interest in Harriet Smith, the language Austen employs seems to become increasingly sexual" (Korba 152). There is much more focus on Harriet's outer appearance than Knightley's which naturally sexualizes their relationship. While the novel shows the first time they meet officially, Emma recognizes Harriet, and has always

admired her beauty, stating, “Miss Smith was a girl of seventeen whom Emma knew very well by sight and had long felt an interest in, on account of her beauty. . . [Harriet] was a very pretty girl. . . Emma was as much pleased with her manners as her person and quite determined to continue the acquaintance” (17-18). Emma is at first attracted to Harriet because of Harriet’s beauty, but it develops further than that into true, mutual affection. Emma describes Harriet in “language charged with courtship custom” (Fulk 253).

Near the end of the novel, Emma and Harriet have, what can be argued, the most emotionally intimate conversation of the novel. In a story where social standing, based on wealth and parentage, determines one’s worth, Emma disregards those standards away. Poor, orphaned Harriet is “worth a hundred [Jane Fairfaxes]” and Emma claims that “happy the man who changes Emma for Harriet” (185). Harriet, who is docile and pretty and forgiving of all Emma’s mistakes, becomes, in Emma’s eyes, worth more than the most elite of Highbury. Harriet does not hold grudges against the ways Emma has hurt her, instead claiming “You [Emma], who have been the best friend of my life I ever had in my life. . . Nobody is equal to you!—I care for nobody as I do for you!” (185). Connotatively, it is nearly a marriage proposal. Both women profess affection for one another. Each makes an acknowledgment of caring for the other more than anyone else, and the exclamations that each is worth more than what society labels shatters the social segregation they were raised upon. Emma believes Harriet is a better person than her, and Harriet easily forgives Emma’s transgressions against her, still claiming that Emma is the most important person in her life. This makes Emma’s sudden change of heart towards Mr. Knightley all the stranger, as the interactions between the Emma and Mr. Knightley lack both sexual attraction and emotional intimacy compared to that of Emma and

Harriet. Indeed, it seems that Emma only separates herself from Harriet once she realizes the inevitability of heterosexual marriage, and that her friendship with Harriet cannot be sustained forever, as Eeckhout states, “Emma ultimately desires Harriet, but expresses this through her desire for Mr. Knightley” (Eeckhout 46).

Emma does take on a distinctly male role within her relationships. She possesses the arrogance of a man, and often acts like a man, is privileged and educated like only a rich man can be. Jagose claims that “there is nothing authentic about gender,” and that such binary is simply a categorization of a “performative effect of reiterative acts,” yet that is not the case in *Emma*. She acts like a man, but that does not make her a man; and while women look up at her with admiration, men disdain her masculinized performance. What her performance does succeed in doing is sexualizing her relationship with women by giving Emma the position of superiority they already find themselves under with men. Emma gets to make choices for them, such as who gets to marry whom, like setting up Miss Taylor with Mr. Weston, and early in her relationship with Harriet, Emma makes choices that will keep the two of them together, rather than allowing Harriet to marry Robert Martin.

Yet, it is the conversation Emma and Harriet have at the end, their symbolic marriage proposal, that the dynamic between them is shifted and they, unlike any other characters within the novel, are able to meet on mutual footing. Neither is above the other. Money and heritage play no part in their relationship. Emma began her relationship with Harriet believing she could change Harriet into a socialite like her, yet at the end, it is Harriet who changes Emma, making Emma for once in her life reflect on her actions; and Harriet does not force the changes upon Emma, but instead, Emma steps back and

after understanding the pain she has cultivated, desires to change on her own *for* Harriet. It is unlike the way Emma changes in her relationship with Knightley, where the relinquishment of her masculinity is done as an act of cultured submission. Emma changes to become a better person. Korba explains that Harriet values “her relationship with Emma far more than she values a romantic union with Robert Martin. When Emma reveals to [Harriet] that such a union would have destroyed the possibility of any further intercourse between them, she is ‘aghast’ (Korba 151). After deciding to reject Martin’s first proposal, Emma tells her “I am secure of you forever” and Harriet agrees, telling Emma “I would not give up the pleasure and honour of being intimate with you for anything in the world” (39).

Knightley often laments about what makes the perfect wife, specifically when he speaks with Miss Taylor. He tells her she is the perfect wife because she has made a point of “submitting [her] will and doing as [she is] bid” (28). Knightley wants Emma to submit to him; Harriet does not. And likewise, while Emma sometimes thinks she knows what is best for other people, she does not demand their servitude. Instead, the more she gets to know Harriet, the more it is her paradigm that changes as she comes to think of Harriet as being above her. It is not just Emma’s perception that gives readers insight into her relationship with Harriet. The outsider points of view that speak of them also work to show the romantic nature of their relationship, compared to Emma’s relationship with Knightley. Knightley despises their friendship and gossips with the neighbors about what an awful thing it is; yet, Knightley is alone in his thinking. Mrs. Weston is happy for Emma to have made a new friend. Knightley despises the intimacy between Emma and Harriet because of the threat it poses to him towards his own desire to conquer Emma.

Emma and Harriet's relationship epitomizes "lesbian feminism. . . [as] ideologically suspect assimilations of patriarchal values" (Jagose 65). Both Miss Taylor and Mr. Woodhouse pledge for the friendship, with Miss Taylor telling Knightley "no man can be a good judge of the comfort a woman feels in her society" and Mr. Woodhouse claiming "Emma could not have a better companion than Harriet" (27, 75).

Unfortunately, their relationship cannot last. They do not live in an ideal world, but rather a male-dominated one. Like a plague, marriage comes for all characters and it is unrelenting. Despite their relationship being the most emotionally and physically intimate, the hypothetical marriage of Harriet and Emma cannot endure. It is not simply the dominant heterosexual narrative that supersedes any homoromantic romance, but of man imposing his power over woman. Despite all Emma has, she is "powerless to avoid the superimposed, socially sanctioned heterosexual marriage" (Fulk 252). Ultimately, the heterosexual relationships have to come to a front, and it comes at the expense of Emma's relationship with Harriet. Harriet and Emma will both marry men that are appropriate for them on the class level, and in turn, their friendship will cease "Harriet. . . was less and less at Hartfield. . . The intimacy between her and Emma must sink" (332). And Emma's female friendships, as well as her independence, are forgone to a man, "all friendships. . . seem to collapse" (Eckhout 44) as she "must learn to play woman and wife, to submit" (Korba 160). Women are second to the wants and whims of men in everything they do. In Jane Austen's world, women do not even own their romantic lives.

Emma contrasts the two different relationships Emma has with Harriet and Knightley, portraying one as mutual attraction based on respect and equality, whereas her

relationship with Knightley falls into the pit of toxic heterosexuality wherein a woman must submit to a man. When taking into consideration what Emma had, and what she loses upon her marriage to Knightley, it is unfair to consider that her marriage at the end of the novel is a happy and fulfilling resolution.

3. TOXIC MASCULINITY LEADS TO QUEERNESS

The era in which *Jane Eyre* and *Emma* take place is one of drastic change. People are abandoning farm life for the cities, and ideals of manliness and femininity are needing to change as well, to fit into this new world. Man is no longer someone who leaves the cave to hunt food; now, he must make money and procure a family to achieve manliness. The Industrial Revolution changed the needs of the people, and as a result, changed standards for masculinity. As Sussman puts it, “The steam engine also substituted mechanical power for the power of men’s muscles. This. . . restricted masculinity by devaluing the ancient definition of manliness that valued the muscle power of the male body” (*Masculine Identities* 83). Machines can do it better, so man is made redundant. It is no longer about him being physically up to the task, but whether or not he is able to *finance* the task.

Money may have superseded muscle, but man does still need to hunt for survival in this new world. The matter of his prey has simply shifted from animal to women. Rochester and St. John hunt Jane, just as Knightley hunts Emma. They *need* to obtain a wife to become manly, because women are now monetized. Any previous definition of manliness is nullified and now recognized as an “individual self-interest motivated by rational calculation of economic gain” (Sussman *Masculine Identities* 81). This new way of thinking was “justified by a Protestant theology that spiritualized commercial success as a sign of being chosen by God” (81). Yet, while Rochester and Knightley eventually achieve this coveted manliness, Jane Eyre and Emma Woodhouse are forced into

unhappy marriages. With the changing times, marriage is no longer necessary for the survival of the species, but instead, to uphold an image. Jane and Emma are reduced to commodities within their heterosexual marriages. They are hunted down, captured, and forced into an institution that both had outright rejected because they are unable to escape the changing times. The men Jane and Emma encounter see them only as an object to bolster their own status, not as an individualized person. In response, they seek out the romantic connections with women.

Richard Thompson Ford states that queer theory “embraces, even celebrates, transgression; it seeks the sublime not in resistance. . . but in blithe and gleeful disregard for social conventions” (Ford 122). Jane Eyre and Emma Woodhouse are ideal candidates for a queer analysis because they test, and push against, those social boundaries. As protagonists, Jane and Emma are, in some ways, unlimited because they resist social norms they believe are unfair. It just happens that most of what they believe to be unfair is centered on how society handles marriage, and so, in these novels, the queer is paired with the feminist. In this changing, industrializing world, women are inferior to men; their wants always come second, and they exist to validate men. In *Jane Eyre* and *Emma*, the main conflict is internalized; Jane and Emma each are outsiders within their worlds, not fitting the molds of what is considered womanly or wifely. They do not, initially, meet the standards for femininity. They are queer not just because of their homoromantic tendencies but because they make, as Ford suggests, “a *decision* to live outside some social norm or another” (Ford 122, author emphasis). Jane and Emma struggle against the brutalities of men that try to shape them into what they are not; demure, submissive woman that bow to every whim of their husbands.

Marriage for Rochester and Knightley has little to do with love; instead, it is about projecting a desired image, and achieving true economic success, which comes in the form of marriage. They have money and leisure, but they are still less than a true man because they are unwed. It is an image that cannot be maintained so long as Jane and Emma do not comply with Rochester and Knightley's demands. With their rejections and refusals to comply, Jane and Emma metaphorically castrate Rochester and Knightley.

Yet, their strong, intimate relationships with their female counterparts—Helen Burns and Harriet Smith, respectively—have no rejections because they are not asked to change; instead, the love Helen and Harriet have for Jane and Emma is innocent and pure because it is rooted in mutual acceptance and understanding. It calls for the protagonists to look inwards of their own volition, acknowledge their errors, and make a conscious decision to change, rather than a man forcefully try to change them. These strong, intimate female relationships are foiled against patriarchy and toxic masculinity. Helen listens to Jane. She re-affirms Jane. She does not demand that Jane accept Brocklehurst's abuses, and she is the only person that validates Jane's feelings of turmoil towards her aunt and cousins, acknowledging that they did abuse Jane. It is the only time Jane's feelings are validated. Rochester and St. John will put upon Jane the same cruelties as Brocklehurst—but her relationship with Helen gives Jane the courage to fight back. Helen is the only person to tell Jane she is right for fighting back. Jane does not conform to their standards; she does not relinquish her independence in order to please either. Rather, until the end of the novel, every action Jane takes is one that is for her betterment. Helen's love for Jane is simplistic and pure, as they only have the desire to raise the other up from the trenches that toxic masculinity tries to bury them under.

Yet, her defiance is not enough. The novel ends with Jane returning to Rochester; even though he is financially disenfranchised, he gets everything he wants, while Jane must give up all her aspirations to become his wife. He still becomes a true man though, because he shares Jane's fortune, is married, and has a male heir. Jane loses her independence and sacrifices her dreams, and Rochester in return achieves full manliness without earning it.

Emma's situation is nearly identical. Like Helen's love for Jane, Harriet's love for Emma is also pure. Compared to Mr. Knightley—who criticizes Emma at every turn, and has a strict vision of the ideal wife, which he wants to shape Emma into—Harriet accepts Emma exactly as she is. Emma is not without her faults, but she grows to acknowledge and overcome them, not by Knightley showing her mistakes in her face, but understanding that her actions have consequences and those consequences hurt people. Specifically, it is the consequences that hurt Harriet that called for Emma's change. It was seeing Harriet in pain, seeing Harriet suffering and humiliated, that gave Emma the self-awareness to step back, analyze her actions, and make a vow to stop meddling. Harriet is the genesis of Emma's growth, not Knightley. Emma overcomes her own toxic masculinity by observing its dangers through its relation to Harriet. It is only when Emma understands that that she grows as a person.

Even so, like Jane, Emma cannot escape the toxic masculinity that surrounds her, despite overcoming her own. She still marries Knightley; and like Rochester, Knightley gets everything he wants, while Emma must give up all her own desires in order to be the ideal wife. Escape is not possible. Jane and Emma live in a man's world and must play

man's rules; despite their initial resistance, they ultimately lose the game because while they are independent, they still are *women* and therefore inferior.

Rochester and Knightley are cruel. To them, women are objects to own and control simply to bolster their own status. They do not care about Jane and Emma, not on the soul-deep level that Helen and Harriet do. Rochester is a pathological liar that manipulates Jane at every opportunity to gain her hand. By the end of the novel, Jane gives up her dream of owning her own school to care for wayward girls like herself, instead chaining herself to Rochester to care for him. Rochester gets everything he wants—Bertha gone, Jane as his wife, with a male heir and Adele displaced—while Jane has to give up all of her dreams. Though Jane is independent, society will not allow her to be free from man. Society demands she marry, so marry she must. Yet, in the novel's last lines, a homage to Helen is made, bringing her back to the forefront of the tale; Helen may be dead, but her spirit is woven throughout the pages of the novel, reminding the reader of the differences in each of Jane's relationships. The reader is reminded of the purity of that innocent, childhood love.

Likewise, Knightley wants to control Emma. Emma is too independent, too arrogant for her own good, and he needs to crush that spirit because it does not fit into his vision of what makes the ideal wife. To Knightley, social class is law, and the intermixing of it is abominable. He denounces Emma and Harriet's friendship, citing their "intimacy. . . a bad thing" simply because Harriet is poor and Emma is not (Austen 27). He is selfish and demanding, and only ever criticizes Emma. He says Emma will "never submit to anything requiring industry and patience," despite the fact that this statement is a pure lie—Emma spent four years working to get Miss Taylor and Mr.

Watson together (28). Yet, Emma eventually has to marry Knightley. With this act, she also must sever her relationship with Harriet, as they are now locked into their caste systems. Intermingling is not allowed. Marriage forces them apart, into their separate spheres of society, where their friendship with dwindle and fade; their love forcibly erased in order to please the demands of society, and they are not even allowed to mourn their loss “Harriet. . . was less and less at Hartfield; which was not to be regretted. The intimacy between her and Emma must sink” (332). Once again, the man—Knightley—gets exactly what it is he desires, and Emma loses everything: her independence and her friendships. Knightley states his displeasure with Emma and Harriet’s friendship, he desires to see it abolished, and he gets just that. He wants to marry Emma so he can control her, and he gets just that. There is no win for Emma in this situation—she did not need to marry because she was already financially independent. Her marriage with Knightley only happens to please the demands of society.

The novels suggest that marriage and the toxic masculinities that permeate society are inescapable—heterosexual marriage will always disrupt female homoromanticism. If Jane and Emma want to live peacefully in society, they have to comply with its demands. Confirmation to its feminine standards—becoming demure, submissive women—is a reality of their worlds. Their intimate friendships must end because they cannot coexist with the reality of their marriages. Helen Burns and Harriet Smith call for Jane and Emma to remain independent, but Rochester and Knightley will not allow for it. They have the power. They make the calls. Jane and Emma can either comply with their demands, or be exiled from their communities. In a battle of wills, not even the intimate

love between female companions can overcome the permeation of toxic masculinity.

Compliance is necessary for survival, and the price is forfeiting lesbian desire.

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