REVEALING LAUGHTER: LAUGHTER, PLEASURE, AND GENDER IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the place of women's laughter as an expression of pleasure in the nineteenth-century British novel and analyzes the intricate social dynamics that define and regulate female laughter in nineteenth-century British society by examining the works of three authors of the period: Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens. Laughter has been historically interpreted and restricted as a social act that reveals one's nature, virtue, and social standing, and, combined with the gender norms of the nineteenth century that deny women's right to individual pleasure, the discourses on laughter contributed to limit women's means to express, communicate, and thus, fully enjoy their pleasure. This study restores laughter's role as an everyday expression and, especially, as a site of pleasure, which has been neglected in the previous studies of laughter focusing on its role in comedy and humor, and I argue that the way laughter is read, confined, and controlled in a patriarchal society crucially affects the individual woman's seeking of happiness in the nineteenth-century novel.

Austen, Brontë, and Dickens all show how the complexity and individuality of female laughter are being constantly disregarded and dismissed in a society that only finds few, fixed meanings from women's laughter, and by doing so, these authors suggest the difficulty of having one's own laugh for women. Austen's troublemaking laughing women, Brontë's almost laughless and socially marginalized women, and Dickens' laughing women who are not allowed to grow or survive reveal each author's different perspective on the contemporary gender norms, and this study explores how far

each author moves away from the dominant, restrictive views of laughter through their representations of alternative laughs of women.

To my parents,

Hee Jeong Lee and Seung Jong Chung

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"How much lies in Laughter: the cipher-key, wherewith we decipher the whole man!" - Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*

In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet defines herself as a girl who loves to laugh, a quality she perceives as unique compared to other women in her life. She declares early on in the novel, "I dearly love a laugh" (42), saying this to pretentious Miss Bingley who is appalled by the idea that Mr. Darcy can be laughed at, and at the happy conclusion of her knotty journey, Elizabeth merrily assures her aunt, "I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh" (293). The ability to laugh, not merely smile, is a strength to Elizabeth that highlights her natural brightness and unaffected style and distinguishes her not only from the conceited, artificial ladies, but also from good-natured Jane who is so easily pleased, but never active or passionate in her seeking of pleasure. As much as she experiences shame and vexation from her family's conduct and her own mistakes, Elizabeth benefits from her philosophy, "Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure" (282), and moves on with a laugh at the end.

The strange thing, then, is the fact that we do not actually get to see her laugh in the novel that much. She certainly shows a quick sense of humor when dealing with Mr. Darcy's slighting of herself at a ball as a joke and responding to Mr. Collins' pompous

proposal with "so near laughing" (101), but she does not really laugh out loud in these scenes. Instead, we more often see her "check[ing] her laugh" (48), "hid[ing] a smile" (43) in front of others or being mortified by her sister Lydia's immodest, wild laughter. Her bright and playful spirit that attracts Mr. Darcy speaks through "the beautiful expression of her dark eyes" (16), not through her laughter. Unlike her verbal affirmation of the act, she remains rather wary of actual laughing, checking her urge for a laugh with a clear understanding of how laughter works in her society. In short, Jane Austen creates a female protagonist who not only has the ability to laugh, which indeed is an unusual quality, but also, the discretion not to laugh.

My dissertation starts from questioning what it means and what it takes for a woman to laugh in the nineteenth-century British novel. The delicacy Austen shows in portraying Elizabeth, of emphasizing her love of laughter through her words, not through actual laughing, suggests that laughing for women was not a simple, laughing matter. Ever since Aristotle stated that "humans are the only animals that laugh" (*Parts of Animals* 276), laughter has been regarded as a basic and exclusively human act.[1] In the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin concluded—through his observation of infants, the blind, and mentally disabled men—that laughter is a natural, involuntary act, not acquired by experience or imitation (195). His observations also show that laughter "primarily expresses mere happiness or joy" (195). However, literary texts provide good evidence that laughter is not so naturally expressed and received in our society and

[1] This view continued into the nineteenth century. In 1818, William Hazlitt starts his lecture on wit and humor by reminding, "Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps" (qtd. in Morreall 65).

rarely viewed as an expression of mere joy. In essence, laughter is a physiological reaction to certain feelings, accompanied by certain sounds and facial, bodily movements, and these discernible symptoms always become the object of social rules and customs. Robert R. Provine remarks, "Amazingly, we navigate in society, laughing at just the right times, while not consciously knowing what we are doing" (2). Though this statement seems to imply that we unknowingly perform adequate laughter without much effort, nineteenth-century novels tell us a different story.

Laughing the appropriate kind of laugh at the right time and at the right place is a result of a perpetual social training. It is not Elizabeth's innate virtue that tells her when to check her laugh, but her socially acquired sense of propriety. Elizabeth's laughter—her actual laughing or its repression—in fact becomes an effective tool to show her properly mannered body.[2] Throughout the narrative, Austen shows how women's laughs or smiles are praised or censured in their society, encouraging certain acts while disapproving others. When Mr. Darcy coldly evaluates Jane as pretty, but also as someone who "smiled too much" (11), we can see how he judges a woman's character through her smile and how there is an appropriate amount and style of a smile he approves. Austen hints at the limited chances for women to reveal their complex and deep feelings within the strict social codes. Laughter should be let out in an adequate manner, and on all occasions, it will be estimated by the critical eyes of others. Thomas

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[22] That Austen uses an individual expression as a sign of a socially mannered body is demonstrated well in Mary Ann O'Farrell's study of the blush in the nineteenth century British novel. By reading the blush as both "the sign of manners" and "the sign of desire" (9), O'Farrell illuminates the complex relationship between individual bodies and social norms and the subtle ways Austen uses to reveal a character's hidden interiority.

Carlyle's quote from *Sartor Resartus* demonstrates the nineteenth-century belief in the revealing nature of laughter, that laughter not only makes the laugher visible and audible, but also readable.

Austen is not the only writer who shows consciousness of this belief and represents the difficulty women face in their experience of laughter. My dissertation analyzes the intricate social dynamics that define and regulate female laughter in nineteenth-century British society by examining the works of three authors of the period: Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens. Each of these authors takes pains to represent the way laughter is expressed, repressed, and estimated in their culture and to show how gender plays a crucial role in this process. The discourses on laughter combined with the norms of ideal femininity inhibited women's free expression of laughter, and the way these authors responded to this phenomenon reveals their views on laughter and gender. By showing how laughter works as a socially constructed and controlled act, the three authors make us see the individual characters' trouble in finding a channel to express, communicate, and, thus, fully enjoy their pleasure. The study of laughter, therefore, provides a means to look into the place of pleasure in women's lives during the nineteenth century. Laughter basically is an expression of one's feelings, and in the three authors' works, laughter plays an important role in a character's path toward happiness and achievement. I want to bring to light how the social restrictions placed on women's laughter become a barrier in their pursuit of pleasure and of the moments of true happiness. The ways Austen, Brontë, and Dickens deal with that barrier will

eventually show their different perspectives on women and laughter in the nineteenth century.

I.1. The History of Laughter and Its Regulation

> What may appear as nature only, as mere nature, pure and simple, and is often given out or celebrated as such, on closer inspection proves to be the product of the cultural processing of nature. If there is, therefore, a 'history of laughter', it can only be the history of social discourses, representations, performances and practices through which such cultural processing of laughter is effectuated. The history of laughter is the history of the—often conflicting—norms circumscribing, and giving a social shape to, the anthropological impulse of laughter in a particular society. (Pfister v)

Manfred Pfister writes in his introduction to *A History of English Laughter: Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond* that the history of laughter is the history of the discourses on laughter. He argues that laughter, a supposedly natural, biological act, is in fact a social product, and its history has been an endless battle of different values and meanings attached to the act.[3] And in this extensive battle, laughter as a basic human reaction to pleasant feelings has become a highly loaded subject that moved far

[3] Matthew Ward also views laughter as a social, cultural product and argues that it is "subject to different ideological interpretations in specific cultures and times. Laughter is a contingent production of its time—socially constructed and culturally determined" (728).

away from the actual act and moment of laughing. Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, in his study of laughter's role in religious discourses and practices, announces, "my subject is never the passing laughter of the individual, but rather, the laughter forever caught in culture and preserved; my focus is on what is written about laughter in the context of religion" (1). His analysis of laughter shows one dominant way that laughter, which, as Gilhus notes, "has been a subject of scientific inquiry at least since the time of Plato" (1), has been dealt within theoretical, critical discourses. The studies of the history of laughter trace the theories of laughter considering its cause, its meaning, and its moral values and examine how the knowledge of and judgement of laughter have changed and developed over time. Though the work is significant and necessary, the attention devoted to what is written and said about laughter has neglected "the passing laughter of the individual." Consequently, as Anca Parvulescu observes, "Most 'theories of laughter' are not concerned with laughter" (3), and, as Provine asserts, "This laughterless study of laughter continues to the present day" (18).

Novels, in this regard, provide a useful and important site for the study of laughter. In novels, we can see what is written and said about laughter by the author and the characters, and at the same time, we can also see the individual human bodies each with its own passing laughter. Although those bodies are fictional, they mirror how people laugh and experience laughter in real life. The way laughter is referred to and represented in a novel also reflects and affects the way laughter is viewed and judged in a society. Nineteenth-century British society had its own view of laughter that was circulated through different forms of texts, and novelists reacted to and participated in

this discussion through their own fictional creations of laughter. The representation of laughter in a novel can be achieved by various means: through the description of the laugher's bodily movements or the sounds one makes, or both, or through simply narrating that "s/he laughed," which is the most common case. My dissertation is a study of the representation of laughter in works by three British novelists of the nineteenth century who contemplated the complex roles of laughter in both social and individual dimensions, and my focus is on the actual laughing moments in their works.

In *The Psychology of Facial Expression*, James A. Russell and José Miguel Fernández-Dols explain that there are two distinct meanings in the question, "What does a facial expression mean?" (20). First is "what about the expresser causes facial behavior?", concerning the expresser's state of mind or intention, and the second is, "what does an observer see in the face?" (20), relating to the observer's preconception or interpretation. In other words, it is assumed that there exists a gap between what one expresses and how others perceive that expression, and this applies to all kinds of bodily expressions. In many cases, laughing creates this gap of meaning in a novel, which could lead to a misjudgment of a character, a crucial misunderstanding between individuals, or a breach in a relationship. How others perceive a laugh is sometimes more important than what the laugher really felt or thought at the moment, leaving the laugher to bear with the burden of misinterpretation. My dissertation discovers how social norms and discourses about laughter shape the way people interpret laughter, ultimately affecting the individual character's experience of the act. Through this, I want to highlight the emotional burden individuals have to carry as a result of these continuing attempts to

define and confine laughter. Thus, it is necessary to first review the dominant historical discourses on laughter that affected the social understanding of laughter in nineteenth-century British society.

Almost all studies of laughter go back to Plato and Aristotle,[4] the two Greek philosophers whose skeptical views on laughter determined the approach to the subject for over two thousand years. Both thinkers were interested in the role of comedy in society, mostly focusing on the meaning of *laughing at*. They were the first, but not the last, to limit their study to the meaning of *laughing at*, discussing laughter's role as ridicule and scorn, as making others the objects of one's laughter. Naturally, laughter is presented as a negative, unadmirable social act. Plato and Aristotle agree that laughing is taking pleasure from other's shortcomings or vice and that excessive laughing is vulgar, irrational, and immoral. Plato says that no one can get accustomed to laughing at others without "either straying in some degree from a serious disposition, or destroying in large part his highmindedness" (*Laws* 338), and he insists on the necessity of legislating who may or may not write any comic writing (338). In *The Republic*, Plato disapproves of the literary representation of excessive laughter and argues, "we must not accept it if we are shown men of any importance—still less gods—being overcome by laughter" (75). Laughter denotes a lack of virtue and is thus unfitting for the higher minds to Plato.

Aristotle also warns of the danger and immorality of excessive laughter. Though he admits in *Nicomachean Ethics* that "relaxation and amusement are necessary in life"

[4] Provine notes that "The earliest surviving theory of laughter is from Plato (427-348 B.C.)" (13).

(75), Aristotle expounds that it requires a sophisticated mind and dexterity to avoid being either a buffoon, who would do anything to cause laughter, or a boor, who would never do anything to cause laughter and is only repelled by any of those attempts. Aristotle stresses the importance of "the medial state" and argues, "there are some things that it is appropriate for such a person [who is decent and free] to say as part of amusement, and also to listen to, and the amusement of the free person differs from that of the slavish one, and that of the well-educated person from that of the uneducated one" (75).

Both philosophers preach on the risk of thoughtless laughter and claim that not all laughs are appropriate or tolerable. Also, while arguing that only sophisticated, educated men can discern the right kind of laughter, they establish a notion that we can tell the virtue and social standing of a person through their laughter. Seeing certain laughs as only befitting uneducated, slavish, and lowly men, they presume that laughter can work as a means of social distinction. Provine reminds us that Plato and Aristotle lived in a time when "the rich and powerful employed fools, [and] physical deformity was a legitimate source of amusement" (14), which explains their relating certain laughs to the "slavish" men,[5] but the tendency to use laughter as a measure of one's social status as well as virtue continued for a long time. Resonating with Carlyle's nineteenth-century voice, a writer and filmmaker of the twentieth century avows, "Tell me what you laugh

[5] Plato insists that comic acting should only be performed by slaves and hired strangers, the lower class, and never by the virtuous free people who should know what is laughable only to avoid it themselves (Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galiñanes 21). Jorge Figueroa-Dorrego and Cristina Larkin-Galiñanes remark that to Plato, not all members of society should engage in humour in the same manner and "humour production is to become a sign of social differentiation" (21).

at, and I will tell you who you are" (qtd. in Holland 75).[6] The bold presumption that laughter reveals the major characteristics, social standing, and virtue of the laugher started when we first talked about laughter.

Plato and Aristotle's distrustful attitude toward laughter is passed on to Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century; his view of laughter most strongly represents what John Morreall refers to as "the Superiority Theory" of laughter.[7] Hobbes claims, "the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from [the] sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly" (*Human Nature* 54-55). Though he says that we laugh from a sense of superiority, he also argues that laughter is a sign of a lesser mind, whose lack of ability forces one to find pleasure from others' imperfection. In his view, "much laughter at the defects of others, is a sign of pusillanimity. For of great minds, one of the proper works is, to help and free others from scorn; and compare themselves only with the most able" (*Leviathan* 38). Hobbes seems to follow the previous views of laughter, but his emphasis is laid on the sense of superiority. The essence of laughter for Hobbes is finding ourselves superior to others and feeling pleasure from the discovery that this is the case. Hobbes' theory implies that laughter reveals what we think about ourselves,

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[6] The quote is Norman Holland's translation of Marcel Pagnol's remark.

[7] Morreall sees that Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes all represent this theory which views laughter as "always directed at someone as a kind of scorn" (3). Other than "the Superiority Theory," there are also "the Relief Theory" which is a physiological approach to laughter seeing it "as the venting of excess nervous energy" (Morreall 6) and "the Incongruity Theory" which explains that laughter occurs when we detect incongruity in life.

especially our position relative to others.[8] Also, Hobbes suggests that the sudden glory in laughter denies any room for sympathy that a virtuous man should feel toward the inferior, unfortunate others. This idea that links laughter to the lack of sympathy appears again, though following a very different logic, in Henri Bergson's *Laughter* in 1900.

Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes all attribute negative qualities to the nature of laughter by seeing it as an expression of malice, vulgarity, a sense of superiority, and an unsympathetic mind. Accordingly, laughter became something to be constantly controlled and avoided, not an enjoyable, uplifting experience. In their anthology of writings about laughter and humor, Jorge Figueroa-Dorrego and Cristina Larkin-Galiñanes assert that laughter "was *prescribed* (in the sense of *restrained*) rather than *described* by the Classics" (180). The traditional theories of laughter deny the goodness of the pleasure we derive from laughing and consequently contributed to the restriction of the act. Gilhus argues that "laughter has again and again been subjected to critical discourse and systematization" (1), including stigmatization by religious discourses. He states, "Greek philosophers restricted it. Christian theologians condemned it" (1).[9] During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, much was written on the subject of humor, laughter, and comedy, but as before, they commonly dealt with "the age-old question of the acceptableness and propriety of laughter and comedy" (Figueroa-

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[8] Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galiñanes note that this Hobbesian view of laughter reflects "the Hobbesian conception of man's nature as a social creature in constant competition for positions for power, and egotistically striving for superiority over others" (218).

[9] Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galiñanes explain, "Calvinism viewed laughter as a sin because it turned people away from hard work. Laughing in excess was against the Protestant emphasis on efficiency, diligence, order, and rationality" (181).

Dorrego and Larkin-Galiñanes 311). In these writings, we can more clearly see how the theories of laughter actually affected and restricted the everyday behavior of an individual.

Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galiñanes explain that the opinions on wit, laughter, and humor expressed in eighteenth-century periodicals were "part of and parallel to the contemporary discussion on taste and politeness" (316). They describe the concept of "politeness" as "an ideal of behaviour that considered the individual essentially as a social being revolving in a social medium" (320). In this newly acquired importance of one's social behavior, laughter became an important component of one's social manners, and a keen wariness of inappropriate laughter was necessary, as illuminated in Lord Chesterfield's letter to his son written in 1748:

> Having mentioned laughing, I must particularly warn you against it: and I could heartily wish, that you may often be seen to smile, but never heard to laugh while you live. Frequent and loud laughter is the characteristic of folly and ill manners: it is the manner in which the mob express their silly joy at silly things; and they call it being merry. In my mind there is nothing so illiberal, and so ill-bred, as audible laughter. . . it is low buffoonery, or silly accidents, that always excite laughter; and that is what people of sense and breeding should show themselves *above*. (72, my italics)

Lord Chesterfield's advice to his son is quite extreme, disapproving all laughing whatsoever. At the end of his lecture, he even boasts that "nobody has ever heard me

laugh" (72). Lord Chesterfield wrote this letter to his illegitimate son, and Parvulescu explains that his goal was "to educate simultaneously the young and the deficient-by-birth toward acquiring a 'decency' consonant with what he calls a 'polite country'" (38). So, "[m]anners become paramount" (Parvulescu 38). To a man whose social standing was uncertain, laughter, or its absolute control, was recommended as critical in strengthening his social identity as a gentleman. Lord Chesterfield emphasizes that laughter belongs to the silly joys of the silly mob and his son should be "above" the "ill-bred" mass. The norms of social manners not only distinguish, but hierarchize individuals based on their social conduct, and laughter divides the low from the high, the vulgar from the sophisticated, the fool from the sensible, and the ill-bred from the genteel.

Although Lord Chesterfield's view of laughter corresponds with traditional theories of laughter, he is not theorizing on the nature of laughter, but providing practical advice to his son about the appropriate social behavior. His letter is an example showing how discourses on laughter evolve into the actual restriction of one's manner in one's social life. The dominant views of what laughter signify lead to discussions of how one should laugh or not laugh. However, it is usually neglected in these discussions that we laugh all kinds of laughs in real life, that laughter has many different faces—good-humored, pleasant, sociable, nervous, mocking, offensive, insolent, or hollow, etc.—while the discourses of laughter mostly deal with specific kinds of laughter. Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galiñanes' book contains extensive writings on laughter and humor including those of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Lord Chesterfield, and of more modern

theorists such as Bergson and Sigmund Freud, which, basically, are the names that are most frequently referred to in the studies of laughter. However, there lacks a more careful distinction in the meaning of laughter they each talk about: that what the traditional philosophers call vulgar is laughing at unfortunate, inferior others, that Bergson is concerned with the function of comedy, not laughing in general,[10] and that Freud is interested in the psychological dynamics of joking and how they are related to the unconscious. Laughter has a complexity that needs to be acknowledged in the critical studies of laughter.

Laughing is not always laughing at certain objects or people, or an occurrence in comedy or jokes. Yet as the most representative and influential writings on laughter focus on these limited roles, and as they mostly offer an unfavorable picture of laughter, they get incorporated into the discourses that restrain the everyday conduct of an individual. Bergson observes that we can only laugh at objects we feel emotionally detached from and claims, “laughter has no greater foe than emotion” (63), strengthening the idea that laughter is an unsympathetic act. Also, while not making any moral judgment about laughter like Hobbes, Bergson agrees that what provokes laughter is one’s sense of superiority, "an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbor" (148). For Freud, joking and laughing provide a vent for our sexual and hostile desires, which are repressed in a civilized society where “primary possibilities of enjoyment are lost” (*Joke* 96), and this view confirms laughter’s hostile

[10] Though Bergson titled his book *Laughter*, Morreall points out, “a more accurate title would have been *Humor*, or better, *Comedy*” (5).

and obscene nature.[11] So, suspicious views on laughter persist, and as we can see in the conduct literature and the novels that reflect the understanding of laughter in nineteenth-century society, these views result in controlling and oppressing the individual's desire for a laugh. Lord Chesterfield believes that what provoke laughter are only "low buffoonery, or silly accidents." Because he rejects every kind of laughter based on his narrow thought, his son is guided to ignore laughter's various tints and textures and lose all its pleasures.

Darwin points out that laughing can simply be the expression of one's joy that could come from "any trifling pleasure" such as meeting an old friend in the street or smelling a sweet perfume (195). It is not necessarily an expression that only occurs in a social situation or that has a social significance. However, in the history of laughter, or rather, the "civilizing of laughter" as Parvulescu calls it (7), the focus of the discussions was almost always on its social value, what it means to laugh at others, how laughter reveals one's morality, refinement, and social position, and whether laughter is a socially recommendable act or not. Because its social significance was emphasized, its control became critical in the cultivation of one's social manners. Darwin argues that the force of social norms can overpower our biological instincts and also suggests that these norms can be arbitrary: "The rules of etiquette always refer to conduct in the presence of, or towards others. They have no necessary connection with the moral sense, and are

[11] Though Freud explains laughter as a result of one's sexual and hostile desires, which makes laughter a socially undesirable, inappropriate act, Freud himself does not view laughing as negative. Rather, he sees laughter as a safety valve for forbidden feelings and thoughts, and Provine explains that for Freud, "all laugh-producing situations are pleasurable because they save psychic energy" (16).

often meaningless. Nevertheless, as they depend on the fixed custom of our equals and superiors, whose opinion we highly regard, they are considered almost as binding as are the laws of honour to a gentleman" (332). Therefore, as the prevailing opinions of laughter which are limited to certain aspects of laughter shape the way we interpret others' laughter, they become rules of conduct that we have to follow. As a result, the means of expressing one's pleasure, whether trifling or great, has been restricted.

My intention, then, is to return to the basic role of laughter as an expression of individual pleasure and analyze how the discourses of laughter that emphasized its social and moral value deprived individuals of a way to express their feelings. Laughter, of course, does not always express pleasure. Sometimes, one can laugh to feign satisfaction or delight, as a social courtesy or as a way to cover up unpleasant feelings. Some theorists and critics argue that laughter can be used as a "psychological survival skill" (Bilger 10), a way to cope with harsh and oppressive reality. For example, Herbert Spencer argues that "laughter is a result of the pleasure we take in escaping from the restraint of grave feelings" (304) enabling the release of nervous excitement. Wolfgang Iser views laughter as a reaction to helplessness and argues that through laughter, we can "free ourselves from entanglement in a situation that otherwise we could not cope with" (157). Since many agree that laughter can create an emotional distance from its object at the moment of its occurrence, they believe that laughing enables us to distance ourselves from difficult situations that can easily make us feel vulnerable. So, if we see the decrease of pain, stress, or discomfort as one kind of pleasure, laughter is, in many cases, related to pleasure. Therefore, by focusing on the element of pleasure in laughter, I aim

to illuminate the complexity of laughter and what it actually reveals, rather than fixing it to a single definition.

Considering the importance placed on laughter's social effects and the frequent reference to laughter as a means of social distinction, it is not surprising that discourses on laughter were often intertwined with gender discourses. For women, whose social conduct was more strictly observed and censured and whose social position and right to pleasure were deemed inferior and subordinate to those of men, laughing was a more serious and precarious matter. As laughter was read to indicate one's sense of superiority and a vulgar, unfeeling, and unsophisticated mind, more rigorous supervision and judgment followed women's laughter. Not only did laughter work to expose the laughing body of a woman in negative ways—especially as laughter was often described as violent and unruly—,[12] but it was believed to open up the mind of a woman to view as well. The features of ideal femininity—being submissive, harmonious, supportive, kind, and disciplined—were no less required in women's laughter than in women themselves, and since the qualities most often attached to laughter negated all requirements of femininity, laughing properly for a woman required much tact and prudence. If the history of laughter has constantly defined, confined, and regulated laughing, the gender discourses of the nineteenth century offered an image of the ideal woman with no laugh.

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[12] A laughing body was usually pictured as disorderly. Charles Bell provides a good example in *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression* (1824) when he portrays a body "convulsed with laughter": "He draws a full breath, and throws it out in interrupted, short, and audible cachinnations; the muscles of his throat, neck, and chest are agitated; the diaphragm is especially convulsed. He holds his sides, and, from the violent agitation, he is incapable of a voluntary act" (147). Darwin's description is not very different: "From the shaking of the body, the head nods to and fro. The lower jaw often quivers up and down, as is likewise the case with some species of baboons, when they are much pleased" (199).

I.2. The Intolerable "Lightness" of Woman's Laughter

In George MacDonald's short fairy tale, "The Light Princess" (1864), the author interestingly uses laughter as an indication of the princess's fatal flaw that needs to be overcome—or more correctly, dispelled—adopting the conventional notions of laughter as vulgar, insolent, selfish, and unsympathetic. Yet what really aggravates the matter, making the princess's laughter terrible and unacceptable, is that she is a woman and a princess. The story is a good example of how the dominant social view of laughter conflicts with women's individual pursuits of pleasure, forcing them to abandon the latter in order to achieve ideal femininity defined by social norms. The tale gradually proceeds toward the expected happy ending with the princess losing her former troublesome laughter, acquiring more respectable virtues as a princess, and being happily married to her true love, but while achieving all these, she loses the exquisite joy she once tasted with her laughter.

The story begins with a baby princess being cursed by her enraged aunt, a powerful witch who had not been invited to the baby's christening by the baby's father, the king. The witch places a peculiar enchantment on the baby, reciting,

> "Light of spirit, by my charms,
>
> Light of body, every part,
>
> Never weary human arms—
>
> Only crush thy parents' heart!" (195)

What seemed at first like "some foolish nursery rhyme" (195) turns out to be a terrible curse that "deprived the child of all her gravity" (195). Suddenly, the baby starts to float

in the air, losing all her weight, and begins to "laugh and crow" (195). So "[t]he mischief was done" (195). MacDonald does not simply translate being "light" in body and spirit as becoming less heavy in weight and getting silly or unserious in mind. He uses lightness as the exact opposite of gravity of mentality and bearing, and this extreme is demonstrated through ceaseless laughter. The princess's laughter becomes unbearable to her royal parents and crushes their heart as the witch wanted.

In the beginning, however, the story does not present the princess's laughter as a horrible and miserable matter that needs to be solved. Instead, the narrator comically depicts the king and queen troubling themselves over their daughter's happy laugh while the baby princess remains "floating in perfect comfort and satisfaction, as was testified by her peals of tiny laughter" (196). Regardless of the parents' concern and grief, the princess "laughed and grew—not fat, but plump and tall" (201), always "laugh[ing] at everybody and everything that came in her way" (201). The fact that the story quickly jumps over time and concentrates on the period when the princess turns seventeen indicates why her laughter really becomes a serious problem. The constant laughter of a baby is not as much a problem as the laughter of a grown-up lady. The comic tone of the narrative, which did not seem to sympathize with the worrying adults, now more humorlessly addresses the princess's problem. The grown-up princess's laughter is described as "immoderate" (201), and we are led to see why it is a tragedy that "[s]he never could be brought to see the serious side of anything" (201). The laughing princess does not have any sense of disgust, dignity, shame, and sympathy, and when she laughs at her parents from the ceiling "regard[ing] them with the most comical appreciation of

the position" (201), she recalls all the negative notions of laughter which mark her as a woman with no virtue. As U. C. Knoepflmacher puts it, we see how "the child develops into an unfeeling, narcissistic, increasingly shallow young woman" (*Ventures into Childland* 133).

Her laughter negates all conditions of ideal femininity; she shows no sympathy, but only laughs at the heartbreaking story of a beggar; she is not humble or submissive, as she displays her sense of superiority by literally looking down upon everything with a laugh, and she shows no discretion and decency when she "burst into a violent fit of laughter, threw herself backwards over the chair, and went rolling about the floor in an ecstasy of enjoyment" (203). Her enjoyment is depicted as violent, ugly, selfish, and cold-hearted, absolutely objectionable compared to the previous, benign picture of the baby princess as "a baby-laughter-cloud" (196). Above all, the biggest problem of the laughing princess is that she cannot love. The Metaphysicians the king calls in suggest, "Perhaps the best thing for the princess would have been to fall in love" (206), though they cannot devise any ways to accomplish that. Also, when they find out that the princess recovers her gravity inside water, they propose that "water from a deeper source might work a perfect cure" (208), meaning her tears. In other words, MacDonald implies that the ability to cry is essential in the ability to love and that they are both missing in the princess's "light" laughter.

The lesson of the fairy tale seems to be that good laughter needs a teardrop inside it. Describing the peculiarity of the princess's laughter, the narrator says there is something lacking in her laugh.

> She would laugh like the very spirit of fun; only in her laugh there was something missing. What it was, I find myself unable to describe. I think it was a certain tone, depending upon the possibility of sorrow—*morbidezza*, perhaps. She never smiled. (202)

There is no moderation, no softness in her laugh, and the narrator elaborates, "a real hearty laugh requires the incubation of gravity" (210). This is why the princess's laughter is heard as "strange sounds" (210) to strangers, not recognizable as a laugh at all. Pleasure itself is not enough to produce a good, hearty laugh. Thus, the happy ending of the story is only possible after the princess cries "[a]ll the pent-up crying of her life" (228) and exhibits "the sweetest, loveliest smile" (229) to the prince who sacrificed his life to make the princess happy. The sacrifice of a true love brings back the princess's ability to feel, and her tears are described as "wonderful" (228).

This narrative, after all, is about the princess being disciplined, being pulled down from her unbearable "lightness." However, MacDonald does not simply show this as an absolutely happy ending for everybody. The reformed princess has to learn how to walk from the beginning, constantly "falling down and hurting herself" (229), and complains, "I consider [gravity] very unpleasant. I feel as if I should be crushed to pieces" (228). Even after her happy marriage, she declares, "For my part, I was a great deal more comfortable without [gravity]" (229). It might seem that she is only complaining about physical gravity, but the princess who lost her former peals of laughter has lost the passionate delight she enjoyed before as well. The author leaves room for doubt whether it is a total cure, whether it is happiness or a loss and adjustment

that the princess achieves at the end. The composed happiness of the finale makes us wonder if the princess had to sacrifice her own pleasure for the happiness of all—her parents, the prince, and the state. Just as the story once said that her "perfect comfort and satisfaction . . . was testified by her peals of tiny laughter" (196), the disappearance of the laughter implies that maybe, at least for the princess herself, things were happier under the curse of lightness.

MacDonald's use of laughter as a sign of lightness, which in fact means having no virtue as a woman, is one specimen of showing how difficult it was to portray a positive and recommendable female laughter during the nineteenth century. He brings up all the popular prejudices against laughter, of its being ill-mannered and unfeeling, and even materializes the Hobbesian sense of superiority through the princess's floating body. The story indicates clearly that those negative notions conflict with the norms of ideal femininity, and as a result, laughter becomes a useful instrument when estimating female virtue. Moreover, what greatly harms the virtue of the "light" princess is the fact that she does not hesitate to express her own pleasure through laughing, the pleasure that no one can share or understand. Because, for women, putting the happiness of others before their own was expected as a basic duty. Eileen Gillooly asserts that nineteenth-century notion of femininity included "passivity, submission, dutifulness, gratitude, selflessness, maternal feeling, and sympathy" (xxii). Deborah Gorham similarly defines the ideal woman of the nineteenth century as "innocent, pure, gentle, and self-sacrificing" (5) and adds that such a woman "only existed in relationship to others" (38). In *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839), Sarah

Stickney Ellis even says that it is "impossible [for a woman] to be satisfied without actually doing something for the object of her regard" (16). Laughter is a form of self-expression, usually of one's own pleasure. In a social environment that demanded women to be selfless, laughing with her own delight can only be difficult and dangerous.

In *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*, published in 1858, Dinah Mulock Craik depicts the image of a "happy woman" as follows.

> [Y]ou will recognize her presence the moment she crosses your path. Not by her extreme liveliness—lively people are rarely either happy or able to diffuse happiness; but by a sense of brightness and cheerfulness that enters with her—as an evening sunbeam across your parlour wall. Like a fairy Order in the nursery tale, she takes up the tanged threads of your mind, and reduces them to regularity, till you distinguish a clear pattern through the ugly maze. She may be neither handsome, nor clever, nor entertaining, yet somehow she makes you feel "comfortable," because she is so comfortable herself. (252)

Craik portrays a happy woman through the viewpoint of "you," emphasizing her impact on others. The happiness of a woman passes onto the mind of others with its sunbeam-like diffusion of brightness. It calms and eases one's mind into regularity and is never lively. In this picture of serene and "comfortable" happiness, there is no room for laughter. The cheerfulness that enters with a happy woman is almost invisible and intangible like a fairy charm. One can feel its effect, not see its demonstration upon a face.

John Ruskin states in "Of Queen's Gardens" (1865) that "The perfect loveliness of a woman's countenance can only consist in that majestic peace, which is founded in the memory of happy and useful years" (95). And even a peaceful smile, he criticizes for being not self-sacrificing enough. He wonders to see a woman "with her happy smile upon her face, and no cloud upon her brow" (115) when she should know that outside of her garden wall, the world is "torn up by the agony of men" (115). Some interpret this as Ruskin's appealing for women to "take a more active, and, necessarily, a more openly critical role in enforcing the values of the home in the larger world outside" (Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder 79), which resembles the argument of the active feminists of the late Victorian years. However, this viewing of woman's happy smile as irresponsible and insufficiently sympathetic tells us that, for women, to be pleased and to smile—not even laugh—can hardly escape social censure. There are always others' distress and sorrow that a woman needs to care for, and a peaceful smile is an indication of negligence in her duty. Ruskin urges women to be more active, but he is urging them to be active in sacrificing their own smiles for the greater happiness.

If Ruskin reads women's smiles as negligent, Mary Wollstonecraft, an advocate of women's rights, criticizes women's smiles for being submissive and complaisant. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she laments that women are raised to seek only trifles and "barren amusement" (xxiii), with "the prevalent fondness for pleasure" (xxv), not knowing any nobler ambition or passion. While criticizing their pursuit of fleeting pleasures, she also objects to women's complaisant smiles. In Wollstonecraft's view, women frivolously smile, feeling satisfied and happy with the "hollow respect" of

men—"They will smile—yes, they will smile" (50)—when in reality, men are just "insultingly supporting their own superiority" (51). Women's smile is to Wollstonecraft a sign of compliance and lack of reason, of just being content with the reality that she finds aggravating. Contrasting to this obedient, thoughtless smile, she pictures herself laughing at the ridiculous ceremonies between the sexes that only perpetuate women's inferior and weaker position in society.

> So ludicrous, in fact, do these ceremonies appear to me that I scarcely am able to govern my muscles when I see a man start with eager and serious solicitude to lift a handkerchief or shut a door, when the lady could have done it herself, had she only moved a pace or two.
>
> A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it, though it may excite a horse-laugh. (52)

The urge for a horse-laugh that follows the critique of a complaisant smile reveals Wollstonecraft's strong resistance to the designated female role in her society. She refuses to be obedient or gratified and chooses to be rebellious and strong-willed. Her horse-laugh breaks all the rules of feminine social conduct, but she insists, "I will not stifle it." To distance herself from other women's laughter, Wollstonecraft has to imagine herself to be laughing the most unfeminine and unsightly laugh. She embraces the negative image of laughter rather than avoiding it to mark her desire to resist the unjust social system and rules.

The two extremes of woman's laughter presented in Wollstonecraft's work make us perceive the limited scope of laughter allowed to women of the nineteenth century.

Their laugh can be either light or just ugly. For different reasons and in different meanings, Ruskin and Wollstonecraft both view women's happy smile as "light"—negligent or frivolous. Wollstonecraft's horse-laugh is meant to be revolting, refusing any traits of femininity. Thus, the above-mentioned portrayals of women's laughter lead us to the crucial question of whether it is possible to envision a positive and beautiful laughter that goes beyond the limits of ideal femininity for a woman in nineteenth-century texts. Though Wollstonecraft's horse-laugh seems like the only option apart from submissive or silly laughs, we can find in the novels of Austen, Brontë, and Dickens that these authors pondered ways to represent the complexity of female laughter and to add some beauty to the laugh. The demise of the light princess's exquisite laughter shows us that it is necessary and significant to rediscover laughter as a positive experience for women.

I.3. The Feminist Revisiting of Woman's Laughter

The critical attempt to examine the position and value of women's laughter in literature is not new. Especially within feminist criticism, many studies have emphasized the subversive power of female laughter that defies and mocks patriarchal social norms, following the lead of Wollstonecraft's laugh. As David McWhirter notes, feminist critical works of the 1980s and 1990s led by Regina Barreca and Nancy A. Walker shared an assumption "that women's laughter is inherently subversive, compatible with and perhaps even essential to feminist political struggle" (189). Laughter was believed to be about one's position and hierarchy, and women were undeniably regarded as social

inferiors to men. However, because of the sense of power that accompanies laughter, feminist critics have argued that when women laugh, it can attack and even overturn the established social hierarchy, momentarily providing a way for outburst and rebellion for women. Most of the studies are concerned with women's humor and comedy, not everyday laughter, and so, they concentrate on the power of laughing *at*. Though their focus is different from my own, their strong voices have contributed to show how the study of women's laughter can add a valuable perspective to feminist critique.

Many critics agree that for a long time, women's laughter or comedy was deemed to be nonexistent. Gail Finney remarks that it has only recently been acknowledged that "not only men but also women can laugh; that what's more, not only men but also women can make others laugh" (1). She argues that when Schopenhauer, Bergson, and Freud wrote about humor, laughter, and jokes, "they have meant male humor, laughter, and jokes" (1). Barreca also states, "the history of comedy has in fact been the history of male comedy" (*Last Laughs* 10).[13] Bergson explains that laughter in comedy can work as a social corrective, humiliating its objects into correction and improvement. Because of this view of laughter and comedy, Walker points out that for women to be humorists means that "they must break out of the passive, subordinate position mandated for them by centuries of patriarchal tradition and take on the power accruing to those who reveal the shams, hypocrisies, and incongruities of the dominant

[13] Walker also points out that "women have been officially denied the possession of—hence the practice of—the sense of humor" (8).

culture" (8). The belief that women are passive, submissive, and inferior prevented the idea that women can laugh and make jokes.

During the nineteenth century, there certainly existed doubts about women's laughter and humor. In his 1871 article "Feminine Humour," Leslie Stephen writes that the humor of women simply "does not exist" (75). Instead of seeing this as women's incompetence or flaw, he explains the lack through the incompatibility of feminine delicacy and humor. He insists that most humorous writings are "totally incompatible with the feminine sense of delicacy" and observes women's lack of humor as the product of "the influence of our lofty standard of feminine decorum" and "the atmosphere of extreme propriety in which ladies are generally brought up" (75). He also argues that the "monotonous and decorous life" of women deprives them of the delight of humorous insight (75). Although it seems that he believes women are originally capable of humor as much as men, at the end, he announces, "till some woman succeeds in the task, it is at least open to any one to infer that feminine mind is generally weak upon this side" (75). When Stephen evaluates Austen or George Eliot as only possessing mild or "latent" humor (75), his prejudiced opinion against women's humor reveals itself. By concluding "that women are too good to be humorists" (75), he returns to his beginning premise and confirms that the humor of women "does not exist." Although Stephen's article maintains an indulgent tone of criticism, Margaret D. Stetz shows that the atmosphere of the nineteenth century was in fact much more hostile to the laughter and humor of women. She discusses how the so-called New Woman writers of the late nineteenth century confronted the prejudice that decried woman as "incapable by nature of laughter

of her own---humorless, without wit, unable to address a reader except through harangues or angry sputters" (221).

Feminist critics since the late twentieth century have tried to exorcize this bias against women by rebuilding the tradition of women's humor and highlighting the power of female laughter that ridicules and rejects the patriarchal norms that confine and distort women's nature. Barreca claims to explore "the uncharted regions where women laugh their hearts out" (*Last Laughs* 4) and argues that "comedy by women is about decentering, dislocating, and de-stabilising the world" (*Last Laughs* 15). Karen C. Gindele examines how "[f]eminist comedy, aiming to liberate, stages the collapse of patriarchal desire to enable female individual *and* social desire" (40). The feminist revisiting of women's laughter in literature is significant as it points out the long-established neglect of woman's laughter and comedy and provides a new perspective from which to view laughing women. They do not rewrite the dominant views of laughter's nature, but rather utilize those views to show what happens when a seemingly powerless woman wields the power of laughter, as an expression of hostility, mockery, and a sense of superiority. However, their studies inevitably limit themselves within the subject of humor and comedy, concentrating on the power of laughing *at.* They address the difficulty and danger women faced when laughing within the prevailing social norms and customs, but they do not deal with the everyday, ordinary laughs that do not necessarily see men or male-dominated systems as their targets.

Laughter is plural and has many different aspects.[14] As Provine indicates, it can be "warm, authoritative, cooperative, ineffectual, or just plain annoying" (3). Moreover, women's laughter is not meaningful and powerful only when it challenges and disrupts the patriarchal system or the domineering men. The mere fact that a woman lets out laughter can be significant in creating tension between women's right to laughter and the oppressive social rules; even when women stifle their laughs to comply with those rules, we can get a glimpse of their repressed desire for pleasure. Without being necessarily subversive or aggressive, the laugh of a woman can reveal many important aspects of nineteenth-century society and its control of a woman's manners and emotional expressions. If the feminist studies of women's comedy have demonstrated the need to rediscover woman's laughter, my dissertation intends to illuminate what has been overlooked in those studies and expand the perspective of feminist criticism.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous presents an interesting image of the laughing Medusa: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (255). Medusa, for Cixous, represents what have been regarded as dangerous, dark, and deadly, the desires and writings of women that have been oppressed and silenced in the phallocentric system and from which women as well as men were told to turn their heads away. Cixous casts away the darkness imposed on the image of Medusa and changes it into "the symbol for

[14] For this reason, I will sometimes use "laughs" instead of "laughter" in my study in order to stress the plurality of laughter and show that each individual can have different laughs in different occasions and that there are different forms, meanings, and functions of laughter.

the open, overflowing, laughing bodies of women" (Gilhus 103). It is remarkable that Cixous imagines what will pour forth from a woman's body to be laughter that is beautiful. The nineteenth-century novels tell us that woman's laughter was considered as dangerous, immoral, light, and sometimes, even monstrous. My dissertation is an effort to illuminate the missing, or unnoticed, beauty of woman's laughter and the pleasure it delivers. The three authors I examine—Austen, Brontë, and Dickens—all represent the difficulty women faced in their experience of laughter during the nineteenth century. They understand the individual desire for pleasure behind laughter and also the deeply rooted social prejudices against laughing. Each writer responds differently to the social construction and control of laughter, particularly in terms of gender, revealing their different views on gender ideology of the time. All three writers suggest the positive virtue of laughter but also portray the reality that seldom allows female laughter to have any positive influence, whether over the laugher herself or over others. Through the following chapters, I will explore the various and complex ways of portraying woman's laughter in the novels and elucidate why laughter should be read as an integral part of each author's artistic vision.

I.4. Chapters

The following chapters focus on the representations of laughter in novels of Austen, Brontë and Dickens. Although the three novelists are all nineteenth-century writers, it is not difficult to discover that laughter does not take an equal share or function in their fictional worlds, reflecting the diverse perspectives on laughter that existed during the

period. Chapter II discusses Jane Austen, who not only was a great comic writer but also took great effort in creating a variety of laughing characters. Among the three novelists, Austen presents the widest range of laughing female characters who are not easily categorizable as good or bad, though they usually take secondary roles in the narrative. As a female writer famous for her wit, Austen directly deals with the conflict between the norms of ideal femininity and women's laughter, and she contemplates ways to find a balance between social and individual happiness. This chapter emphasizes the role of Austen's novels as an education on the manners and values surrounding laughter that is very different from the one offered in the conduct literature of her time. I examine the eighteenth-century conduct manuals that were popular during Austen's time to show how they unanimously censured laughter as an expression of momentary, insubstantial pleasure and an inappropriate social conduct. Even though Austen acknowledges that laughter can be selfish, insensitive, and intolerable, she indicates that woman's pursuit of pleasure is also important, not only for her own happiness, but for the good of the entire community. After analyzing some remarkable laughing women in Austen's novels (such as Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Palmer, Lydia Bennet, and Mary Crawford) to see what makes their laughter ultimately "unforgivable," the chapter concentrates on Emma Woodhouse, the protagonist who goes through great troubles because of her love for laughter and who finally achieves perfectly happy and approvable laughter at the end of her story. Departing from the common understanding that laughter breaks, rather than enhances, relationships, Austen shows a belief that true intimacy can stem from understanding and sharing each other's laughter. This chapter demonstrates that Austen's education on

laughter defies the conventional norms of conduct literature and embraces the beauty of female laughter.

Chapter III examines Charlotte Brontë and her rather laughless fictional works. Laughter seems to play a minimal role in Brontë's bleak world, but its relative absence becomes a powerful tool in Brontë's critique of a patriarchal society where laughter is but a privilege of social superiors, especially men, and where women's laughter gets constantly confined, abused, and persecuted. At first, it seems that Brontë agrees to the idea that laughter delivers power and superiority as she focuses on the life of her socially disadvantaged, marginalized protagonists who are alienated from laughter, but soon, we can see that Brontë tries to rewrite the nature of that power as an indication of one's inner strength and autonomy. Resisting their social reality and attempting to overcome their vulnerability, Brontë's powerless protagonists learn to use laughter as a mask and a weapon to hide their inner secrets and overturn the existing hierarchy. This chapter discusses how Brontë engages with the medical, psychological, and social discourses of the Victorian period that tried to define, interpret, and control female nature and interiority and how her female characters use laughter to win in the battle of interpretation. The chapter also attends to Brontë's emphasis on the emotional burden that an individual woman has to carry while trying to hide her true feelings beneath laughter in front of the oppressive male gaze, which suggests the value of truly happy laughter that is rarely possible for her marginalized female characters. In the last section of the chapter, I concentrate on *Jane Eyre* and its protagonist's journey to achieve her own alternative laughter that could give her real pleasure. Jane uses laughter to protect

herself from the penetrative male gaze and to show her independent mind, but throughout her life, she encounters different laughs of other women that make her understand the limited scope of laughter allowed for women in her society and also the ways their laughs are being manipulated and restrained by masculine norms. Unlike Austen, Brontë provides a pessimistic view on the possibility of woman's truly happy laughter inside a patriarchal society.

Chapter IV discusses Charles Dickens and his vision of happy, communal laughter that resonates in many of his novels. Dickens is, without doubt, the most open champion of laughter who continuously uses laughter as a channel for sympathy, love, and happiness. Yet, while his novels overflow with laughter, finding a distinctive female laugh in his work is much harder than locating a memorable male laugh. Although Dickens seems to move far away from the negative view of laughter, cheering its positive social influence, he still perceives laughter as an indication of socially defined power when he allows that power only to his male characters. This chapter investigates the drawback of Dickens' vision of the all-inclusive male laughter that subordinates women and their laughs, which eventually reveals the limitation of Dickens as a writer confined within the dominant gender norms. Through a close examination of his laughing characters, this chapter shows that the transmissible power of the boisterous, hearty laughter that Dickens upholds is essentially gendered as masculine. In its last section, the chapter examines *David Copperfield* where Dickens shows a more complex and ambiguous attitude toward the gender constrictions on laughter that eventually block the free exchange of pleasure between sexes and the survival of nonconforming female

laughs. The novel is a story of David's growth that is only possible through overcoming his own feminine laugh and expelling the inappropriate, yet attractive, female laughs. The feelings of loss and guilt that enclose the narrative indicate Dickens' ambiguous stance toward the lost laughs and also his inability to incorporate them into David's success story. This chapter addresses the limitation Dickens shows as a writer who cannot move beyond the norms of his society and the consequent limitation that appears in his positive vision of happy shared laughter.

As shown above, though my focus is on the representation of women's laughter, I also examine male laughter in order to evaluate the position of woman's laughter more accurately and to better understand each writer's attitude towards the gender norms of the nineteenth century. The male and female characters in the novels discussed do not embody laughter in identical ways, which reflects the difference in the scope of agency allowed to and the different virtues required from men and from women. Each author's way of representing that difference reveals their views on the gender issues of their time. Moreover, even though all three authors attempt to portray women's laughter as beautiful, their views on the social reality and women's position therein make them provide very different endings for those beautiful laughs. Barbara Korte emphasizes the importance of studying body language in literature and argues, "non-verbal behavior in literature is always 'significant': it is integral to the text's artistic design even when it cannot be read as a sign with a clearly defined meaning" (5). My dissertation starts off with the belief that the representation of laughter is indeed an integral part of a writer's artistic design that effectively reveals his or her perspective on women's place in society

and their rights to individual pleasure. The complexity in the three authors' representations of laughter resembles the complexity of the act itself that reveals so much more than it seems to reveal.

CHAPTER II

JANE AUSTEN'S LESSONS ON LAUGHTER[15]

> "The letter which I have this moment received from you has diverted me beyond moderation. I could die of laughter at it, as they used to say at school. You are indeed the finest comic writer of the present age."
>
> - Jane Austen, to Cassandra (*Letters* 7)

Jane Austen, who herself was one of the finest comic writers of her age, indeed enjoyed laughing at her sister Cassandra's entertaining, pleasant letters and responding with her own. In the above letter written in 1796, Austen reveals the delight of being "diverted beyond moderation" and also the pleasure of sharing laughter with her sister. Although they are not laughing at the same moment, their exchange of laughter and amusement becomes a source of their intimacy. Vivien Jones points out that the humorous correspondence between the sisters suggests their deep understanding of each other's feelings. Jones argues that because laughter and humor were stigmatized for women, Austen's ironic, funny letters and her affirmation of her excessively laughing self reflect how "Cassandra offers an intimacy beyond politeness which provides relief from the emotional exhaustion of otherwise inescapable, and often empty, social

[15] A part of this chapter, especially its last section on *Emma*, previously appeared as "After the Laughter: Seeking Perfect Happiness in *Emma*" published in Erin M. Goss, ed. *Jane Austen and Comedy*. Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2019.

obligations" (V. Jones xxii). Especially because laughing could cause her to be an object of misinterpretation and censure, Austen is expressing her trust in her sister through the candid description of her laughter.

The short passage above from Austen's letter alludes to several important issues that this chapter aims to address. As a well-known humorist as well as a public female writer, Austen faces a difficult struggle between her relish for a big, cheerful laugh and her sense of propriety. Her letter undoubtedly shows how willingly she enjoyed a happy laugh, but at the same time, it reveals her awareness of the "moderation" expected from her laughter. She cannot describe herself as dying of laughter without mentioning that she knows she is crossing a line. This delicacy she retains as a writer is what ultimately allows her to keep her propriety while playing with the boundary of proper manners. Moreover, her free expression of excitement and laughter in the letter suggests the nature of the intimacy she shares with her sister. For Austen, true intimacy involves appreciating and sharing laughter. This is rare intimacy in light of the multilayered prejudice and intolerance against women's laughter during Austen's time. Unlike most conduct book writers who only emphasize the harmful social effect of laughter, Austen seeks the possibility of intimacy that derives from laughter. Becoming a public writer famous for her wit, Austen dares to move beyond the private space between sisters to express her love for laughter and pursue her search for a reader who could possibly be another 'Cassandra.'

Focusing on these issues, this chapter will study the portrayal of laughing women in Jane Austen's novels in order to understand Austen's view on women's expression of

pleasure. First, I will attempt to restore laughter as a site of pleasure which has been neglected in previous critical works on Austen. In her novels, Austen reveals her consciousness of the gender norms reinforced by contemporary conduct literature that defines the role of women to find pleasure only in pleasing and comforting others, which is related to the discourses that restrain women's laughter. Whenever a female character laughs in her novels, what becomes important is how that laughter is felt, received, and judged by others, and this determines the morality and propriety of the act. For Austen, the problem is that women's free expression of pleasure seems incompatible with their observance of the proper, decent manners. For the most remarkable laughing female characters, including Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer in *Sense and Sensibility*, Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, laughter works as both a charm and a defect in their personality. Austen does not deny the pleasure expressed through laughter, but individual laughter not shared or understood by others cannot escape being censured as selfish and improper and only blocks any growth of intimacy. While maintaining a distance from these laughing characters, Austen guides her readers to consider what is lacking in their "unforgivable" laughter, an expression borrowed from Elinor Dashwood describing Mrs. Palmer's laughter as the one thing she cannot forgive about her. After reviewing prior criticism on Austen's use of laughter, this chapter analyzes what makes the laughter of certain female characters "unforgivable" and move on to discuss one female character whose laughter appears to be "forgivable": Emma Woodhouse. Focusing on *Emma* in detail in the last section of this chapter, I illuminate the complex lessons on laughter that Austen provides for her

readers which teach them how to laugh with goodness as well as pleasure. Also, by contemplating both the social and individual effects of laughter, I discuss how Austen probes the possibility of achieving a laugh that could be a pleasure to oneself as well as to others. This is where Austen departs from the social restriction put on women's laughter, and in her lessons on laughter, Austen seeks intimacy that could stem from one's pleasant laughter.

II.1. Laughing Austen, Laughing Women

Austen's talent in provoking laughter is universally acknowledged. A. C. Bradley says, "Jane Austen's favourite attitude, we may ever say her instinctive attitude, is, of course, that of the humorist" (70). Austen's narratives are filled with witty, ironic, or satirical comments and descriptions. When reading *Pride and Prejudice*, readers would laugh or chuckle at the comically exaggerated manners of Mr. Collins; the striking contradiction between overly sensitive, vociferous Mrs. Bennet and unresponsive, cynical Mr. Bennet; or at the stiff didacticism and the ridiculous piano performance of Mary Bennet. Humor adds the pleasure of reading Austen's novels and also becomes a useful means to deliver the author's critical insights. By making her readers laugh at her characters, Austen makes them laugh at the artificial rules and values of the society, self-indulgence of feelings, lack of moral principles, and all kinds of foolishness and vanity. Readers and critics have responded to and interpreted Austen's humor and laughter in various ways, and one significant thing that the previous criticisms have revealed is that Austen's position as a humorist cannot be separated from her gender identity, her

position as a female writer. Her novel is her reaction to the dominant cultural views on women's laughter, and many critics emphasize that Austen attempts to expand the limited understanding of laughter's role and value.

Because Austen's laughter was viewed as the laughter of a woman, it was deemed benign, unimpressive, and almost negligible during her own time. While examining the early reviews of Austen's works, B. C. Southam remarks, "Notably absent from . . . all the contemporary views of Jane Austen's work, is any sign that her readers were conscious of her satire, an edge turned towards themselves" (14). Austen's work was viewed as "so very comfortable" (Southam 14) to read, and when D. H. Harding exposed Austen's "Regulated Hatred" in 1940, he pointed out the ongoing misreading of Austen's satire, how her "unexpected astringencies" (6) and "disintegrating attack[s]" (11) were still being overlooked by "the comfortable reader" (6) as "slight imperfections" or "trifling errors of tone" (6). Harding explains that Austen had to hide her seriously critical portraitures of society behind the exaggerated caricatures in order to earn the love of the public she greatly needed as a writer (12), and the readers who were "not ready to accept her disconcerting account of the ways and values of their own society" (Southam 17) were willing to accept Austen's novels as simply pleasant and decent.

Leslie Stephen's evaluation of Austen in "Feminine Humour" shows that misjudging of Austen's humor was the result of underestimating women's humor in general. In his 1871 essay, Stephen insists, "They like Miss Austen . . . because her humour (to use a vulgar, but the only phrase) is drawn so excessively mild. There is not

only nothing improper in her books, nothing which could prevent them from being given by a clergyman to his daughter as a birthday present; but there is not a single flash of biting satire. She is absolutely at peace with her most comfortable world" (75). Summarizing Austen's fictional world as only "comfortable," he asserts that Austen's writing provokes "a gentle smile" at best, never a burst of laughter (75). To modern critics such as Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, who focuses on the bawdiness of Austen's humor, Stephen's view is an obvious and intentional misreading. It is only because Stephen ignores Austen's ridiculing of Mr. Collins, a clergyman, that he thinks her book is an ideal present to a clergyman's daughter. To support his assumption that humor of woman does not exist, he reduces Austen's humor to be "excessively mild," and thus, properly feminine.

Erin M. Goss suggests that the blindness to the acuity of Austen's humor reflects determination to ignore unpleasant and uncomfortable aspects of woman's comedy and laughter. She argues that Harding's analysis "opened the door easily to accusations of a misanthropy that had been held at bay through repeated insistences on her gentle and even demure humor" (5) and remarks, "It is difficult, evidently, to know how to respond to a woman who laughs" (5). The way of reading Austen's humor is closely related to the way of reading woman's laughter, and Austen had to be wise and careful in her use of humor since as Heydt-Stevenson notes, the contemporary social norms "required women writers to represent elevated moral principles while becoming embodiments of chastity and modesty" (16). Since her humor was evidently "at odds with social expectations of the woman novelist of her time" (Heydt-Stevenson 4), it was necessary

for Austen to be subtle in her use of laughter. And because of the confined social view, most readers did not see beyond their expectations and took Austen's novel as a mild pleasure.

Austen's letter to her sister proves that she had a keen sense of humor and enjoyed a wild laugh, but within the limitation of her society, the power of her laughter was lost and unrecognized. So it was not until the twentieth century that Austen was generally identified as a writer skilled at satire and irony and as a writer who shows serious consideration on the role of laughter. Many critics argue that Austen not only uses humor as a major tool in her novels, but also tries to reveal the various aspects of laughter that move beyond its function to ridicule, attack, and humiliate. Illuminating laughter's complexity is a way for Austen to allow more room for laughter for women. Emphasizing Austen's position as a female writer in the context of the male-dominated literary world where women's use of humor was discouraged and restrained, Nicholas Mason asserts that Austen had to find ways to combine humor with feminine virtue. He points out that Austen has been often thought of as "one of the last great satirists of the British Enlightenment" (213) and explains that this can cause a problem since the eighteenth-century satire "with its decidedly 'unfeminine' tendencies towards aggression, cantankerousness, lewdness, and political squabbling, has generally been considered a distinctively masculine domain" (214). Eighteenth-century satire was full of "metaphors of violence and warfare," which reinforced "the dominant belief that

proper women should stifle their wit" (Mason 214).[16] Hence, Mason argues that Austen develops a new satirical mode and convention by combining satire with sensibility and by becoming a writer who "valued both properly directed ridicule and human sympathy" (215). Mason's argument implies that Austen could not transcend or ignore the gender norms of her society and had to find ways to compromise her humor and her gender. But it also shows that Austen rejects the idea that women cannot be satirists.

Thus, as a female comic writer, Austen attempted to change or expand the perspectives on laughter, showing that proper women can also laugh. Patricia Meyer Spacks and Jan Fergus demonstrate that for Austen, laughter is a multilayered subject. In her article "Austen's Laughter," Spacks examines how Austen distinguishes between "acceptable and unacceptable" modes of laughter (80). According to Spacks, Austen represents the characters who laugh as more attractive than others,[17] but she also reveals her awareness of the moral danger one can fall into through laughter and makes her characters undergo a certain education on the proper, acceptable boundary of laughter. While Spacks examines how Austen teaches us to avoid "laughing at" wrong things, Fergus shows that Austen distinguishes the difference between "laughing at" and "laughing with" or "laughing at oneself." Fergus regards "laughing at" as "a strategy of domination" (104) mostly used by men and argues that Austen reserves two different

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[16] This idea is also shown in the contemporary conduct literature, representatively by John Gregory in *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*. Here Gregory warns his daughters that "[w]it is the most dangerous talent you can possess" (30). He argues that laughter is seldom united with delicacy and softness, which are the most important qualities for women in his view.

[17] Spacks notes, "Even Jane, admirable Jane, seems a trifle boring in her relative lack of humor" ("Laughter" 72).

modes of laughter—"laughing with" and "laughing at oneself"—for her female characters so that they can exert power through laughter differently from men. Fergus shows that Austen is interested in more complicated strategies of laughing, "strategies that create communal feeling instead of establishing dominance" (104). Spacks' and Fergus' studies attempt to reveal more complex dimensions in Austen's use of laughter, but they do not depart from the traditional discourses of laughter in their prioritizing of the social value of the act. The meaning of laughter for the laughing individual remains undervalued.

On the other hand, feminist critics have succeeded in seeing laughter as a means of self-expression for women, but their study limits the value of that expression to women's confrontation against the norms of male dominated society. If the above-mentioned critics deal with Austen's attempt to rewrite laughter's nature as hostile, immoral, and unsympathetic, other feminist critics argue that Austen uses laughter as the very means of ridicule and attack in order to criticize the conventional, idealized view of femininity. These critics defy the idea that Austen's laughter works within the proper boundary set by the dominant discourse. Regina Barreca, Audrey Bilger, and Eileen Gillooly all share the idea that Austen's laughter serves a feminist purpose of mocking the masculine, patriarchal norms of society and its ideals of femininity.[18] These three

[18] To some extent, their ideas are similar to Mason's as they all argue that Austen recognizes and rejects the male/masculine humor and sets a new type of humor for women; Barreca describes this as "women's humor," Bilger as "feminist humor," and Gillooly as "feminine humor." For Gillooly, Austen's humor holds different qualities from male humor and allows women to express and deal with their frustration within masculine society. If male humor presumes an emotional distance from the object, "feminine humor" works with empathy and "maternally seek[s] to protect the victim from suffering" (Gillooly 41), the victim who is usually a woman suffering from male violence and oppression. Barreca explains in

critics characterize Austen's gendered humor in somewhat different ways, but they agree that this new humor provides women with a means of self-expression and resistance within the male dominant society. Gillooly even characterizes female humor as "hysteria" since women can express their unspeakable desire in a converted form through laughter (32).

Thus, in feminist criticism, female laughter in Austen's novels has been understood to have a subversive force that resists the dominant system and its decorum. This idea seems to contradict Marilyn Butler's well-known argument for 'conservative Austen.' Butler, in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, argues that Austen is "far less critical of contemporary society in its essence than Ben Jonson, Dryden, Swift, Pope, or Fielding had been" and says that for most of Austen's heroines, "moral progress consists in discerning, and submitting to, the claims of the society around them" (1). On the contrary, Bilger states that Austen achieves a great degree of "liberation by satirizing the standards of female conduct and by creating characters who mock authority and gleefully reject traditional notions of decorum" (86). Laughter, for these feminist critics, becomes a valuable means for Austen to deliver her critical, non-conformist stance without being branded overtly subversive.[19] Although feminist critics reveal the

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Untamed and Unabashed that, unlike in male comedy where women usually appear as "sexually manipulative, slyly nasty, and emotionally dishonest" (16), in women's comedy, "witty woman is in control" (17). So "women's humor" is about women's "reclamation of certain forms of control over [their] own lives" (Barreca, *Untamed* 12). Bilger also interprets "feminist humor" as "psychological survival skill" as well as "emancipatory strategy for women in a sexist society" (10).

[19] According to the feminist critics, laughter can provide female writers with a safe, prudent weapon to attack the masculine social norms as they could hide and disguise their violence and rage under the cover of humor and laughter: "humor not only camouflages their attack on cherished nineteenth-century values like female passivity but, by charming its readers, disarms any possible objection to their insurrection as

subversive power of Austen's laughing characters, their reading tends to simplify the nature of laughter. They define laughter's function as to attack and mock, while setting up a binary opposition between men and women. Laughter is seen to resist, not to accommodate, the formation of intimacy between characters, especially between men and women. Considering that Austen's main plot commonly heads toward the realization of romantic relationship, the feminist criticism shows limited understanding of laughter and its function. As Fergus points out, Austen's positive, original portrayal of laughter includes her attempt to see laughter as a possible bond between people.

As a whole, whether critics see Austen's use of laughter as didactic, discerning, reformative, or even subversive, what they are all focusing on is how Austen responds to the dominant view of "laughing at." They examine how Austen adds new aspects to it, how she discovers different modes of laughter, and what object Austen criticizes through her laughter. However, as a female writer who loves to laugh and to make others laugh, Austen also responds to the contemporary discourses that restrict both women's experience and expression of pleasure. Seeing laughter as an everyday expression of an individual, beyond its function in comedy or humor, is essential in the ongoing critical discussions on the subversiveness of Austen's laughter. Not only in her use of humor, but in her diverse representations of laughing female characters, Austen supports

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well" (Gillooly xxiv). When too direct an attack on society could harm the reputation of female writers, "comedy can serve as an excellent vehicle for making radical ideas palatable to an audience that might otherwise be offended by them" (Bilger 9).

women's desire for laughter. For Austen, laughter performs a significant function in women's lives as an expression of their individual pleasure.

During Austen's time, the social discourses that regulate woman's laughter were closely connected to the ones regulating their pleasure. Numerous conduct manuals were tutoring and reinforcing the ideal conduct and manners of femininity to young women, and both women's laughter and seeking of pleasure were discouraged as a sign of improper femininity. Penelope Joan Fritzer argues that Austen was greatly influenced by the eighteenth-century conduct books that were being continually reprinted during the early nineteenth century (2). In these books, pleasure was introduced as a risky subject that needs to be approached cautiously. James Fordyce, in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1776), the book used so famously by Mr. Collins to educate the Bennet girls in *Pride and Prejudice*, warns his readers of falling into the temptation of undesirable pleasures and states, "The love of promiscuous amusement, how innocent soever it may often seem, and sometimes be, ensnares multitudes of your sex" (47). Fordyce says that young girls "run," "laugh," and "prattle" while enjoying this "promiscuous amusement," but they should acquire as they grow "a quicker perception of what is decent, and of what is wise" (47). So their laughter needs to be displaced by their blush, which he deems as "the precious colouring of virtue" (47). While warning women of falling into the dangerous traps of entertainment, Fordyce attempts to define what should be the proper pleasure for women as well: "Ah! my young friends, what pleasure can be compared to that of conferring felicity?" (17). He affirms that true happiness for women can only come from the provision of happiness for others and this can be best effected at home:

"the truest pleasures, and the fairest prospects, that humanity knows; the pleasures which are enjoyed at home, and the prospects which include a family" (56). What Fordyce wants his young female readers to have is the proper perception to discern "the truest pleasures" from the foolish, selfish amusements.

This is a common instruction that can be found in many conduct books. In most cases, writers caution young women against pursuing momentary pleasure and advise them to turn their minds to more lasting, stable, and solid happiness. Lady Sarah Pennington, in *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters* (1761), asserts that a gay life is nothing but "a short Forgetfulness of Misery" and says, "restless Temper is frequently the Product of a too early Pursuit of Pleasure in the early Part of Life, to the Neglect of those valuable Improvements which would lay the Foundation of a more Solid and Permanent Felicity" (22). In *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1744), Wetenhall Wilkes distinguishes the "well-tim'd and well-chosen Recreations [that] are more solid and lasting" from "short-liv'd Mirth" whose violence fatigues a mind (94). Wilkes says that "if Pleasure be the Lot of human Nature, it must lie in somewhat beyond this Life" (7). For these writers, more solid, permanent pleasure for women is only possible by leading a virtuous life: "For all the Satisfaction you can promise your selves, how securely soever you may think of Happiness, is vain and dangerous, except that only which proceeds from a Sense of Modesty, Obedience, Humility, and such like Virtues. This is the Standard of your Worth and Happiness" (Essex 20).

If pleasure that stems from virtue is introduced as true happiness, pleasure that comes with laughter appears to stand on the opposite side. In most conduct manuals, laughter appears as a sign of one's enjoying the "wrong" kinds of pleasure. Laughter is not a major subject of these books, but when it is discussed, it is almost always connected to negative virtues and presented as an unacceptable manner. Suggesting that laughter is associated with the momentary, inferior kinds of pleasure rather than with true happiness, Fordyce claims, "She that cannot distinguish between laughter and happiness, never knew what the latter means" (93). For Fordyce, laughter, whether the "loud laugh, or childish titter, or foolish simper," provides an "indication of a light mind" (67), and "the loud bursts of unmeaning laughter" directly counter "[t]he sigh of compassion" which he insists is more musical to men's ears (94). Clearly, Fordyce uses laughter as a mark that one both lacks and fails to deserve sympathy.

Without considering that there might be differences among women, or that women might have pleasure of their own, Fordyce asserts that every woman should have the same standard for the truest pleasures and that that standard must involve the sacrifice of one's own claims to pleasure. Also, to emphasize the need for women's self-denial, Fordyce highlights the importance of their self-command and suggests that laughter is a result of its failure.

> When the heart overflows with gaiety, is there no danger of its *bursting* the proper bounds? Is not extreme vivacity a near borderer on folly? To prevent its breaking loose, and throwing itself into very serious

> inconveniences, into a very hurtful conduct, will surely require the check of self-command. (87-88, my italics)

Fordyce earlier uses the word "burst" when he describes "the loud bursts of unmeaning laughter" and uses it here again to denote an overflowing gaiety that violates the proper bounds. The "bursting" of laughter is equal to the "bursting" of proper bounds, which marks the failure of self-command. To achieve true happiness, women have to learn self-control and regulate their desire for the immediate, selfish indulgence of pleasure and devote themselves to the lifelong practices of virtue and endless services for domestic felicity. It is interesting to see how laughter works as the enemy of virtue and of the path to the eternal happiness. As he never describes laughter as a positive, allowable act, it is always "loud," inappropriate, and bad.

Although the conduct literature discusses the ultimate goal of life that young women should seek, its major and more immediate purpose is to teach them the proper manners and conducts of life. Naturally, laughter is most frequently mentioned when discussing the manners suitable in social conversation. *The Whole Duty of Woman* (1753) scorns women whose affectation makes them "laug[h] at nothing to shew the beauty of her teeth" (33), and John Essex, in *The Young Ladies Conduct* (1722), says that women who believe they should keep the good humor of the company by always laughing or smiling are mistaken, "for such little Artifices to gain Esteem, appear ridiculous to discerning Minds" (26). In fact, many writers argue that to avoid any unnecessary censure and misunderstanding, the best strategy that one can take is to stifle any involuntary urge for laughter and only laugh moderately when others start to laugh.

The Lady's Preceptor (1745), for example, warns its female reader against being the first to laugh in company: "should it happen to be of a humorous and diverting Cast, don't be the first to laugh at it yourself . . . This is a Behavior too unguarded and indelicate, and betrays a want of Judgment as well as good Education" (12). The book argues that to laugh along with others is pardonable, but "[t]o set up a Laugh in Company, without everyone present being acquainted with the Occasion, is inexcusable" (20). The meaning and the cause of one's laughter should be always clear, and it is always safer for women to follow the standard of others than to set it by themselves.

Reserve is indeed presented as the key virtue that a woman should preserve in all kinds of social environments. In *The Lady's New-Year's Gift* (1765), Lord Saville states, "The Advantages of being reserved are too many to be set down; I will only say, that it is a Guard to a *good Woman*, and a Disguise to an *ill one*" (82). If reserve can be used as a guard and disguise, laughter, in contrast, is believed to expose women to the observation of others and make their virtue immediately vulnerable. It seems extremely difficult for women to hold agency in their laughter when they always have to care for others' feelings and judgments first. In fact, one can also say that laughter is not recommended to men as well. When Plato and Hobbes criticize laughing men as immoral and selfish, their target audience is not women. Sir John Fielding, in *The Universal Mentor* (1763), discourages men from laughing and says similar things that we see in the conduct literature for women. He argues that "a man should not talk to please himself, but those that hear him: this would make him consider, whether what he says be worth hearing" (34). He also says, "Every man ought to abstain from immoderate laughter" (139)

because laughing is a sign of one's immodest pride. For men, too, laughter is a dangerous conduct that could put one's virtue at risk. At the same time, however, men are never urged to keep reserve and be silent in company. Fielding makes clear that the kinds of virtue that are appropriate for women are essentially different from the ones suitable for men: "the fortitude of a woman would be cowardice in a man; and the modesty, which becomes a man, would be forwardness in a woman. The office of a man is to acquire, and that of a woman [is] to preserve" (250). Women are to remain more passive and submissive in their role to serve others' pleasure, while men can more actively promote the pleasure of others. As Robert Irvine argues, conduct literature teaches women "not to express their own needs or desires" in front of men and learn "a feminine self-effacement" (8) that could never befit a gentleman.

Therefore, we can learn from the contemporary conduct literature that woman's laughter needs to be treated carefully since it could lead to an undesirable exposure. Women's pleasure cannot be considered detached from their virtue, and the virtuous conduct basically means the one promoting the happiness of overall society. It is not unusual for conduct book writers to state the significance of their writing through emphasizing the social role of women. Hannah More, for example, argues that on the virtues of women "will depend, in no low degree, the well-being of those states, and the virtue and happiness, nay perhaps the very existence of that society" (5). This is why women should refrain from laughing that is thought to be more about the enjoyment of the momentary, individual pleasure than the advancing of the pleasure of others. Moreover, that laughter is also about one's social conduct, of how one appears to others,

suggests how women are placed under the observation of others who are more than ready to point out and criticize any symptoms of misbehavior. While the conduct manuals propose the art of pleasing, which is basically "to appear pleased with other" (Pennington 44) or to "mak[e] the company pleased with themselves" (Gregory 33), they are indifferent to the ways of pleasing oneself. It is assumed that seeking of one's own pleasure is selfish and detrimental to one's femininity, and it seems extremely difficult for women to hold agency in their laughter, to laugh simply in the way they want. Laughter is mostly associated with negative virtues, and the proper repression of laughter is required in one's path to "true happiness." In this regard, laughter is a very useful site where we can explore how women's feelings and conduct were trained and restricted through patriarchal gender norms. That Austen makes Mr. Collins, of all people, the proponent of Fordyce's views indicates her position on his ideas.

Therefore, to discuss Austen's position as a humorous writer, we should remember that Austen was living in the age when overflowing discourses were limiting the meaning of women's laughter and their experience of pleasure. Moreover, Austen does not simply reproduce the existing views of laughter in her representation of laughing women, but tries to raise questions about those views while providing her own lessons on laughter to her readers. Fritzer argues that conduct books do not merely teach the proper outer manners for women, but also emphasize manners as reflections of one's inner virtue. She states that "[b]oth [Austen's] novels and the courtesy books stress 'deep' manners over 'surface' ones—that is, social manifestations of character over fashion." (6). What Fritzer fails to notice is that Austen often attacks the imperatives of

conduct manuals that unconditionally link certain manners with certain virtues or lack of virtues. She invites her readers to question whether laughter really works as an opposition to virtue, whether laughter only serves the fleeting, meaningless pleasure of oneself, and whether laughter should be strictly suppressed as many argue. Maggie Lane defines Austen as "a didactic writer" (10), and Spacks argues that Austen offers a proper discernment of "right" laughter. As Mary Ann O'Farrell states, "the compelling pleasures of reading Jane Austen enforce manners lessons" (8), and it seems that Austen provides her own lessons on laughter, following the lead of other conduct book writers. However, this does not mean that Austen agrees to the views presented in conduct literature, and it is important to understand exactly what kinds of manners lessons Austen is offering. As the Bennet girls pay no heed to Mr. Collins' sermons, Austen refuses to copy the principles of the dominant discourses.

How Austen redefines what is right and wrong in one's laughter is what this chapter aims to investigate. For this purpose, the chapter closely examines her laughing characters as it is through these characters that Austen delivers her lessons on laughter. For Austen, moments of individual pleasure and the joy of expressing one's pleasure are as important as promoting the pleasure of others. In this way, she pursues the balance between one's virtue and desire for happy laughter. Most of all, it is significant that Austen does not deliver her lessons through directly presenting thoroughly bad examples or perfectly good examples of laughing women. She resists providing an easy answer and leads her readers to explore the minds of her characters. Defying the rhetoric of the

conduct literature, Austen educates her readers on the more complex dynamics of laughter and its virtue.

II.2. Austen's "Unforgivable" Laughing Women

Except for Emma Woodhouse, Austen's laughing female characters usually take secondary positions in her novels, and their laughter appears as something that the protagonists have to cope with. Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Palmer, Lydia Bennet and Mary Crawford are the most representative laughing women in Austen's novels, and we can easily see that they are the characters that the protagonists have trouble in liking. Also, unlike Emma, these women are not interested in being virtuous while they show strong desire for their individual pleasure. By portraying women who are eager to be happy, but who are indifferent to others' feelings, moral principles, and social duties, Austen shows many things that can be lost while pursuing a merry laugh. As these female characters' laughter is beyond the comprehension of the protagonists, it works as a barrier between characters that hinders them from forming a pleasant or intimate relationship. Austen's attitude toward these laughing women is ambiguous, sometimes approving and, at others, quite critical. Even though the unrestrained, happy laughter of the female characters holds certain charms, which Austen never fails to indicate, as long as their laughter hurts, mortifies, or repels others, it remains "unforgivable." Austen does not suggest that laughter itself is wrong, but she shows that the laughter which lacks consideration or sympathy cannot escape being disagreeable and isolated. Through these

laughing characters, we can perceive Austen's complex perspective on the delight of laughter that comes at the expense of others' pleasure and one's own virtue.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen takes the matter of feeling as the central focus of the novel and recommends the virtue of proper self-control. The two sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, go through similar hardships in love,[20] but deal with their emotion in substantially different ways throughout the stages of love, disappointment, and grief. If Elinor tries to repress her feelings and maintain an undisturbed surface, Marianne abhors the very idea of hiding or pretending what she feels. Though Elinor and Marianne seem to respectively represent sense and sensibility, many critics have argued that the contrast between the two sisters is not as clear as it seems.[21] Thomas Keymer observes that the talismanic words in the novel's title are after all "cognate terms" and argues that in figures such as Colonel Brandon, they "coalesce into a harmonious (though also somewhat unprepossessing) amalgam of feeling and reason" (35). This amalgam can be found in the two protagonists as well. Although Elinor shows great effort and success in self-command, she has deep feelings that finally erupt at the end as she "burst[s] into tears of joy" (254) after Edward Ferrars' proposal. Marianne, on the other hand, reaches the moment of regret and self-reflection near the end and realizes what was lacking in

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[20] They both cherish expectations of marriage to certain men, but have to endure the collapse of those expectations in the course of the narrative.

[21] There are critics such as Butler who reads *Sense and Sensibility* as a novel promoting the contrast between two concepts and making an "explicit ideological point" through "taking part in the old argument between 'nature' and 'nurture'." (182). For Butler, Austen is being "unremittingly didactic" by reinforcing the strict opposition between sense and sensibility. However, this reading misses the complexity of characters represented in the novel. Recent criticisms on the novel are more toward revealing the flexibility in and connection between the two concepts.

her excessive sensibility. It seems fair to read the story to be about Elinor learning the legitimacy of feeling and Marianne attempting self-command (Keymer 35). While the sisters learn to understand and appreciate each other, they experience a greater difficulty in understanding the feelings of other characters.

If some characters, including Lady Middleton, Mrs. John Dashwood, and Lucy Steele, obviously stay beyond the reach of the heroines' as well as the readers' sympathy, there are other characters whose qualities are more difficult to judge. Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer become close friends to the Dashwood sisters, and the sisters gradually learn to value their kindness and generosity. At the same time, however, Elinor and Marianne never learn to appreciate the meaning or value of their friends' laughter. Mrs. Jennings is a middle-aged woman introduced as "a good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and rather vulgar" (27). She is "full of jokes and laughter" (27), and her endless raillery at the love interests of her young friends is the main source of her everyday pleasure. Mrs. Charlotte Palmer, her daughter, is somewhat different from her mother as she does not make jokes about others, except for her husband. She is simply just laughter itself: "She came in with a smile, smiled all the time of her visit, except when she laughed, and smiled when she went away" (78). Mrs. Palmer's exclamation, "how delightful everything is!" (78) summarizes her character. She is amused by everything around her, including her bad-tempered husband, and so, she laughs all the time. Even though her husband is all cynical and has much "less willingness to please or be pleased" (78), Mrs. Palmer does not seem to care or even notice Mr. Palmer's cold unresponsiveness. These two female

characters become the major part of the company in which Elinor and Marianne take parts, and their ceaseless laughter makes it almost impossible for the intimacy to grow between each party.

Even though Austen deals with sensibility in the novel and describes Marianne as a character with excessive capacity to feel, the chief feelings being represented through Marianne are mostly cheerless ones such as grief and despair. The novel begins with the death of Mr. Dashwood, whose presence was the sole protection for the Dashwood sisters' wellbeing, and shows how Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne "gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow" (8). Elinor is the only one who knows how to govern her feelings, and throughout the narrative, she demonstrates strength in controlling and concealing her emotions. A reader, however, does not get to see Elinor trying to control her pleasure, joy, or happiness anywhere in the novel. Despite the novel's strong interest in feeling and its expression, it does not much deal with positive, pleasant feelings. Marianne goes through a short period of happiness with Willoughby, but even her feeling of delight is described as so poignant that it is nearly painful. Her delight should be "ecstatic delight" (28), and Willoughby's society is her "exquisite enjoyment" (38). That she falls down and hurts her leg while she is taking a walk with "laughing delight" (32) suggests the affinity between her delight and pain. Knowing this, Elinor says that though Marianne is "very earnest, very eager in all she does . . . she is not often really merry" (69). After short moments of pleasure, Marianne faces a long period of suffering and grief, with Elinor silently suffering beside her.

Because Elinor and Marianne's emotional strife is emphasized, the secondary characters' persistently pleased minds and happy laughter appear only distant, insensitive, and somewhat annoying. Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer do not seem interested in their friends' feelings, and their continual merriment often torments the Dashwood sisters. Mrs. Jennings, not having any detailed information on Elinor's relationship with Edward, makes jokes about him that pain Elinor: "This of course made everybody laugh; and Elinor tried to laugh too. But the effort was painful" (46). As Elinor is a part of Mrs. Jennings' company, she is obliged to serve the feelings of others, especially that of her hostess. Elinor faithfully follows the advice from the conduct manuals in her effort to please, and as she cannot stop the painful conversation without breaking the enjoyment of the entire company, she remains silent and attempts to appear pleased. Unlike Mrs. Jennings' laughter, Elinor's laughter contains no merriment at all. On the other hand, Marianne makes no such effort to disguise her feelings. She does not agree there is any obligation to appear happy when she is distressed and never tries to comply with others' pleasure. For this reason, it is always Elinor's job to talk and laugh with Mrs. Jennings while allowing Marianne to indulge her own sorrow.

Since Elinor and Marianne are generally not in the mood to accord with the laughter of Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer and suffer from their ceaseless gaiety, it seems that Austen negatively portrays these women's laughter. Even when Elinor finally gets to appreciate the warm-heartedness of Mrs. Palmer, who showed great care during Marianne's illness, she thinks she "could have forgiven everything but her laugh" (215). Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer are not quick to notice others' feelings, and Mrs.

Palmer's laughing at every utterance of her husband seems to indicate her silliness. Claudia L. Johnson criticizes Mrs. Palmer for her thoughtless laughter and argues that she is "too vacuous to feel [the] sting" of her husband's abusive words (54). Johnson claims that the Palmers show "Austen's relentlessly harsh satire on contemporary marriage" (55) which is maintained between a silly, cheerful wife and a selfish, unkind husband. According to Johnson, Mrs. Palmer's cheerfulness keeps the marriage intact and helps her fulfill the job of a good wife, but it makes her stay blind to the true state of her married life. Mrs. Jennings, watching it without much criticism, is also viewed as an irresponsible, silly mother.

However, Johnson's strongly critical view of Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer misses the subtlety implied in Austen's attitude toward these seemingly simple, flat characters. When interpreting Mrs. Palmer's laughter as an indication of her silliness, Johnson neglects the fact that her laughter works as a means of self-expression which even her husband cannot control. In this regard, Mrs. Palmer does not submit to the conventional role of a wife. Mary Humphrey questions whether Mrs. Palmer's laugh is really just a sign of her "impenetrable insensitivity" (13) and analyzes how Mrs. Palmer, through laughter, always says what she wants to say about her "droll" husband which "thoroughly deflates her husband's overblown self-importance" (14). While Humphrey leaves the intentionality of Mrs. Palmer's laughter as an open question, she argues, "[u]nder the cover of laughter, she says what she thinks while maintaining the smooth social surface" (15). For Humphrey, Mrs. Palmer's laughter is a useful tool for survival as well as rebellion in her marriage.

Moreover, it is remarkable how Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer lead happy, content lives unlike the suffering Dashwood sisters. Kathleen Anderson and Jordan Kidd read Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer as the most healthful women in the novel who maintain the healthy emotional distance from others and achieve emotional self-reliance. Pointing out that the novel warns us of both extreme sensibility and extreme sense, they argue that the two laughing women "embody the blend of sense with sensibility that the novel depicts as most advantageous to a woman's well-being" (136). They point out that Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer do care for others, "without becoming emotionally distraught over their concerns" (144). Anderson and Kidd's attempt to exhume these characters "from their burial place as minor background characters" (136) goes as far as setting them as the model characters who achieve "a deliberate stance of self-reliance and allegiance to an emotional median" (136). Since Austen certainly points at the negative effect their laughter has on others as well, Anderson and Kidd seem to disregard the possibility that emotional self-reliance could easily turn into emotional self-centeredness and unresponsiveness. Nonetheless, achieving a certain independence and freedom in one's emotional experience is an important matter in the novel which attends to the pain and difficulty of always considering others first.

Emily Auerbach defines *Sense and Sensibility* as "a novel exploring the relationship between solitude and society, between intimacy and public life" (126). Elinor and Marianne are different in their ways of dealing with their emotion in relation to others, and Austen suggests the importance of finding a balance between the two poles. Even though Marianne accuses Elinor of concealing her feelings—"We have

neither of us anything to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing" (120)—it is Marianne who usually shuts herself up with her feelings while Elinor patiently performs her social role with her feelings hidden inside her. Marianne does not think about her social duty when she "fix[es] her sorrow by seeking silence, solitude, and idleness" (76). Overcame with sorrow, she is "ill-disposed to receive or communicate pleasure" (121). Marianne is violating every guidance provided in the conduct books, and the novel shows that "exclusiveness of Marianne's kind of self-absorption is no basis for intimacy" (J. Hardy 25). What Marianne needs is to keep a certain distance from her own feelings and to learn to respect others' feelings more. In contrast, Elinor, who seems like a model of proper manners, never seeks solitude, but employs herself in her social duty to overcome her grief and always maintains friendly connections with others. Yet her feelings are isolated even when she is with others, and she suffers from having no chance to attend to her own feelings. Regardless of their differences, neither of the sisters can be true to their feelings in social settings, which makes them feel uncomfortable, and, at times, even miserable, in public.

Unlike the protagonists, Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer do not fight with their feelings in society. As women, Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer show unusual capacity to freely express their pleasure without feeling any need to conceal or restrain their feelings. At the same time, they always seek others' company and never look for solitude. They are not very sensitive to others' feelings and make Elinor endure their laughter with distress, but they are not being cruel or selfish on purpose like Lucy Steele who deliberately manipulates and harasses Elinor's feelings. Mrs. Jennings jokes about

Marianne's relationship with Willoughby only as long as she believes they are secretly engaged, and right after she finds out the truth, she apologizes. It is hard to judge Mrs. Jennings' personality when she is never intentionally bad, but still deplorably inconsiderate and insensitive to others' feelings. What she believes about others' feelings is mostly incorrect, and this is also the case for Mrs. Palmer. Their feelings do not appear as subtle and complex as the feelings of the Dashwood sisters, and even Mrs. Jennings' kindness is a "clamorous kindness" that oppresses Elinor (153). Marianne greatly dislikes Mrs. Jennings and says, "she cannot feel. Her kindness is not sympathy; her good nature is not tenderness. All that she wants is gossip, and she only likes me now because I supply it" (142). Elinor thinks that Marianne is being unfair, but it is hard to deny the truth of the first half of her statement. If Marianne is too refined, delicate and passionate in her sensibility, Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer are too blunt in their sensibility, which is characterized through their ceaseless laughter.

If we can relate emotional healthiness to the degree of happiness one enjoys in life, then, Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer would definitely be the happiest, and thus, healthiest, characters in the novel. The narrator states that "It was impossible for any one to be more thoroughly good-natured, or more determined to be happy than Mrs. Palmer" (82). Even though she is living with a sarcastic, uncaring husband, Mrs. Palmer has nothing to complain about as she turns the downside of her marriage into a laughing matter. Elinor and Marianne's happiness is promised at the end, but throughout the narrative, they suffer again and again while the laughing women enjoy every moment of their lives. They care for the happiness of others, but they never let others interrupt their

own pleasure. For this reason, Anderson and Kidd claim that their happiness "does not depend on anything or anyone other than themselves" (141). Compared to other women in the novel, this is indeed a remarkable quality. While their virtue remains questionable, their happiness stays unchallenged. Anne Crippen Ruderman argues that Austen does not think pursuing one's own desire serves the good of others (4) and that her characters can only "achieve happiness by acting in a way that benefits others and perfects themselves" (14). Ruderman thinks that seeking one's own pleasure can never be a way to achieve true happiness in Austen. Characters like Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer, however, undermine such an assertion. They are difficult to classify as either virtuous or immoral, generous or selfish, as likable or disagreeable. Yet their position as happy women with unswerving belief in their own ability to bring their own pleasure prevents us from evaluating their laughter as just loud, selfish, and insignificant.

Marking the laughter of Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer as "unforgivable" through the voice of Elinor, who is kind and just, Austen indicates that she understands the limitation of these women's laughter. Their laughter is self-centered and inaccessible, and although Elinor and Marianne gradually realize the caring nature of their friends, they fail to laugh with them till the end. While acknowledging the value of their cheerfulness, optimism, and self-willed attitude towards pleasure, Austen suggests that laughter which only pleases the laugher, laughter without sympathy or consideration, is not the one she advocates as desirable. There is no way to connect with

their laughter, and even Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer seem to laugh with their own separate joys, not really sharing each other's delight.[22]

In her subsequent novels, Austen continues to include female characters who laugh a lot and are eager to pursue their individual pleasure. As these characters gain more significance in the plot, their laughter also becomes a more critical factor in the protagonist's quest for happiness. Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park* are both important characters in the novels, much more than Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer, and their actions have great impact on the protagonists, often turning the tide of the plot. Lydia's laughter makes Elizabeth blush over and over again while her elopement with Wickham brings Elizabeth and Darcy together, and Mary Crawford's presence functions as a major obstacle in Fanny's relationship with Edmund. With these laughing characters, Austen again shows the problem of laughter that lacks virtue and hinders intimacy.

In the case of Lydia, she is not only a major character in the novel, but also works as a foil to the protagonist. If Elizabeth is an epitome of "[o]ptimism, laughter, and courage" (Auerbach 136) which keep her resilient throughout difficult circumstances, Lydia as well is all about optimism, laughter, and courage. Auerbach interprets Lydia's role as an exaggerated version of Elizabeth's flaws who warns Elizabeth that lively spirits and youthful playfulness should be "governed by educated

[22] Although Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer laugh a lot, we do not see them laughing together sharing their merriment.

mind, generous heart, and a moral conscience" (284).[23] Elizabeth actually learns through Lydia the danger of losing a moral sense in one's laughter as Lydia laughs when she should be ashamed and feeling guilty. Still, Lydia does not just work as a bad example for Elizabeth. Austen lays great emphasis on Lydia's laughter, and it survives till the end without being seriously injured. Lydia is always "ready to die of laughter" (170), and the intensity of her laughter makes it appear almost violent—" laughing and talking with more violence than ever" (175). Usually, Austen represents her character's laughter without describing its physical, aural elements. Lydia, however, is always "laughing and talking," which highlights the loudness of her laughter that surrounds her chatter. The letter Lydia leaves before eloping resonates with laughter as she asserts that she "can hardly write for laughing" (221). The intensity of her laughter asks for more serious attention to the meaning of the act.

Lydia's laughter is "violent" as it puts her family into a shameful situation while she remains shameless. If Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer's society are mostly confined to their own domestic spheres, Lydia's laughter rings in public spaces where her laughing body gets exposed to a general crowd. Elizabeth's strong objection to her sister's visiting of Brighton stems from her belief in "the very great disadvantage to [her family], which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner" (176). Lydia, a being who should be hidden and tamed, consistently desires to

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[23] Elizabeth is also famous for her lively laughter, and most critics who analyze Austen's use of laughter and humor include Elizabeth as an example who shows great talent in wit and laughter. But, as mentioned in the introduction, Elizabeth more often talks about laughter than actually laughs, which is why Lydia is the main object of analysis in this chapter.

escape the control of others. Elizabeth is already aware of Darcy's aversion toward "the folly and indecorum of her own family" (163), and Lydia's inappropriate laughter is the central cause of her sister's shame. Elizabeth cannot be indifferent to Lydia's laugher, as Marianne is to Mrs. Jennings' laughter, since she conceives Lydia as a part of herself. As a part of her own family, Lydia is a part of Elizabeth who even shares some similar traits with her. The distance between the laugher and the one who suffers from the laugh is decreased as Austen moves from *Sense and Sensibility* to *Pride and Prejudice*.

In the novel, Austen pairs Lydia with Elizabeth; more specifically, Lydia's laughter with Elizabeth' blush. When Lydia laughs, Elizabeth blushes, feeling vexed and mortified. O'Farrell explains that the blush in Austen's novels of manners works as "a stable and reliable index of character" (9), and Elizabeth's blush shows that she possesses what Lydia lacks, a sense of propriety, morality, and consideration. Beside Lydia, Elizabeth's virtue and proper social manners are emphasized. However, Elizabeth frequently reveals her dislike toward the affectation and unnecessary ceremonies of her society as well. When Jane falls ill at Longbourn, Elizabeth determines to walk all the way to see her sister. When she enters the house, the refined ladies are appalled by her look which seems like the very image of disgrace to them: "I shall never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild" (25); "I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches deep in mud" (26). To sophisticated ladies, Elizabeth represents "a most country town indifference to decorum" (26). Lady Catherine De Bourgh also accuses Elizabeth of lacking "every feeling of propriety and delicacy" (271), and, after all, it is Elizabeth who laughs at Miss Bingley's idea that Mr. Darcy cannot be laughed

at. Through Elizabeth, Austen ridicules the arbitrary and pretentious social rules and also warns against the danger of going too far. Placing Elizabeth between Lydia, who has no sense of propriety, and Miss Bingley, who is never natural or candid, Austen attempts to adjust the boundary of proper social manners, allowing more room for self-expression for women. Elizabeth's declaration of her love of laughter attacks social norms that only allow passive, compliant laughter for women, but Austen hides Elizabeth's actual laughs and confines her laughter within her newly acquired domestic sphere at the end to make sure that her laughter is different from Lydia's. Elizabeth always blushes when Lydia laughs, and we can only imagine what it looks like when Elizabeth laughs at her husband. Although Austen shows great interest in the meaning of woman's laughter in the novel, she refrains from examining it thoroughly through the protagonist and uses her problematic sister instead.

Critics have shown contradictory responses to Lydia and her violent laughter which reflect Austen's own ambivalent attitude toward the character. Those who support Elizabeth's necessary separation from her shameful sister argue that Lydia's laughter represents what should be avoided in one's laughter. For Spacks, it is a sign of her refusal to make any moral distinctions, and "[t]he emptiness of her good humor underlines the deficiencies of her consciousness" ("Laughter" 73). Similarly, Fergus claims that "Lydia Bennet's 'violence' in laughing is inane, silly, mindless—indicating only her high spirits and self-satisfaction" (109). Elvira Casal states, "Lydia Bennet's laughter is a sign both of foolishness—of lack of reflection—and of rampant sexuality." Lydia's improper, uncontrolled laughter is linked to her sexuality that desires to be free.

Her letter that informs her intention to elope rings with laughter—"I cannot help laughing myself" (221)—and neither her laughter nor her sexual desire can be tamed or contained. As a force that escapes control and confinement, Lydia escapes punishment as well. Austen surprisingly allows Lydia to have the power to violate rigid social norms and still be happy. It seems that what Fergus disapproves as "only her high spirits and self-satisfaction" are, in fact, not altogether objectionable qualities for Austen.

From this view, some critics question if Austen really condemns Lydia and expels her from the story that moves toward Elizabeth's happy ending. Barreca reads Lydia as a sub-text and doubts if her untamed, unabashed nature is really a "failure." She argues, "it is exactly that 'failure' to see events in a hierarchy of values that sets Lydia in a tradition of later heroines who can insist that what the world reads as their failure is a denunciation of values whose power they have withstood rather than ignored" (57). Heydt-Stevenson points out that Lydia is a double for Elizabeth and claims that by "establishing links between the women characters and by showing the ways in which, for all their variations, they duplicate each other," Austen breaks the binary opposition between the good and bad women (99). Lydia is evidently a bad example, but she is also an occasional visitor to Pemberley at the end, and Austen leaves no doubt that Lydia will not stop being Lydia. After all the trouble and shame that she brought to her family, Lydia is "Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (239). For readers, whose sympathy more readily goes to the protagonist, Lydia's laughter can be unbearable as it is to her sister. Lydia is subversive as Barreca says, but it is hard to say that Austen supports this kind of subversiveness which is highly selfish and unethical.

Lydia is always a burden that Elizabeth has to bear, and because of her selfish laughter, the sisters cannot really form an intimate, sympathetic relationship. Through Lydia, Austen presents an example of a character that shows no sense of virtue while enjoying her pleasure to the utmost.

Lydia's laughter is a mark of her wildly happy, excited mind, and she finds fun in every occasion and never fails to laugh when she wants.[24] As long as someone suffers from the other's happy laughter, however, a reader cannot deny the wrongness of the act. In both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, virtue and pleasure seem to clash when female characters laugh, and Austen implies that neither should be abandoned in one's pursuit of happiness. In her next novel, *Mansfield Park*, Austen explores this conflict more vigorously by presenting two female characters who each represents virtue and pleasure. The protagonist, Fanny Price, is all about virtue, but she hardly ever laughs. Her rival, Mary Crawford, is all about pleasure, but she lacks virtue. As before, the virtuous protagonist suffers from the laughter of a secondary character, but, this time, Austen makes it really difficult to decide which character is more likeable and attractive.

Fanny enters the novel in a state "as unhappy as possible" (14), afraid of the new environment she is adopted into and ashamed of herself for being small, poor, uneducated, and different from her wealthy, beautiful cousins. She is an outsider, and an inferior one, and she is too well aware of this fact. In a house where her feelings are

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[24] Auerbach points out that the word "fun" is used only in association with Lydia (138). This implies that Lydia only pursues immediate, short-lived pleasure without much consideration, and the novel shows how her pursuit of "fun" leads to a precarious situation that could have greatly harmed her own happiness.

"very little attended to" (46), Fanny grows up without knowing much pleasure. Not only does Fanny rarely laugh, she actually "tries not to laugh" (Spacks, "Laughter" 76). She has accustomed herself to deny any rights to pleasure and devotes herself in the service of others' comfort. On the other hand, Mary is a pretty, smart, and pleasant woman whose "lively mind . . . seiz[es] whatever may contribute to its own amusement" (61), and her presence carries laughter. When Fanny waits alone for Edmund Bertram and Mary to return from their strolling in Sotherton, she recognizes their return through Mary's laughter: "the voice and the laugh of Miss Crawford once more caught her ear" (96). At the moment, Fanny's desolated mind is contrasted to Mary's merriment. Mary enjoys what Fanny desires, and while one suffers the lack, the other takes the pleasure of Edmund's company. This is a common pattern that recurs throughout their relationship. When Mary delights in the ride of Fanny's horse with Edmund, Fanny gets sick from the lack of exercise and the feeling of being insignificant and unwanted. When Mary laughs, Fanny suffers. This contrast is intensified as Fanny and Mary's object of desire is identical. Mary's laughter is painful to Fanny because it signals the advancement of Mary and Edmund's relationship. Yet we cannot say that Mary has no sympathy or that she is insensitive to Fanny's feelings. When Mrs. Norris scolds Fanny for refusing to take a part in a play and being ungrateful, Mary is the first one to notice Fanny's tears, and she tactfully approaches Fanny to console her, showing "the really good feelings by which she was almost purely governed" (137). Although she "did not love Miss Crawford" (137), Fanny cannot but feel her kindness at the moment. Mary is simply

unaware of the pain her pleasure causes to Fanny as she is ignorant of Fanny's love for Edmund.

Austen pairs Mary's laughter with Fanny's agony, but it is not because Mary's laughter is itself wrong or selfish. We cannot find fault in her laughing in Edmund's company or her laughing at the pleasant horse ride. Especially, compared to the laughter of the Bertram sisters, who intentionally laugh in Henry Crawford's company to arouse each other's jealousy, Mary's laughter is almost benign, except that it unknowingly pains Fanny. It is when Mary laughs at the wrong things when her laughter appears problematic and unforgivable. At these scenes, Mary's laughter speaks for her defective moral principles, regardless of Fanny's feelings. During the visit to Sotherton, Edmund, Fanny, and Mary talk about the old tradition of family assembly which Edmund and Fanny endorse as valuable, but Mary derides as unnecessary and unpleasant. She believes that it is nothing but forcing the inmates to leave their business and pleasure to attend the prayer and says, "Every body likes to go their own way" (82). If Lydia does what she likes without any deep thoughts, Mary has a principle that everybody has a right to seek their own pleasure in their own ways. She puts individual pleasure before social conformity and harmony, and this is unacceptable in the moral world of Mansfield Park. Mary laughs when she criticizes the family assembly, and Fanny cannot say anything because she "felt too angry for speech" (82). Edmund says, "Your lively mind can hardly be serious even on serious subjects" (82), but Mary is serious enough in her principle. When Edmund sees Mary for the last time and criticizes her for her lack of proper sensibility and morality, he senses her laughter: "She would have laughed if she

could. It was a sort of laugh" (425). With a muffled laugh, Mary refuses his "pretty good lecture" (425).

Mary's laughter reveals her reluctance to follow the moral lessons of her society, and even though her morality appears questionable, her character holds certain attractions. Pam Perkins focuses on the difference and rivalry between Fanny and Mary and points out the difficulty of proclaiming a winner. She admits that "[Mary's] principles do not stand up to Fanny's careful scrutiny, but her cheerful wit makes her an attractive character despite her inability to live up to the standards affirmed by the concluding vision of Mansfield" (5). Perkins sees Fanny as a character who sacrifices her pleasure to uphold her morality and argues that Mary's seeking of amusement is "much more immediately appealing than Fanny's rather solemn good principles" (9). Mary is introduced as "light and lively" (76), reminding us of characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, and for this reason, Jennarae Niece argues that Austen actually "eschew[s] Fanny in favor of the lively and flippant Mary, much more akin to the archetype of the conventional Austen heroine" (244). Even though the novel ends with Edmund choosing Fanny over Mary, condemning the latter for having "blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind" (423), many readers and critics find Mary to be a more appealing and interesting character. Mary does not really *do* anything that is unforgivable and stays as a bystander to Henry and Maria's scandalous elopement, but her lack of proper moral judgment manifested by some of her laughs is insupportable in the strictly moral world of Mansfield Park.

However, Austen insinuates that there is a Mary-like part inside Fanny that she is unconscious of, suggesting that Mary is, after all, not an opposite to Fanny. When Maria's elopement brings about Fanny's quick return to Mansfield after the many months of unhappy stay at Portsmouth, Fanny feels "exquisitely happy, while so many were miserable" (411). For once, she is wrapped in her own pleasure, "incapable of suitably sharing the distress even of those whose distress she thought of most" (41), and at this moment, "Her enjoyment. . . was for herself alone" (415). Mary is criticized in the novel for prioritizing pleasure before everything else, but Austen acknowledges that even virtuous and dutiful Fanny overlooks her duties when she is simply too happy. Fanny's joy is not a laughing joy, and no one even notices its existence, but Austen shows that our desire for pleasure is strong, sometimes enough to baffle one's solid moral sense. Though Fanny blames herself a little for this lapse, for readers who well know Fanny's disposition and virtue, this lapse is only understandable. Austen deals with the conflict between virtue and pleasure throughout the novel, but she slyly tells us at the end that even the most virtuous person has a desire for pleasure, and that Fanny's victory is not equal to Mary's total defeat or expulsion. Virtue and pleasure are not incompatible after all. Fanny is always jealous of Mary and her enjoyment,[25] and Mary's candid acknowledgment of her desire is what Fanny both censures and envies. Before

[25] Fanny's jealousy is depicted several times in the novel. She suffers from "discontent and envy" while Mary enjoys a horse ride with Edmund (70) and is described to be "full of jealousy and agitation" when Edmund and Mary are busily engaging themselves in acting (147). When she is waiting, and also dreading, for the news of Edmund and Mary's engagement in Portsmouth, she is "almost vexed into displeasure, and anger" (303).

she becomes a valid member of Mansfield park, Fanny has to face a bit of Mary inside her.

Reviewing the remarkable laughter of Austen's female characters shows us that what makes their laughter "unforgivable" is basically its social effect. Their inconsiderate pursuit and expression of pleasure can hurt or block others' pleasure or harm one's own morality, making their laughter insensitive, selfish, and alienated. They are all alienated in their pleasure since others cannot access the meaning and value of their laughter. Even when they laugh with a company, there exists an emotional distance from the ones who cannot laugh along. Then again, Austen makes us wonder why it is harder for us to sympathize with others' pleasure than with their sorrow. It seems that the social world demands a quick sacrifice of one's pleasure for greater social good and harmony, and those who persist to laugh and be pleased regardless remain isolated in the narrative without finding anyone who can truly laugh with them. To Austen, "unforgivable" laughers are the ones who show no interest in making connection with others and in expanding their pleasure to those around them. So finding the laughter that strengthens, not hinders, the growth of intimacy is left as an unfinished job. Although Mary's independent and cheerful mind seems to promise her a pleasant future, as she loses the chance to form any deep relationship with both Fanny and Edmund because of her laughter, she is left to bear seclusion at the end. She has a principle of laughter, but it is not the "right" kind of principle. Austen espouses women's right for pleasure and laughter and depicts the laughter of her female characters as powerful, having enough

force to affect other characters or the plot of the novel, but she maintains that there are things to be considered in one's laughter.

Many problems of the characters' laughter discussed above stem from the fact that they are all secondary characters. If we knew Mrs. Palmer's mind as well as we know that of Elinor, maybe her laughter would stop being "unforgivable." If we knew the meaning of Mary's "sort of laugh" more clearly, we might be able to find Edmund's accusation of her as unfair. Because we are distanced from these characters, judging their laughter becomes trickier. Bilger argues that Austen intentionally uses secondary characters—Bilger calls them "trickster" figures—to avoid any direct identification with these characters. Since Bilger believes that Austen's laughing women reject and attack the ideal femininity and masculine social norms, she claims that Austen, by using secondary characters, can "stage rebellions against the restrictions on womanhood without having to fear being identified with these characters" (109). However, this distancing is also what weakens the subversiveness of Austen's laughing women. When there are Elinor, Elizabeth, and Fanny whose virtues are more emphasized and praised than others, the laughter of secondary characters remains in the background. Austen seems to avoid directly confronting the problem of laughter by keeping a distance from these characters. The use of secondary characters enables Austen to deal with the female experience of laughter with delicacy, but it limits the scope of the discussion as well. These characters are not very complex—or, their complexity is not sufficiently revealed to the readers—and we cannot know what is going on inside their minds at the moments of their laughter.

For this reason, we can see that Austen attempts much more vigorous and deeper exploration of the issue when she decides to write *Emma* with a main character who gets involved in serious problems because of her laughter. Now, we are finally exposed to the depth of the mind of a female character who struggles to achieve a moment of happy laughter while trying to be virtuous at the same time.

II.3. Emma's Quest for Perfectly Happy Laughter

It is well known that Austen referred to Emma Woodhouse as "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (Austen-Leigh 157). The first sentence of the novel introduces Emma as gifted with "the best blessings of existence," in that she is "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition" (5). Readers more used to sympathizing with unfortunate characters suffering from all kinds of economic or domestic travails might find it hard to feel friendly toward this perfect, well-off heroine who has "lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (5). Moreover, Emma enjoys "the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (5). It is no wonder that Austen thought nobody would much like this heroine. As Auerbach points out, *Emma* "centers on a woman who centers on herself" (202), and many agree that *Emma* is

a reformation story of an errant heroine who gradually must learn modesty, generosity, and self-knowledge.[26] Interestingly, her lack of virtue is most visible when she laughs.

Emma is notorious for her heartless laughter in the Box Hill scene where she makes fun of Miss Bates in front of others. Not only does she expose herself to the severe criticism of her admired Mr. Knightley, but her morality becomes seriously weak in the wary eyes of the reader as well. Since the opening sentences of the novel, Emma's inner quality has constantly appeared questionable, and her laughter at this scene only seems to confirm negative views of her character. Despite her subsequent deep regret, the image of Emma laughing at a poor, old lady appears to indicate her lack of compassion, consideration, and humility, which makes some view the entire scene as a "descen[t] into the spiritual and emotional chaos" (Gay 61). To some extent, Emma seems similar to other laughing women in Austen's previous novels. She is isolated at her laughing moment, seems to be deficient in her virtue, and distresses others through her thoughtless laughter. Emma, however, is different from them in one crucial way: She senses the wrongness of her laughter, learns the proper principle of laughter, and, at the same time, keeps her happy, merry laughter till the very end. Through Emma, Austen tries to combine laughter with virtue while suggesting the possibility of retaining both virtue and pleasure in one's laughter.

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[26] Wayne C. Booth, reading the novel from this view, argues that "[Emma] is deficient both in generosity and in self-knowledge . . . But with the reform in her character, she is ready for marriage with the man she loves, the man who throughout the book has stood in the reader's mind for what she lacks" (102).

Like Emma, Austen herself has received much criticism on account of her laughter. Her witty, satirical descriptions led Marvin Mudrick, for example, to call her "almost inhumanely cold and penetrating" (qtd. in Stafford 16). For some critics, Austen's laughter, like Emma's, raises doubts regarding her virtue. Sarah Emsley reports that "[d]espite Austen's reputation as light, bright, and sparkling, she has been accused on more than one occasion of intolerance, insensitivity, and a general lack of charity." If Austen's laughter is subject to censure, it seems to be on the same ground as Emma's. Both are guilty of a lightness and brightness that may lead them to laugh where some would wish they did something else. Such a wish, however, risks misunderstanding the laughter of both the character and the author, and attending more carefully to Emma's laughter may help us to develop a more nuanced understanding of Austen's own.

Emma certainly laughs a lot, more than any other Austen heroine, and her laughter has generally been read as holding very simple, straightforward meanings. Spacks, one of the few critics to discuss Emma's laughter as an important factor of her character, focuses on how Emma's laughter functions as "a momentary declaration of control or of superiority" in the Box Hill scene ("Laughter" 83). However, closer examination of the narrative reveals that her laughter rarely carries a sense of control or superiority. More often than not Emma's laughter is accompanied by vexation, mortification, and even guilt as she follows her laughter with a process of self-examination and self-correction to see if she has done any wrong to others and to herself. Austen clearly points to the gap between how Emma's laughter is read by others and how it is understood by herself, showing that what to others may appear "light and

sparkling" is actually accompanied by painful introspection and reverie. While Emma's life is a series of seekings and plottings of amusements, and her laughter does reflect her desire for pleasure, over the course of the narrative, she has to learn how hard it is to attain moments of perfect happiness and joy. For Austen, the important question is not how to subdue laughter, but how to achieve a perfectly happy laughter that is not followed by shame, repentance, or harsh judgments.

In the examination of laughter as a site of pleasure, Emma's laughter offers a good example of how women's pleasure is expressed and judged. Since Emma is always aware that her laughter is being watched, she sometimes tries to be alone before she lets out her laugh. Therefore, whenever she laughs, we can learn something about her relationship with others and how her expression of pleasure works in her society. *Emma* is full of laughter, not just Emma's, yet her laughter is more critically judged than any other character's. Her social position and, most of all, her gender make her the central object of others' observations. As a daughter who needs to serve her overly anxious father and as a mistress of Hartfield who has to care for the entire Highbury community, Emma's every move is closely examined. Despite her independent situation, Emma cannot be the one who decides the proper moments for pleasure, like other male characters in the narrative. Her feeling and expression of pleasure inevitably work within the intricate social network, and to laugh with "true happiness," Emma needs to find a balance between personal and communal happiness.

Thus, while examining Austen's portray of laughter, we need to consider not just the social function of laughter but also its personal value. Austen clearly highlights the

positive value of Emma's laughter while demonstrating how hard it is for women to achieve a moment of happy laughter. Emma laughs in many different scenes in many different ways, but regardless of the variations on display, most of her laughter makes her feel uncomfortable afterward. Emma's successive "faulty" laughs suggest the heavy restriction put on women's experiences of pleasure. When contemporary conduct literature teaches women not to laugh and instead only to serve the pleasure of others, Austen's portrayal of the beauty of an individual woman's laughter is quite outstanding. Even after showing the many hardships and considerable uneasiness that Emma often experiences after laughing, Austen makes Emma keep her laughter until the end and allows her to enjoy the perfectly happy laughter that marks the finale. *Emma* shows that the subversive power of female laughter, for Austen, basically comes from its lively demonstration of individual female happiness. As a writer of comedy as well as a fan of laughter, Austen celebrates the joy of laughing and guides us to the wise ways to achieve that joy.

Emma is undoubtedly a fortunate woman who has not much to worry about, and pleasure is a vital motivation for her everyday activities. Her only concern is her father's temper, but she usually knows how to appease it. When Emma is not tending to her father's moods, she has freedom to look after her own pleasure. Once she arranges a card-table for Mr. Woodhouse, Emma spends time to plan and anticipate dinner parties and picnics that will amuse herself, and most of all, to prove her skill as a matchmaker. Believing that Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston's marriage was possible because of her assistance, she describes matchmaking as "the greatest amusement in the world" (10).

When, after Miss Taylor's marriage, she decides to be an arbiter of a match between Mr. Elton and Harriet Smith, she does so both for charity and for pleasure. Although Emma highlights that her matchmaking is for others—"this is the only way I have of doing [Mr. Elton] a service" (11)—she finds much pleasure in the work. She enjoys the feeling of being a generous friend and a competent prophet, and she loves the activities she performs for her plan, each of which becomes a chance to prove her wit and creative skills: organizing dinner parties, drawing a portrait of Harriet, and helping Harriet to collect riddles. When Emma mistakenly thinks that Mr. Elton is close to proposing to Harriet while they are all planning together to draw Harriet's portrait, Emma briefly considers whether she should "better leave them together at once" (34). But "as she wanted to be drawing, the declaration must wait a little longer" (34). Showing off her drawing skills and getting unconditional praise from others are pleasures that she cannot give up. Despite her charitable aim, she is not just doing a service for others.[27] Also, as she finds great satisfaction from seeing herself as promoting other's happiness, doing good deeds for others and enjoying pleasure are inseparable for Emma.

Moreover, she is born with a "happy disposition" as introduced by the first line of the novel. Even though she encounters several misfortunes in the narrative, we never find her immersed in hopelessness. When she finally finds out that she herself has been

[27] Shinobu Minma presents a highly critical view of Emma's enjoying of pleasure through her "charitable" act. Minma claims that "her sense and performance of duty are distorted by her pursuit of her own pleasure" (58) and sees that Emma's performing of duty is "primarily to indulge in the pleasure of feeling her own superiority" (58). It is true that Emma takes pleasure in helping others, but this pleasure does not necessarily make her act as entirely self-indulgent. Minma's argument makes us wonder if Austen actually sets opposition between social duty and individual pleasure.

the object of Mr. Elton's admiration, not Harriet, she undergoes penitent and guilty feelings. Yet the narrator's description of her wavering, digressing thoughts shows that it requires great effort from Emma to stick to the mournful thoughts. After some moments of regret, she laughs at herself already searching for a new match for Harriet and tries to recover her repentant mindset: "She stopped to blush and laugh at her own relapse, and then resumed a more serious, more dispiriting cogitation upon what had been and might be and must be" (98). Her feelings for Harriet and her self-reproach seem real, but she finds it hard to maintain the "unmirthful reflections." Her judgment works adequately, enabling her to see her fault, but her feelings, or natural disposition, betray her will to be distressed. On the next morning, Emma wakes up with "softened pain and brighter hope" caused by her "youth and natural cheerfulness" (98), and instead of resigning herself to sorrow, she turns to more hopeful thoughts and decisive actions to amend her former wrongs.

Thus, Emma's comfortable situation, naturally happy disposition, and active seeking of pleasure all seem to guarantee her a happy fate. We could easily assume that Emma is "guaranteed by her vitality and optimism to achieve a happy ending" (Gay 61). However, Emma's guaranteed happiness does not come that easily, as she must continually confront the social view that judges and reprimands both her desire for and her experience of pleasure. Because her material condition does not become an obstacle in her way to happiness, unlike other Austen heroines, we can see more clearly the social restraints and gender norms that work against her individual happiness. In the first few chapters of the novel, her happy disposition and desire for pleasure are introduced as the

major defects she needs to overcome. The narrator points out that she is used to "doing just what she like[s] . . . directed chiefly by her own [judgment]" (5), and Mr. Knightley believes that the ability to do anything she wants has worked against Emma's proper maturity. While discussing Emma with Mrs. Weston, he comments that Emma is "spoiled by being the cleverest of her family" and laments that through her mother's early death, she "lost the only person able to cope with her" (31). Mr. Knightley even hopes to see Emma disappointed or frustrated: "It would not be a bad thing for her to be very much in love with a proper object. I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good" (30).

Having an active, happy, and willful mind unbound by any serious restraints, Emma seems to enjoy an easy life. Mr. Knightley, who will of course emerge as the "proper object" of Emma's love, judges this ease as a threat to Emma's character and wants her to experience some rejection and dissatisfaction. Throughout the narrative, Mr. Knightley's role is to intervene at Emma's moments of pleasure to comment on its inappropriateness and sometimes even cruelty. At his direction, Emma repeatedly experiences a discomfort and anxiety about what she does for the happiness of herself and others. While critics often criticize her for being self-centered, narcissistic, arrogant, and controlling (Johnson 122), it is questionable how much agency Emma holds in her own experience of pleasure and happiness. Despite Mr. Knightley's concern for Emma, it seems that her life is already filled with disappointments and uncomfortable sentiments.

Emma's laughter is generally viewed as a sign of her sense of superiority or her self-centered mind, but in reality it is more often a sign of her unease and frustration. Emma laughs for the first time when she quarrels with Mr. Knightley about Harriet's refusal of Mr. Martin's proposal. The whole event is a source of pleasure to Emma since she firmly believes that Harriet will soon earn the love of Mr. Elton, whom she deems much superior in status and qualities to Mr. Martin. When Knightley tells Emma that Robert Martin is going to propose to Harriet, Emma, who already knows about the proposal and its unfortunate result, "smil[es] to herself through a great part of this speech" (44). Here, her inward smile signals her pleasure coming from being the one who knows more. For some time, she enjoys this delight of superiority. But her happy moments come to an end as Knightley becomes "red with surprise and displeasure" after knowing Harriet's refusal and exclaims, "Emma, this is your doing" (44). Since Emma does not want to keep the uncomfortable atmosphere with Mr. Knightley, she tries to laugh off his retort. But her laughter is no longer a sign of her controlling, superior position.

Rather, she laughs because she is uncomfortable: "Emma made no answer, and tried to look cheerfully unconcerned, but was really feeling uncomfortable and wanting him very much to be gone" (48). For Emma, having Knightley "sitting just opposite to her in angry state, was very disagreeable" (48). Even though she responds to Mr. Knightley with laughter, that laughter now suggests her thwarted pleasure and her inability to express vexation, rather than her actual enjoyment. Unlike Mr. Knightley who naturally expresses his displeasure to Emma, she cannot respond with the same

liberty. In fact, we continuously see Emma struggling to hide her distress in front of others. As "[s]he dreaded being quarrelsome" (82), she strains to remain silent when she disagrees with her brother-in-law's feelings. Even when Mr. Elton upsets and annoys her with his blatant manner and improper attention, she can only laugh it off or "give him a look" at best (89). Emma's laughter and playful manner are the armor that she wears when she finds herself unable to deal directly with an unpleasant situation.

While Emma is unsure about what to feel at the moment as her inside is filled with different kinds of emotions—vexation, displeasure, desire to remain pleased, guilt, etc.—Mr. Knightley is unwavering in his feelings of anger and irritation. Mr. Knightley is a man who always knows the "right" feeling to feel at the moment. This is not the first time that Emma feels uncertain about her own feelings while Mr. Knightley obliges her to feel the "right" sentiment. The novel starts with a sense of loss that takes place at Hartfield after Miss Taylor's marriage. After sixteen years of being Emma's governess and friend, Miss Taylor left Hartfield and became Mrs. Weston. This event is evidently a fortunate and delightful occasion for Miss Taylor, but Emma cannot but feel the loss of her good and only companion. She, however, can only be melancholy until her father wakes up and "made it necessary [for her] to be cheerful" (7). Despite her own sorrow, Emma endeavors to humor her father and make him dispel the depressing thoughts about the marriage. She "smiled and chatted as cheerfully as she could to keep him from such thoughts (7). Soon, Mr. Knightley enters the scene, and as if he knows their sentiment, he talks about how good it is for Miss Taylor to get married and find independence. He asserts, "Every friend of Miss Taylor *must be glad* to have her so happily married" (9,

my italics). If Mr. Woodhouse unconsciously and unintentionally forces Emma to display cheerfulness, Mr. Knightley plainly states that it is "right" to feel pleased about the occasion. In front of him, Emma "turn[s] away her head, divided between tears and smiles" (10), trying to hide her complex, reprehensible emotion.

The narrator points out the "great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude" (6) that Emma might face by losing the only friend who can "meet her in conversation, rational or playful" (6). In addition, Emma is also facing the danger of emotional solitude. With Miss Taylor, Emma shared "perfect unreserve" (6) and "could speak every thought as it arose" (6). Without her friend, Emma has no one to whom she can honestly show her feelings, and the way she disguises her feelings in front of Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley, the two characters who are closest to her except for Mrs. Weston, suggests her isolated position. Spacks points out that "Emma, despite her social leadership in Highbury, has little real connection to most of her fellows" (*Boredom* 169).[28] Emma's endless imagining of intimacy among others and her welcoming of Harriet as her new company are her efforts to make connection with others. She has no one to whom she can open up her mind without risking misunderstanding and unfair criticism. Her desire for perfectly happy laughter, therefore, goes together with her earnest desire for true intimacy.

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[28] What it means for Emma to lose Miss Taylor is well discussed by John Wiltshire and Spacks in their analyses of boredom in *Emma*. They focus on the limited scope of life Emma is living and the boredom resulting from it. While Wiltshire emphasizes the physical boredom caused by living only with a father whose "programme is the denial of almost all bodily activity and almost all bodily enjoyment" (203), Spacks brings to light that boredom can also be a sign of one's emotional alienation.

What Emma most desires to feel is pleasure, satisfaction, and happiness. However, pleasure is always something that will come, not something she enjoys at the moment. In most cases, she only gives the appearance of feeling pleased rather than experiencing actual enjoyment. Her life focuses more on expecting and planning amusements than on enjoying them. We often see her expectation turning into disappointment, and, at those moments, she laughs. When she determines to "enjoy all that was enjoyable to the utmost" (84) as she enters the party at Randalls, for example, her night is ruined by Mr. Elton's annoying flirtation and his most unwelcome confession of love. Likewise, both picnics to Donwell and Box Hill excite much expectation of merriment, but they end with vexation and mortification. Even when she has a good time at the Coles' party, she later feels uneasy remembering the things she did wrong there. As the narrator says, "Perfect happiness, even in memory, is not common" (160). Hence, contrary to Mr. Knightley's assessment, Emma seems quite familiar with disappointment and frustration. This continuous experience of dissatisfaction suggests Emma's limited power in her pursuit of pleasure. Regardless of her will, things happen to thwart her expectation. Thus, Emma's greatest goal is to find the moment of "perfect happiness" where she can be truly happy and pleased without alloy.

Before she reaches that perfect moment, Emma has to learn first that, unlike many of those who surround her, she cannot fully determine her own pleasure. The novel presents various male characters who stick to their own principles of pleasure and decide what is good for themselves and for others according to their own view. Mr.

Woodhouse, to take the first example, always judges others' comfort and pleasure based on his own feeling, "being never able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself" (7). In his pursuit of pleasure similarly, Frank Churchill may receive the censure of characters like Mr. Knightley, but he never goes through the process of self-examination and regret as Emma does. The sudden whim that takes him to London disrespects Mrs. Weston's feelings and position, but he simply "laugh[s] at himself with a very good grace . . . without seeming really at all ashamed of what he had done" (147). His laughter, unlike Emma's, is not followed by mortified musings, and we can see that it merely reflects his pleasant, untroubled mind.

Mr. Knightley, the unquestionable representation of the true British gentleman, not only claims his right to decide his own pleasure, but he also tries to define the proper pleasure for Emma. He uses phrases that restrict Emma's free experience of feelings. In the momentous Box Hill scene, his reproach announces a definition of Emma's feelings: "This is not pleasant to you, Emma—and it is very far from pleasant to me" (259). It is notable that his rhetoric sets his own judgment as a standard, which makes him somewhat similar to Mr. Woodhouse. Besides, even though Mr. Knightley judges the proper pleasure for Emma, he firmly states his own right to decide his own pleasure. While everybody else is excited about the dance party, he alone remains uninterested and aloof. He is "determined against its exciting any present curiosity, or affording him any future amusement" (177). When Emma urges him to participate, he claims, "they shall not choose pleasures for me" (177). He never allows others to be a better judge of his actions and feelings.

Mr. Knightley's defining of the proper feelings for Emma echoes the rhetoric of the contemporary conduct manuals that aim to construct the "right" manners and feelings of ideal femininity. On the one hand, Mr. Knightley's virtue and authority within the novel suggest Austen's endorsement of his principles, but on the other hand, Austen obviously points to the unequal position of woman in the search for pleasure. In the novel, Emma's laughter and pursuit of pleasure are similarly censured, but male characters enjoy the liberty of choosing their own standard for pleasure. Mr. Knightley has a firm belief in the man's scope of agency. When he quarrels with Emma about Frank not visiting his father and Mrs. Weston earlier, he states his idea of mature masculinity.

> "If Frank Churchill had wanted to see his father, he would have contrived it between September and January. A man at his age—what is he?—three or four-and-twenty—cannot be without the means of doing as much as that. It is impossible."
>
> "That's easily said, and easily felt by you, who have always been your own master. You are the worst judge in the world, Mr. Knightley, of the difficulties of dependence. You do not know what it is to have tempers to manage."
>
> "It is not to be conceived that a man of three or four-and-twenty should not have liberty of mind or limb to that amount." (103)

The point of this conversation is not who is right. Emma does think that Mr. Knightley is right about Frank and "to her great amusement perceive[s] that she [i]s taking the other

side of the question from her real opinion" (102). But Emma is doing more than just making up excuses for Frank. Emma knows much about having "tempers to manage," and she knows the hardship of being "your own master." Emma is saying what she can never say about herself by projecting herself into Frank's position, whose living depends on his selfish, willful, and redoubtable aunt. Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, upholds man's right to have agency. Repeating that Frank is "a man of three or four-and-twenty," he shows his belief in what a mature man can do. Moreover, although he disapproves of Frank's behavior, he knows he has no right to confront him. Emma, a woman of one-and-twenty, cannot enjoy such "liberty of mind." Despite some similarities in their situation, Frank and Emma's scopes of agency are widely different.

Austen not only indicates the unequal position of women, but also delivers a critical view on social norms that teach women to serve men's needs by representing how men's active, often selfish, pursuit of pleasure becomes a physical and emotional burden for women. Gillian Russell explains that during Austen's time, women were expected to be "exemplars and facilitators of harmony and refinement, who could temper the excesses of men" (177). In *Emma*, it is indeed a woman's job to moderate "the excesses of men" while silently bearing its weight. For instance, Mrs. Weston, who is always concerned more with others' pleasure than her own, shows what it takes to be a dutiful wife and a caring woman. When Frank and Mr. Weston mindlessly suggest impractical plans for the dance party, it is Mrs. Weston who has to work hard to accommodate their wants, believing "[t]o do what would be most generally pleasing must be our object—if one could tell what that would be" (176). Unfortunately, when

everybody has different tastes and opinions, it is almost impossible to fulfill her goal. Emma thinks of her friend as "always over-careful for every body's comfort but [her] own" (131), but men are not much aware of Mrs. Weston's "little fidgets" (131) as she never complains. Mrs. Weston represses her disappointment on Frank's continuous delaying of his visit, and when Mr. Weston happily and mindlessly offers his guests to stay the night at his house during a heavy snowfall, Mrs. Weston remains silent, filled with concern, as she "hardly knew how to do, from the consciousness of there being but two spare rooms in the house" (90). She is an ideal woman who accepts it as her duty to serve men's needs and happiness first, but Austen makes us see that serving others' pleasure is a demanding and consuming labor for her.

Despite her reputation of being selfish and arrogant, Emma, too, endeavors to facilitate social harmony and the pleasure of others. She is a devoted daughter who willingly takes care of her childish father, and whenever her brother-in-law, Mr. John Knightley, freely expresses his ill temper which distresses Mr. Woodhouse, Emma tries her best to appease both men while hiding her own distress. Women are frequently represented as sacrificing their own ease to promote men's pleasure, and ironically, Isabella Woodhouse, who has no desire of her own and always thinks and feels as her husband does, is described as the happiest creature in the world and "a model of right feminine happiness" (99). Austen illuminates that, in terms of pleasure, women and men are not allowed equal rights or opportunities and that even Emma who is often criticized for being too much at ease and too self-centered endures her prior duty to serve others.

The different scopes of agency given to men and women in their experience of pleasure are demonstrated well through the laughter in which Emma and Frank both engage. Emma's most problematic laughs in the novel occur when she teams up with Frank to seek amusements, but their gender difference singles Emma out to be the one who suffers from criticism and guilt. Frank's easygoing, pleasant manner allows Emma to be more lax with the sense of propriety that usually restrains her social behavior, and Emma's laughter with Frank reflects both Emma's desire for pleasure and the difficulty of enjoying that pleasure as a woman. The intimacy between Emma and Frank grows rapidly after Emma confides to him her suspicion of Jane Fairfax's relationship with Mr. Dixon, and when they play a puzzle together, Knightley recognizes that Frank and Emma mutually enjoy an "eager laughing mirth" that displeases Jane (240). Later, Mr. Knightley gravely says to Emma, "[I] am curious to know how [something] could be so very entertaining to the one, and so very distressing to the other" (241), indicating his disapproval of the act. The truth is that Emma already felt guilty about her joke before this scene, right after she first mentioned her suspicion to Frank and worried "whether she had not transgressed the duty of woman by woman" (160). That Emma keeps the content of their inside joke from Mr. Knightley suggests her awareness of the joke's inappropriateness.

Emma is fully aware of the social decorum expected from her, but the new taste of mutually shared pleasure and laughter is too strong to resist. For Emma, who believes that "[o]ne half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other" (60), it is a great delight to have someone who can understand and participate in her pleasure.

Although Mr. Knightley regards Frank as a fellow only concerned with his own pleasure who "ha[s] no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people" (105), Emma feels like her sentiments are approved and respected by Frank. When talking about Jane with Frank, Emma experiences the moment in which her own sense of humor is immediately reciprocated without censure, and it is a rare occasion on which Emma can say, "your countenance testifies that your thoughts on this subject are very much like mine" (150). Although Frank is deceiving Emma about his feelings and intention, Emma, unaware of this, enjoys his company. Since Emma feels surrounded by people who disavow or criticize her feeling, Frank's easy manners allow her to be honest with her pleasure, and consequently, she ignores her inner inhibition and enjoys the guilty pleasure. She laughs, not because she lacks a proper moral sense, but because her desire for pleasure at the moment prevails over her moral sense.

However, in the Box Hill scene, Austen shows that even this seemingly equal and reciprocal relationship is controlled by the man as Emma finds herself laughing with no joy. At this scene, Emma crosses the line of propriety by again disregarding her inner scruples. Emma had high hopes about the picnic and the joy it would bring, but "[t]here was a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union, which could not be got over" (253). There exists a discord among the members of the party, and to expel this unpleasant mood and dullness of the day, Emma gladly responds when Frank starts to flirt and joke with her and laughs "because she felt less happy than she had expected" and "because she was disappointed" (254). Actually, Frank is using Emma to provoke Jane, his secret fiancé, and by "making [Emma] his first object" (253), he makes Emma the center of

everybody's attention. He even requests the entire party to say something entertaining for Emma and announces that she will "laugh heartily at them all" (255). Susan Rogers argues that even though "[t]he fine views and open landscape should create a sense of greater space, of larger possibilities," the opposite occurs, and "there is a sense of confinement in the arrangement." This confinement occurs inside Emma's mind as she is "trapped" in a situation in which she must laugh at jokes from Frank that she does not find amusing. This is where her illusion of mutuality in the pleasure she shared with Frank gets broken—in which she once said, "I smile because you smile" (150)—and now Frank's raillery distresses rather than pleases Emma. However, as she cannot reveal her true mind as always, she tries to "laug[h] as carelessly as she could" (255), and in this careless manner, attacks Miss Bates, the poor, old, and harmless spinster. Emma's frustrated desire for pleasure, Frank's public demand for her response, and above all, her total lack of control over the entire situation become a pressure that forces her to laugh, regardless of her actual feelings, and to mock the one person she should not mock.

Miss Bates has been Emma's constant source of uneasiness throughout the novel, someone whose feelings Emma has been expected to attend to. Because of her low social standing, Miss Bates' presence works as a test for one's social virtue in Highbury society. She is a woman "nobody is afraid of" (63), and whom everybody knows better than to neglect. The first thing Frank learns upon his arrival to Highbury is that "any want of attention to [Miss Bates] *here* should be carefully avoided" (135). Pointing out Miss Bates' symbolic position in Highbury, Julia Prewitt Brown explains that "Emma's insult is an affront to the democratic character of the community itself" (18). Although

Emma is deeply aware of the symbolic position of Miss Bates, she cannot deny the displeasure she finds in her company. Emma hates Miss Bates's endless, pointless chatter, unbearable praising of Jane, and overflowing expression of gratitude. Because Emma knows well that she does not deserve her gratitude, she feels uncomfortable in front of her. Whenever she converses with Miss Bates, her words "overpower[s] [Emma] with care and kindness, thanks for their visit, solicitude for their shoes" and so on (107), and she feels like "much had been forced on her against her will" (112). Emma cannot be honest to her feelings when she is with Miss Bates, and even though she usually manages to maintain her proper manner in front of her as a social duty, at the Box Hill picnic, Emma loses her control and blurts out the mockery that she knows to be unkind and immoral. The pressure she feels to laugh and her need to be pleased lead to a neglect of her moral sense, and she ends up hurting Miss Bates.

In fact, since Emma's laugh is directed toward another, it becomes much more than a matter of her own morality or Miss Bates' feelings. When she laughs at Miss Bates or jokes with Frank targeting Jane, her laughter becomes a weapon that victimizes others. Especially because of her social position, Emma's laugh makes Miss Bates and Jane's already vulnerable position more visible, regardless of her intention. Frank, who stimulates Emma's laughter, is also at fault in affronting those who he needs to respect and care for the most. Even though Emma's laugh is not a product of her sense of superiority or pride, it nevertheless displays her superiority and power to others' eyes. Mr. Knightley critiques Emma on both occasions as he understands that Emma's behavior could risk the communal virtue that Highbury society tries to uphold.

Conscious of Emma's social influence, Mr. Knightley emphasizes why her laughter is such a serious matter, telling her, "many of whom (certainly *some*,) would be entirely guided by your treatment of her" (259). As the lady of Hartfield, Emma's conduct takes great social meaning, and Emma has to realize that social duty should be respected as much as her own desire for pleasure. Her position provides her with the means of pursuing pleasure, but it also obliges her to regard her social virtue. Austen understands that if "laughing with" can create intimacy, "laughing at" can break it.

Throughout the narrative, Austen shows how one's desire for pleasure can be a pressure or pain for another to bear, and Emma sorely realizes this through her own errant laughter. Emma has to learn that as much as she loves her own pleasure, she has to respect others' feelings and consider the social weight of her behavior as well. Yet Austen suggests that this lesson is not just for women. Repeatedly, in the novel, Austen reveals her critical view on men's selfish and inconsiderate pursuit of pleasure and what it costs for women to bear its consequences. Even if Emma is the only one who is directly reprimanded for her behavior and the only one who actually goes through the painful lesson about the wrongness of her laughter, Austen indicates that this should not be a gendered instruction and that Emma is not the only one who needs it. When Frank still "laugh[s] so heartily at the recollection" (329) of his past, errant conduct at the end, Jane, who was the victim of Frank's misconduct, quietly, but firmly, criticizes his laugh: "How you can bear such recollections, is astonishing to me!—They *will* sometimes obtrude—but how you can *court* them!" (331). It is clear that he did not properly learn his lessons.

Austen portrays Emma's education on laughter as a result of her self-examination and self-understanding, rather than of strict masculine regulation. Although Mr. Knightley intervenes to criticize Emma's laughs, Emma goes through the process to "feel" the wrong of her action in isolation and understands that as long as her pleasure harms the happiness of others, she cannot enjoy real pleasure. In short, through her errant laughs and the following musings, Emma gets to understand what genuinely pleases her. In his reproach, Mr. Knightley speaks for the social norms that Emma has to regard, but Austen shows that for Emma, laughter is also an issue of individual happiness. The wretchedness and "true contrition" (410) that she experiences after the Box Hill picnic teach her how inconsiderate laughter will only give her pain. At the same time, Emma's lesson does not make her give up all her desire for pleasure and simply adhere to the expectations of ideal femininity. Rather, Austen differentiates herself from the conduct book writers by showing how wonderful the moment of perfectly happy laughter can be, if it does not have to be followed by guilt and shame. At the very end of the novel, Emma finally gets her reward and enjoys her "true happiness."

The novel ends with Emma and Knightley's wedding, but the moment when Emma is described as most happy is when she laughs with joy, alone. In a way, what concludes Austen's comedy is laughter itself, not a wedding. After Emma finds out about her love for Mr. Knightley and his love for herself, she feels the "exquisite flutter of happiness" (298). Yet this happiness still has some alloy: her concern for her father who would be left alone after her marriage and her guilt about Harriet who confessed her love for Mr. Knightley to Emma. Emma's pleasure again seems to come at the expense

of others' pleasure. But soon, these problems get resolved: Mr. Knightley proposes to live at Hartfield, and Harriet will be happily married to Mr. Martin. Finally, Emma's rare moment of perfect happiness arrives, and she cannot help feeling "a most unreasonable degree of happiness" (325). There is no more alloy in her pleasure, no regret or vexation to come after her laughter.

> She wanted to be alone. Her mind was in a state of flutter and wonder, which made it impossible for her to be collected. She was in dancing, singing, exclaiming spirits; and till she had moved about and talked to herself, and laughed and reflected, she could be fit for nothing rational.
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> …
>
> Serious she was, very serious in her thankfulness, and in her resolutions; and yet there was no preventing a laugh, sometimes in the very midst of them. *She must laugh* at such a close! Such an end of the doleful disappointment of five weeks back! (327, my italics)

The narrator emphasizes that Emma is serious. Her laughter is not another momentary, careless slip or a disguise to cover up her displeasure. She thinks that she "must laugh" even in, or perhaps because of, her seriousness. After the distress that has accompanied her laughter before, she can now appreciate the value of this perfect moment.

Austen makes Emma laugh this last laugh alone. There is no Mr. Knightley to judge her and no one to get harmed by her laugh. As her laughter is described as wild and unreasonable, there is no doubt that it would appear wrong to Mr. Knightley. Emma is laughing with dancing and singing, but Austen does not describe this as "loud"

laughter that should be suppressed. Emma's happiness is more evident and complete in this scene than in the brief description of her marriage ceremony. Emma does not need Mr. Knightley to judge the appropriateness of her laughter as she well knows it herself. She finally appears to be the best judge of her own pleasure. Marking the conclusion of Emma's trial with her happiest laughter, Austen demonstrates that her lesson was for Emma to achieve that moment. After all the troubles Emma went through with her laughter, Emma's final, ecstatic laugh carries a sense of liberation.

At this scene, the reader, instead of Mr. Knightley, is driven to decide the value of Emma's laughter. The narrator, after noting that Emma's laughter was "serious," steps aside and refrains from making a judgment. Examining Austen's narrative technique, Caroline Austin-Bolt observes that at key moments, Austen's narrator stays silent and "provides a temporary opportunity for the reader to take the narrator's stance" (280). Austin-Bolt also indicates that the mingling of the voice of the first-person character with the third-person narrator's voice creates a sense of sympathy between the reader and the first-person thoughts of a character (274). Emma once says in the novel, "It is very unfair to judge of anybody's conduct, without an intimate knowledge of their situation" (103). This principle should be applied as well to our judgment of other's feelings. To understand Emma's excessive delight and happiness at the end, we need to know all the previous occasions in which her laughter was stifled, blocked, and criticized. To enable her readers to make fair judgment of her heroine, Austen allows us

to have enough access to Emma's mind. Emma is everywhere in the novel,[29] and through the technique of free indirect discourse, readers can closely follow Emma's feelings before and after her laughter. It is hard to call her insensitive when her repentant, mortified heart is exposed to our view. As Wayne C. Booth says, "[w]e know her too intimately to take her conscious thoughts at face value" (104).

Through the intimate knowledge of a laughing woman that *Emma* offers, we achieve a much more complex view of woman's laughter than the one provided in conduct literature. The intimacy formed between Emma and the reader is even greater than the intimacy that exists between Emma and Mr. Knightley. Johnson evaluates that "Austen's determination to establish a discrepancy between what [Mr. Knightley] knows and what we know about Emma is daring" (141). This discrepancy indicates Austen's ambivalent attitude toward Mr. Knightley and his male authority, together with the author's decision to leave Emma alone when she most happily laughs. Even though Emma loves him, she cannot betray Harriet's secret to Mr. Knightley and, thus, cannot share her merriment with him at the end. Moreover, Mr. Knightley is not familiar enough with Emma's past musings and feelings to appreciate the value of her laughter that reaches the point of being unreasonable. On the other hand, readers have intimately known her secrets. After all, Austen implies that the education Emma went through in

[29] As Reginald Farrer points out, "there is only one short scene in which Emma herself is not on the stage; and that one scene is Knightley's conversation about her with Mrs. Weston" (75). More than any other Austen protagonists, Emma takes the central position in the novel.

the novel was also for the readers. Now, it is up to the readers to decide if Emma's laughter is understandable and pleasant.

This brings us back to Austen's letter to her sister introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Like Austen's intimate sister Cassandra who was cherished by Austen as one person who would not harshly judge her for her immoderate laughter, readers are placed in the position of a possible intimate friend of Austen as well as Emma. As she did with her sister, Austen attempts to build intimacy with her readers by inviting us to laugh at her comic, entertaining narrative and, at the same time, teaches us the risk of careless laughter and the ways for a truly happy laugh. Austen suggests that true intimacy involves more than sharing sorrows and distresses. By presenting a protagonist who is unlikeable because of her well-provided, happy life, Austen implies that we can achieve true intimacy only when we can understand and share others' laughter and pleasure.

For Austen, women's laughter is a complex issue. If the conduct books condemn laughter as a loud bursting of propriety and feminist critics praise female laughter as a powerful attack on the masculine norms, Austen explores more various aspects of laughter: laughter as disguise, as defense, as a moment of self-reflection, and as a moment of pleasure. Maintaining both the virtue and the pleasure of laughter and finding a balance between personal and communal happiness cannot be realized in a simple manner. However, at least, Austen seems to believe that they are possible. Knowing the danger of laughter that could distress or oppress others and understanding the morality that should not be abandoned in one's laughter, Austen shows the need to examine what

comes after our laughter. Emma's search for the perfectly happy laughter is only achieved at the end once she learns the displeasure of her errant laughter. Laughing, after all, can be a joyful, positive experience, even for women. In *Emma*, Austen succeeds in revealing the beauty of perfectly happy laughter by exploring how difficult it is to achieve that moment. Austen's lessons on laughter guide us to laugh with goodness as well as pleasure, and, according to Austen, this only can make the true correspondence of sympathy and pleasure between individuals via laughter possible.

CHAPTER III

THE LAUGHTER OF THE MARGINAL IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Do you never laugh, Miss Eyre?

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (118)

In *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, Robert R. Provine explains, "The strangeness of laughter—as a behavior, and as a vocalization—is masked by its familiarity" (1). This familiarity of laughter that veils its strangeness is nowhere to be found in Charlotte Brontë's novels. Laughter is alien to most of her protagonists, who are usually grave and repressed, and the dark atmosphere of her fictional world does not allow much merriment to its characters or to its readers. Provine argues that laughing is an "instinctive behavior programmed by our genes" (1), but Brontë's laughless characters attest that they either have no such genes or that their social reality is too grim and oppressive to allow their genes to work naturally. When Rochester points out Jane's laughlessness by asking, "Do you never laugh?", Brontë asks her readers to notice the strange absence and examine its origin. What makes a socially disadvantaged, marginal woman like Jane Eyre laugh, or not laugh at all? Brontë's narrative dismisses any faith in laughter as a familiar, natural expression of everyday life. Moving far away from Austen's comedy, where laughter presents itself in every corner, Brontë represents a world where laughter is most noticeable through its odd absence, and where, when it appears, it is mostly just strange.

Most of Brontë's protagonists lead a difficult, toilsome life without money, social status, or family, and in their marginalized, isolated position, they discipline themselves to accept their fate as monotonous, bleak, and distanced from the pleasure of the others. Laughter is experienced more through their observation of others' laughter than through their own embodiment. Estranged from laughter, they see how laughter signals power and superiority in their society. The major question, then, is what kind of laughter is possible for the powerless characters in a society where laughter works as power. Through her marginal characters' laughter, Brontë tries to rewrite the nature of that power, using laughter as a mark of inner superiority, not simply the demonstration of socially defined power. The power relations produced in the strictly hierarchal system are disturbed when a socially inferior character lets out a laugh. As Brontë's protagonists struggle to survive and to progress with their limited means, they use laughter as a weapon, as a shield, and as a mask to gain some authority in their lives. In short, when laughter appears in Brontë's novels, it is rarely represented as an "instinctive behavior" or an involuntary expression of pleasure.

Therefore, in various ways, laughing appears to be a strange act in Brontë's works. Bertha Mason's "goblin-laughter," which is supposedly the most famous and bizarre female laughter in all of Victorian fiction, is also the result of the author's casting off of all that is familiar from the act of laughing. Brontë raises a doubt whether natural laughing that conveys pleasure can really exist in the social world she represents, and this illuminates the tragic life her characters are facing. While laughing a laugh that is always something other than just a laugh, they carry an unfulfilled desire for a fully

embodied laughter of happiness. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë explores the possibility for her underprivileged protagonist to achieve a happy laugh, but her final answer is not really optimistic. The masculine social norms and discourses limit the scope of women's laughter in Victorian society, and Brontë emphasizes the difficulty of having one's own laugh. Through her representation of laughter, particularly the laughter of the marginal women, Brontë effectively delivers her criticism of the oppressive, patriarchal society.

This chapter is composed of three parts. First, it reviews the critical studies focusing on the subject of laughter in Brontë's works. Though there are only a few such critical works that directly deal with laughter, the study of laughter can be connected to the wider range of studies that examine the dynamics of emotional expressions in Brontë's novels. These studies suggest the importance of considering the nineteenth-century medical and social discourses that define and confine women's nature and body in negative ways when discussing Brontë's representation of laughter. The second part analyzes the laughter represented in Brontë's novels, mainly *The Professor* and *Villette*. William Crimsworth and Lucy Snowe show well how Brontë's characters use laughter to defy the existing social hierarchy and to demonstrate their inner strength. However, their different genders matter greatly as Lucy suffers more severely from her subordinate position as a woman and from the oppressive male gaze. Brontë portrays the tragedy of always using laughter as a strategic device to protect oneself, without tasting real pleasure. The last section closely examines *Jane Eyre*, where Brontë more directly points at the protagonist's missing laughter and its significance. Through the eyes of a protagonist who most passionately desires her own happiness, Brontë shows how female

laughter is neglected, manipulated, and confined in the patriarchal society. Jane's quest for a happy laugh leads her to a secluded life, implying that there is no place for a happy female laugh within the dominant social rules. This chapter aims to reveal Brontë's concern with the (im)possibility of the happy, powerful laugh of a woman in nineteenth-century British society.

III.1. Positioning Laughter in Brontë Criticism

Owing to the fact that laughter is hard to find in Brontë's novels, there are not many critical works focusing on the subject of laughter in Brontë. The existing few mainly deal with *Jane Eyre*, in which Bertha Mason's ominous, goblin laughter highlights the act of laughing more distinctly than the other novels. Still, Robin Jones indicates that despite the "stimulating and far-reaching" critical reaction to Bertha, "there has been a definite neglect in an analysis of this particular action of Bertha's" (201), that is, her laughing. The tendency to examine laughter within the study of humor or comedy has contributed to this neglect, since in Brontë's novels, "The plot, theme, or characterization hardly fulfills any requirements of comedy or humor" (R. Jones 201). Therefore, to investigate the significance of laughter in Brontë, it is essential to move beyond the boundary of comedy or humor, and see laughter in her novel as a part of emotional experience as it works within the codes of Victorian society.

In this regard, Jones seems to be the only critic who examines laughter in Brontë as "very revealing of social construction" (201). She claims that "[e]xploring why and how women in the novel laugh or don't laugh reveals cultural mores and attitudes about

women" (201) and traces Jane Eyre's learning of the meaning and risk of laughing in a patriarchal society where "the incongruous or the marginal aren't expected to laugh at the domineering force" (202). Jones argues that the way women laugh reveals their standing in patriarchal society and explores the different functions of female laughter in the novel as a "response to a patriarchal construct," as "an expression of self ," and as "a tool with which knowledge of women's experience is passed on, from women to women" (201-02). Jones' article shows well how Brontë sees laughter as a social construct regulated by masculine social norms and how development of a female character involves her learning of this fact. However, while emphasizing the socialization of female laughter that occurs in the narrative, Jones fails to notice Jane's personal desire for laughter that could work beyond the existing social codes. If Jones interprets Jane as a character who eventually submits to the social regulation of women's laughter, I intend to illuminate Brontë's critical attitude toward that regulation which is revealed through Jane's continuous attempts to achieve a laugh of her own.

Regina Barreca and Amanda T. Smith also study laughter in Brontë's novels—Barreca in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* and Smith in *Jane Eyre*—but their studies are more limited to the "laughing at" moments where a character's laughter delivers their resistance to or mocking of patriarchal authority or restrictive social norms. Barreca emphasizes Brontë's "unsettling and powerful use of humor" (*Untamed* 61) and examines Jane and Lucy Snowe's application of their "wit in a combination of self-defense and mutiny, as a way of negotiating with a world they often dislike and always distrust" (*Untamed* 61). For Barreca, who sees Brontë's protagonists as "[a]rmed with

their wit," humor becomes "an essential strategy for survival" (*Untamed* 61) for women. Unlike Jones who stresses the oppressiveness of society that makes women repress and hide their laughs, Barreca indicates how laughter and wit can provide women with tools to defy the society. They both deal with laughter's social meanings and roles, but as Barreca's approach is more confined within the study of humor, it only underlines laughs that are witty and subversive. Smith agrees with Barreca as she also argues that Jane "wields wit against Victorian social and literary conventions" (192) and that "when the marginalized appropriates the privileges of laughter, revolutionary social critique can occur" (193). Yet by seeing Jane's laugh only as a means of defiance and ridicule, Barreca and Smith simplify the complex use of laughter in Brontë's novel. As in Austen criticism, feminist critics disregard laughter's role as an expression of pleasure, and this leads to a limited understanding of what Brontë tries to show through the representation of women's laughter.

Although Jones, Barreca, and Smith examine laughter from different points of view, they commonly address the social function of female laughter. Since Brontë's fiction focuses on protagonists who are poor, friendless and marginal individuals, it seems natural to emphasize how characters use laughter, either compliant or rebellious, in their struggles to progress in life with their meager means. However, doing so could limit our understanding of laughter to its role as a crucial survival tool, excluding laughter's broader function as emotional expression. Barreca and Smith observe how a character's laugh reveals their attitude toward society and analyze society's reading and restricting of women's laughter, but they do not take into account laughter's more

personal values or the burden that characters carry because their laughter is laden too much with social implications. In other words, in the studies of laughter in Brontë, there has been a critical neglect of "just laughing" moments or of the desire for that simple, happy laughter. Laughter is not always used or viewed as a strategic device in Brontë's works, although it certainly works in that way in many cases, and only when we take the further step of studying the diverse representations of laughter in the novel can we reach a more comprehensive understanding of Brontë's response to laughter's role and position in the Victorian society.

While laughter in Brontë's novels has not been the focus of critical studies that often,[30] many critics have explored how Brontë generally deals with emotion and its expression. It is not hard to find out that the tendency to read laughter as a strategic tool for survival aligns with the way emotion or its expression is read in Brontë criticism. Generally, Brontë's characters are reserved, introverted, and even asocial,[31] and typically strive not to reveal their feelings to others. Laughter is not the only mode of expression that rarely appears in her novels as Brontë's characters are commonly not prone to reveal their inner thoughts and feelings. So the keyword in the works of literary criticism studying Brontë's representation of emotion is *repression*. Many critics point out that the characters not only suffer from the oppressiveness of the society that restricts free expressions, but also deliberately choose and rely on repression as a tool for survival and

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[30] In fact Jones, Barreca and Smith are the only critics whose works deal with laughter as their main subjects.

[31] Julia Miele Rodas describes Jane Eyre's social behavior as "highly unusual" (52) and points at "the singularly remote, withdrawn, or unattractive quality of her social intercourse" (52).

independence in their difficult reality. In this regard, the studies of emotional expressions in Brontë provide useful insights to analyze laughter as well.

The proper expression of feelings and also its proper control are among the virtues expected from the Victorians. Gesa Stedman asserts that during the Victorian period, "The ability to express the inexpressible—the emotions—is seen to be a vital capacity… something which is necessary to the preservation of individual and social health" (47) as emotional expression served as "a medium of human sympathy. . . enabling the reading of another person's mind" and as "a mark of distinction between human & animals" (53). Yet she also argues that the proper control of expression was considered as the sign of good taste and good manners (53), which creates an "unsolvable dilemma" for the Victorians as they had to be "legible" through emotional expression while also performing constant self-control (55). When emotional expression becomes the means of reading the other's mind and of judging their behavior, it is vital for an individual to regulate his or her expression so that it could deliver the proper bodily language that is acceptable to the social norms and also to conceal other bodily expressions. Stedman adds that women faced greater difficulty as they were thought to be more emotional than men (19) and notes that the "association of women & mental disturbance & womb" led to the belief that women are "prone to more violent emotions and consequently in danger of becoming insane" (70). Thus, for Brontë's protagonists who are without money, status, familial connections and even the right gender, sustaining the proper social behavior and exerting necessary control of their emotional expressions become essential.

Sally Shuttleworth undertakes a more detailed study of how bodily expression was interpreted during Brontë's time through the analysis of contemporary discourses of psychology, politics, and even social economy. Shuttleworth explains that during the nineteenth century "A new interiorized notion of selfhood arose and, concomitantly, new techniques of power designed to penetrate the inner secrets of this hidden domain" (3), particularly psychiatry and phrenology, the purpose of which was to decode "the external signs of the body" (3). She argues that together with the attempts to read one's interiority, nineteenth-century economic ideology contrasted male self-control with female subjection to the forces of the body, contributing to the separate spheres ideology, supported by medical and psychological discourses defining the female body as unstable. Reflecting this reality, Shuttleworth says that in Brontë's novels there exist continuing "struggles for control which centre on the issue of legibility, on decoding and penetrating the secrets of the other" (4). In this struggle, Shuttleworth asserts, "power resides with the figure who can read the other whilst preserving the illegibility of the self" (46). Shuttleworth demonstrates how Brontë's powerless protagonists, especially female protagonists, show wariness toward surveillance and try to baffle these penetrations to keep some authority in their life.

As Stedman highlights the needs for emotional self-control and Shuttleworth the importance of keeping one's interiority intact from outer penetration, we can guess the difficulty faced by Brontë's protagonists. While they try to look calm and reticent on the surface and become silent observers, their insides are boiling with different feelings and desires that cannot be let out. Sometimes, Brontë chooses to let her protagonists reveal

their minds at least to the readers through first-person narration as in the case of *Jane Eyre*,[32] but in *Villette*, the same technique is only used to underline the severity of the narrator's repressive tendency that makes her hide her own feelings not only from the readers, but from herself. Lucy Snowe, the protagonist and the narrator of *Villette*, conceals the important incidents of her life and her deepest feelings from readers and makes it impossible for them to completely know or judge her.[33] This narrative embodiment of illegibility shows how Lucy, after enduring life-long neglect and oppression, has come to employ repression as a means of resistance.[34]

However, repression cannot always be successful and some of the most powerful scenes in Brontë's works occur when repression fails. Since Brontë's protagonists strive so hard to repress and mask their feelings, these acts of repression are usually followed by break-through moments in the narrative where the repressed feelings suddenly erupt

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[32] As a narrator, Jane is usually evaluated as open and honest, not elusive or reluctant as Lucy Snowe. Peter Grudin remarks, "Jane is an open narrator who tells us all she thinks, knows, and feels" (155), and Beth Newman argues that the novel assumes "mutual regard" between the reader and the narrator "with the reader's interest and attention rewarded by frank self-disclosure" (57).

[33] Most notably, Lucy ends her narrative vaguely without telling whether M. Paul, her lover, has returned from the West Indies safely or not. It is suggested that he was killed by a shipwreck on his journey back, but the definite truth is not delivered. For discussion of Lucy Snowe's repressive tendency as a narrator, see Jolene Zigarovich 26-35, Mary Jacobus 121-22, Janet Gezari 145, and Susan Bernstein 3.

[34] The subversiveness of Lucy's evasive, secretive narrative is pointed out by many critics. For example, Jacobus asserts that Brontë subverts the existing narrative conventions through Lucy's "perverse" storytelling and says, "The novel's real oddity lies in perversely withholding its true subject, Lucy Snowe, by an act of repression which mimics hers. . . Her deliberate ruses, and falsifications break the unwritten contract of first-person narrative (the confidence between reader and 'I') and unsettle our faith in the reliability of the text" (122). Nancy Mayer also highlights Lucy's "willfully inaccessible privacy" protected by her elusive narrative (75) and explains how Lucy's "strategic reticence" serves to "demonstrate the impenetrability of subjective experience" (75). Moreover, Patricia Murphy proclaims the feminist import of Lucy's narrative by pointing out how Lucy's strategic silence subverts "the parameters of approved female speech" (23) shaped by the conduct manuals that teach female reticence as "an expression of modesty, humility, and inferiority" (24). According to Murphy, Lucy deviates from social norms by "manipulat[ing] silence for her own purposes" (23) and gains agency.

from the character and get out of their control.[35] Jane Eyre's rebellious retort against Mrs. Reed or both Jane's and Lucy's tearful and passionate confession of love to their lovers are representative scenes where their inner secrets that cannot stand to be contained anymore just burst out of the character. These moments prove the characters' strong, unyielding spirits and desires to free themselves from outside oppression and restraint. Eugenia C. DeLamotte indicates that Jane's defiant verbal act is "described in images of power, energy, expansion, escape, and bursting" (197). Jane's assertive cries certainly demonstrate her free and strong mind that cannot be oppressed. At the same time, some critics warn us of the danger of linking expression directly to power and liberty. John Kucich points out that "surrender to her passion is directly linked to her vulnerability" since "[o]nce externalized, intense feeling is subjected to social controls and distortions" (49). Bette London also refuses to see these scenes as triumphant or revolutionary because they are the "production of an over-disciplined body" (203). She argues that Jane's ardent confession is not the "spontaneous overflow of authentic

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[35] This pattern of repression-eruption brings to mind Freud's psychoanalytic analysis of repression and a return of the repressed. Freud explains that repression occurs when satisfaction of certain instinctual impulses could lead to unpleasure and says, "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" ("Repression" 147). So, in Freud, repression is, to be precise, "repression into the unconscious" (Laplanche and Pontalis 392). And Freud says that a return of the repressed happens through substitutive formations and symptoms ("Repression" 154). Although the pattern of repression that appears in Brontë's characters resembles the Freudian conception of repression in its symptoms of "the damming-up consequent on frustrated satisfaction" (Freud, "Repression" 149), what I discuss here is not concerned with the unconscious, which is essential in Freud's analysis. Brontë's characters' obvious attempts to hide their feelings and the continuous self-conflict they undergo show that their repression-eruption occurs mostly at the level of the conscious. That Lucy's own fictional creation—her writing—reflects her repressive tendency also reveals that she actively and intentionally employs repression to protect herself and to present herself in certain ways to others' eyes. Moreover, when the eruption of the repressed feelings occurs in Brontë, it does not take the form of distortion or substitution as in Freud's explanation of the return of the repressed.

female feelings," but "speak[ing of] the very text Rochester seeks to elicit" (203). Because she sees these moments as the result of the extreme emotional control Jane has suffered for so long, she warns feminist critics to avoid being "dazzled by the spectacle of Jane's (controlled) rebelliousness" (204). For both Kucich and London, repression of feelings and the outbreak that comes in the end are not separate, but closely interconnected. By setting up the cyclic pattern of 'repression - (erupted) expression' in her works, Brontë precludes any hasty judgments and suggests the difficulty of achieving authentic expression that is strong and liberating in an overly watchful and authoritative society. The true feelings cannot forever be repressed and the uninhibited confession is crucial at certain moments, but, all the same, one is never safe from the dangers of unmasked emotional manifestations.

In sum, the critical studies on emotional expressions and their dynamics in Brontë concentrate on the propensity for and value of repression or emotional self-control in her characters. However, laughter does not really feature in the general pattern of repression-expression discussed above. Laughter is scarce in Brontë's works, but this scarcity is not the result of repression. Lucy Snowe does not laugh, not because she strives to repress the urge to laugh, but because there is not much to laugh about in her bitter, toiling life. Sometimes laughter is repressed, but most of the times, laughter simply does not exist. This is why laughter is not at all mentioned in Kucich and London's discussions of repression. Laughter does play a crucial role in characters' struggles to survive and protect themselves, but when it plays this role, it is not by means of the repression of laughter, but by a character wearing laughter as a mask or wielding it

as a weapon. Since natural, involuntary laughter is hard to experience, characters often laugh to conceal the fact. Thus, the study of laughter requires us to consider how different feelings/expressions can work differently and how each relates to the characters' struggles for power and independence.

Though laughter is not really the object of repression in Brontë's novels, it nevertheless crucially functions in the characters' attempts to hide their insides from others' supervision and appropriation. It is also related to their struggles between the desire for self-control and the desire for self-assertion. Moreover, as the constant control of feelings brings about the strong desire for expression, the continuing use of laughter as a mask increases the desire for the true realization of a happy laugh. If the critical works on emotional expressions in Brontë have not dealt with laughter because the feelings that could lead to laughter are generally absent in her characters, my aim is to focus on that absence and its meaning and to illuminate how laughter still plays a significant role in the character's attempt to win in a psychological battle.

III.2. Brontë's Rewriting of Laughter as Power

The traditional theories of laughter teach us to be cautious with laughter as it can display a sense of power and superiority, which is not a moral or a wise thing to do. In Brontë's fiction, laughter indeed indicates power more than anything else. When creating Emma Woodhouse, Austen makes her beautiful, rich, and prosperous in many ways, but this does not necessarily mean that Emma's laughter is possible only because of her social condition. Austen clearly says that Emma has a happy disposition, which

blurs the boundary between natural and social factors. While her high social standing and beauty guarantee Emma an easier access to laughter and pleasant experiences, she also has a noticeably bright and resilient nature that props up her laughter. Moreover, given that there are other characters in Austen's novels—such as the Bennet girls in *Pride and Prejudice* (especially Elizabeth and Lydia) who love to laugh but are not from a wealthy, prosperous family or such as Miss Bates who always feels happy and grateful regardless of her deprived social position—it is hard to say that social condition determines a character's laughter in Austen's novels. In Brontë's work, however, social condition greatly affects or even determines one's experience of laughter. Brontë's protagonists usually do not have a profitable social background, and even when characters who seem like Austen's Emma appear in Brontë's novels, they are seen from the point of view of the poor protagonist who deeply senses the social divergence between them.

Though Brontë's characters do not laugh a lot in general, there are some exceptional characters for whom laughter is a part of their everyday life. Brontë sees them as blessed beings who are born under a lucky star. For example, Miss Rosamond Oliver in *Jane Eyre* is a daughter of a rich factory owner and a character described as having perfect beauty, and she is "the laughing girl" (310) who is always in a gay, happy mood. To Jane's eyes, "[n]o charm was wanting, no defect was perceptible" (309) and "the ideal of beauty were fully hers" (309).[36] Miss Oliver is almost a surreal presence to

[36] Jen Cadwallader observes that Miss Oliver "perfectly embodies the ideal of the fairy-tale heroine" as "[s]he is beautiful and genuinely good—the very pinnacle of nineteenth-century femininity" (240).

Jane who wonders, “What happy combination of the planets presided over her birth?” (310). Miss Oliver’s laughter that “well bec[omes] her youth, her roses, her dimples, her bright eyes” (310) is totally harmless, not intended to exert any influence over an inferior other such as Jane, but it nonetheless establishes the difference between them immediately through its free, casual manifestation. To Jane, Miss Oliver’s laugh is an unmistakable sign of her superiority and fortunate state. Because she is so gifted in life, Miss Oliver can laugh a happy, innocent, and “child-like” laugh (310). It is a privilege given to her that Jane cannot enjoy. Although Jane appreciates her beauty and childlike nature, she sees her as a “gay, lively and unthinking” (314) character who is “not profoundly interesting or thoroughly impressive” (314). As she cannot feel akin to Miss Oliver’s easy laughter, she just observes her from a distance and sets apart their fates.

Among Brontë’s protagonists, Shirley Keeldar, an heiress, alone is permitted to have this happy laughter from the beginning. Shirley is “a brilliant, happy, youthful creature” (175) with a “pleasurable nature, want[ing] to talk, laugh, and linger” (248). The narrator says that “Fate had been benign to the blissful dreamer” (195), and that bliss displays itself through her “joyous laugh” (174). As a gifted being, Shirley’s virtue includes her eager desire to share her laughter with Caroline Helstone, who is not used to it and who wonders at Shirley’s free laughter at first. As Shirley enters the narrative only at the end of part one, during which Caroline had seemed like the sole heroine of the novel, we are led to compare Shirley and Caroline’s different social conditions and different dispositions and to view Shirley’s bright, free laugh from a distance. Miss Oliver’s laughter or Shirley’s does not aim to offend or humble anyone, but simply the

fact that they can laugh so much, so easily, and so happily makes others aware of their fortunate, superior social standing. Having not much to suffer and having no reason to restrain their laughs, some enjoy the privilege that is impossible to others. By letting the readers see these characters and their laughter from a distance, Brontë makes the contrast between the fortunate laugher and not-so-fortunate observer quite noticeable. That is, even the most innocent laughter can create a sense of inequality. Brontë indicates that laughter is always about power; whether it is immoral or not is a different issue.

Therefore, interesting things happen when seemingly powerless, inferior characters laugh at or in front of their superiors, which twists the common working of laughter. In this way, Brontë moves away from the general idea of what constitutes power and bestows inner strength on her unfortunate characters. Laughter can create tension in relationships and sometimes even overturns hierarchy for a moment. Even though laughter is about power in Brontë's novels, it is not always about power that is defined by a worldly standard. With a clear understanding of how laughter works in relationship to others, Brontë's characters use it for their own advantage, to win in a psychological battle.

Using laughter as a psychological weapon appears most clearly in *The Professor* which is Brontë's only novel that has a male protagonist. In the preface, Brontë announces that her hero should "never get a shilling he had not earned" and "As Adam's Son, he should share Adam's doom—Labour throughout life and a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment" (3). So, we meet the protagonist, William Crimsworth, as a poor, determined man who seeks to pursue life through hard work and self-government. His

mind is set on earning money through his own hands, and even though he hates the idea, he decides to become a tradesman because he does not want to be dependent on his relatives and because one of his uncles sneered at the idea of following his father's job in trade: "such was the scorn expressed in Lord Tynedale's countenance as he pronounced the word *Trade*, such the contemptuous sarcasm of his tone, that I was instantly decided" (6). What William cannot bear is to be laughed at by others. This man who willingly adopts the "habits of self-denying economy" (19) and humbly submits to harsh reality never forsakes his independence of mind. While lowering himself in position, he never lowers his pride or dignity. Despite his disadvantaged situation, William seeks inner triumph and self-respect, which is crystallized through his laughter.

The relationships William forms in the narrative are mostly competitive in nature. He is a rival in various ways to his elder brother Edward, to his aristocrat friend Mr. Hunsden, to schoolmaster M. Pelet, and to the attractive, yet manipulating Mdlle. Reuter, and he eventually achieves an ideal master-student relationship through his marriage to Frances Henri. All these characters, except for Frances, hold higher social positions and greater wealth compared to William, but with all of them, he finds a way to prevail. Particularly, his relationship with Edward is full of strain and hostility from the beginning. Even though they are brothers, there exists no brotherly sympathy between them. On their first meeting, Edward "scan[s] [his brother] from head to foot" (9), and William feels "inner satisfaction" (10) from not betraying any warmth or enthusiasm toward him. After that, William tries to endure the harsh, unjust treatment of his brother, who is also his supervisor, without any signs of resentment and maintains

"impenetrable indifference" (20) in front of his brother's "covert sneer" (19). Hence, the battle between the one who wants to mortify and tyrannize and the one who defends with utmost indifference continues for a while. What terminates this silent, yet intense battle is William's provocative laughter. At the climax of their conflict, Edward takes hold of a whip to stop William from leaving his office and William laughs out loud.

> I *permitted myself to laugh* with a degree of scorn I took no pains to temper or hide; his fury boiled up and when he had sworn half-a-dozen vulgar, impious oaths, without however venturing to lift the whip, he continued. (35, my italics)

As there is nothing laughable about the situation, William's laugh openly expresses his desire to defy his brother's authority and violence and to show that he is unaffected by his brother's demeaning treatment. William confronts his brother's physical and social power with a mark of his inner superiority. After he finally walks out of the mill, he feels "light and liberated" (37) and thinks, "I had got away from Bigben Close without a breach of resolution; without injury to my self-respect" (37). Self-respect is important to him, and he would rather face the fear of being out of a job than become a slave to his tyrannical brother. Moreover, the way his laughter is described suggests that it is not at all involuntary. He "permits himself" a lapse from his cold, distanced exterior and makes his laughter reveal the scorn that he carries inside. That he has the nerve to laugh at his brother's whipping power is what he wants to show. His laughter here might look like a breakthrough moment as he usually restrains any kinds of emotional expression in front of others. However, his laughter is not a result of a failure in his self-control, which is

usually the case for other scenes of emotional outburst. Instead, William laughs because he clearly knows that it will deliver his scorn most successfully.

A similar scene occurs in William's conversation with Mr. Hunsden, another man who has more wealth and higher status than William. Even though Hunsden becomes William's only friend 'til the end, William consistently shows an aversion to admitting his fondness to and for the man. When they first meet, William moves away from Hunsden "[s]imply because Mr. Hunsden was a manufacturer and a millowner and [he] was only a clerk" (21), and he admits, "my instinct propelled me from my superior" (21). Moreover, William holds "a sort of involuntary grudge" (21) for the man who witnessed several times Edward's insulting manner toward him. Despite their similar taste and Hunsden's friendly attitude, William avoids opening up his mind and even refuses to thank him when he helps him escape from Edward's oppression. When Hunsden criticizes William for submitting to Edward's tyranny, William suddenly laughs as he senses "a tone of despotism in the urgency of the very reproaches, by which [Hunsden] aimed at goading the oppressed into rebellion against the oppressor" (31). Hunsden is "chafed by a laugh, scarce louder than a whisper" as he expected William to take "his bitter and haughty taunts" with calmness (31). Again, William's laughter functions to resist and offend the superior other's authority. Hunsden's face darkens at the laugh, and he says, "who but an Aristocrat would laugh such a laugh as that and look such a look? A laugh frigidly jeering; a look lazily mutinous; gentlemanlike irony, patrician resentment" (31). Laughter obviously conveys here a sense of superiority that would only suit an aristocrat, and when worn by William it becomes "mutinous." It is

interesting how Hunsden connects one's emotional expression to one's social status and defines William's laughter as aristocratic, and thus, inappropriate. Although there is nothing favorable in William's social condition that makes him a competent rival to Hunsden, his inner pride and penetration make him a difficult match. Through laughter, Brontë successfully portrays her character's strong desire not to lose a mental battle with others who are superior to him and, in doing so, she suggests that laughter can be used as a strategy or a weapon that enables one to take control in a relationship.

However, it should not be missed that William is a male character, a man fighting against other men. The power that he exerts through his laugh is masculine in its nature. He can laugh whenever he wants without harming his reputation, and furthermore, his laugh makes him appear to be a superior, a better man and one with dignity. Although he does not have a stalwart, manly form or a high social position that could support his masculinity, he has a masculine laugh that enables him to win over the most conventionally masculine character in the novel, his brother Edward. When meeting his brother for the first time, he compares his body to his brother's and states, "in form I was greatly inferior—thinner, slighter, not so tall. As an animal—Edward excelled me far" (14). But he does not readily accept that Edward is a better man and wonders, "Had I then force of mind to cope with him?" (14). William rewrites the conditions of masculinity and shows faith in his mental strength that could overpower Edward's.

The fact that Brontë uses a male first-person narrator in *The Professor* has raised many doubts about the choice, as the prevailing critical opinion is that Brontë provides

"a clumsy, inept, and unconvincing portrayal of masculinity" (83), as Sara Pearson notes. Ute Kauer explains that since the Brontë sisters decided to use male pseudonyms to add authority to their works, the same reason might have propelled Charlotte to use a male narrator in her first attempt to write a novel (168).[37] Yet Kauer also judges Brontë's attempt at using the male narrator to be a failure as "the hero fails to convince us of his maleness as well as of his narrative authority" (170).[38] William is certainly represented as a sensitive, reserved man who is somehow too familiar with female dress and behavior, which Kauer points out as an element that makes his male voice unrealistic, but, in terms of laughter at least, he is unmistakably male. William Cohen argues that writing a male first-person narrative "supplies Brontë the opportunity to imagine being a man, and in particular to speculate about how it feels to inhabit a male body" (41). Clearly, Brontë imagines what it is like to embody a male laugh through William.

Besides, William shows a male consciousness when observing and judging female laughter. He mostly dismisses female laughter as vain, coquettish, and light. Though he welcomes the chance to teach at a girls' pensionnat and to have an access to female nature, he finds out too soon that the girls in Mdlle. Reuter's establishment are only vulgar and vain coquettes. In his first class, he faces endless giggles from the students which only speak their "conceited coquetry and futile flirtation" (73). One of

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[37] Annette R. Federico also acknowledges that "Like everything else, narrative voice corresponds to the cultural needs of Victorian society, and so an age comparatively rich in literary heroines (and in women writers) still finds the masculine voice more representative, and, supposedly, more rational, more 'objective'" ("The Other Case" 185).

[38] There are also critics who reject this negative evaluation and instead claim that Brontë is actually providing a new, unconventional masculinity that incorporates feminine qualities. Pearson and Federico view the novel from this perspective.

the students, Aurelia, is described as always indulging in "a half-suppressed laugh" (83) with "all sorts of looks, languishing, provoking, leering, laughing" (83). Compared to these girls, Reuter stands out for laughing "quite good naturedly and with the sort of tranquility obvious in all she did" (67), but William's illusion of and desire for the directress crumble as soon as he witnesses her laughing a "little laugh of exulting coquetry" (92) in front of M. Pelet. He cannot find any modesty, sense, or attraction in the women's laughter, and this increases his contempt for female nature.

The only female laugh that he approves is that of Frances Henri, his student and the woman who will be his future wife. He observes Frances very closely and finds there "a much-meaning though not very gay smile [which] seemed to say 'He talks of he knows not what'" (117) when he reproaches her and "a smile, slight and brief, but bitter, distrustful and . . . scornful" (105) toward Mdlle. Reuter's manipulative interference. Also, as his schooling continues, he sees how her suffering tears are replaced by smiles. Though she never laughs, her smiles prove to William that she keeps a sensible, undaunted spirit in her struggling, poor life, just like himself, and this attracts him to this new model of femininity. Yet he also takes pleasure from Frances' smile because he believes this is the result of "The benefits of my system" (124). He says that he watched with pleasure how "she could smile brightly, converse gaily, move with vivacity and alertness" (123), and he compares himself to "a gardener watch[ing] the growth of a precious plant" (123). William has the ability to appreciate Frances's rare, inconspicuous smiles, which sets him apart from other men, but he also takes pride from making her smile in a way he approves. Frances' smiles are continually objectified by William's

eyes, and even though her smiles are never submissive or servile, his authority is reinforced through his judging, masterly stance.

Thus, female laughter is represented as being scrutinized and evaluated by the male gaze. The different status male and female laughter takes in Victorian society is distinctly shown when Mdlle. Reuter exclaims that William looks handsome like Apollo when he smiles with a haughty air (154). The haughty smile is thought to befit the masculine ideal, Apollo, while women are expected to laugh with modesty and tranquility. The eyes that study Frances' soundless change of countenance and the mouth that laughs out loud in front of his socially superior others are definitely defined as male. Besides, what is remarkable in this narrative delivered by a male protagonist is that although it contains more laughing scenes than other Brontë's novels, most of the laughs appear devised and unnatural. Hunsden and William frequently laugh at each other, but their laugh seems like a weapon they throw at each other, perhaps not a very sharp weapon that intends to leave a deep wound, but definitely a device to lower each other's pride. They never laugh together, and usually when one laughs, the other feels slighted or ashamed. Frances never laughs, but just smiles, and other girls and ladies laugh flirtatious, vain laughs to lure men. Characters laugh with purpose, and these calculated laughs do not bring real pleasure to anyone. As the title, *The Professor*, suggests, the novel is about the protagonist's attempt to secure his social position through hard work, self-government, and maintaining a superiority of mind. In this hierarchal, competitive world, there is no room for a happy, sympathetic laugh.

In her later novels, Brontë turns to a female point of view to represent what it means to laugh as a woman and pays attention to the pressure of living with only a devised, strategic laugh. Laughter still works to protect the protagonists from surveillance or to provide them with means to win a mental battle, but it also reveals their vulnerable position and suffering mind. In *Villette*, Brontë presents a similar story to *The Professor*, but through a female voice. The differences between the two novels are highlighted in two very similar but essentially different scenes. Both William and Lucy, after moving to a foreign land to earn a living, face a task to prove their ability to impress and control the unruly students in their first classes in a girls' pensionnat. Unsurprisingly, what they have to master is the students' open laughter. However, the natures of the laughter that confront them are widely different. While William feels disillusioned from his idealized vision of femininity through the students' flirtatious, coquettish giggles, Lucy is thrown into the middle of flatly scornful and insolent laughs. As she enters the classroom, it is quickly filled with "murmurs and short laughs" which soon become "oppressive enough" (79). In William's case, the girls' flirtatious giggles function to strengthen his masculinity, whereas Lucy is only threatened by the offensive laughs. The students know too well of Lucy's position at the place as a nursery-governess, and Lucy possesses "only a hesitating trickle of [French] language" (80), unlike William who is benefited by his education at Eton. Lucy manages to impress by deliberately reciting and ripping off the exercise-book of the most offensive student with scorn, just as William does in *The Professor*. But as if that could not be enough in Lucy's case, Brontë adds that one student is not subdued by this act and needs to be

violently thrust into a book closet by Lucy in order for her to bring peace into the classroom. The added difficulty of this situation and the extra physical force required from Lucy demonstrates that she lacks the masculine power that William has. The change of gender changes everything.

Lucy recognizes how laughter works as power in the society of Villette and tries to use this power for her own benefit. However, Lucy does not have the privilege to openly laugh at others to display her power, and she also faces a more serious need to protect herself from being too legible or to avoid expressing too much emotion as a woman. Moreover, when she laughs or smiles, the effect is more directed toward herself than to others, as laughing mostly becomes a means of self-control and self-preservation for Lucy. In a way, Lucy performs the most passive and non-demonstrative kind of laughter that can ever be found: keeping a laughing distance from everything around her. Many believe that laughter is only possible when you feel emotionally detached from the object of laughter. For laughter to work as power, it has to assume a certain distance from the other as well. When William laughs at his brother, he expresses his emotional detachment from his brother most plainly. Lucy, on the other hand, adopts the mindset of a laugher to protect herself from the harming effects of her sore life. She barely laughs, but she always tries to laugh away the unbearable things inside her mind and put a distance from the pain.

Lucy's narrative subtly conceals as well as discloses its main character, Lucy Snowe. While narrating the affairs of her surroundings, Lucy asserts, "I, Lucy Snowe, was calm" (22) and takes satisfaction from her calm, unmoving stance. A solitary being,

without family, without money, without outstanding talents, Lucy takes the painful events of her life—such as her parents' death and her family's downfall—with composure while not even telling us the details of those events. Her grief and despair are only mildly hinted at through non-realistic, picturesque descriptions: "all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished" (35). Wearing "a staid manner" which becomes "as good to [her] as cloak and hood of hodden gray" (44), Lucy bears her life without betraying her deepest emotions and desires. And sometimes, her attempt to detach herself from her own pain takes the form of a sarcastic smile or laughter.

When Lucy first meets Ginevra Fanshawe in a ship heading toward Brussels, Ginevra "slightly curl[s] her short, pretty lip," which Lucy interprets as a "mark of contempt" elicited from her homely clothes (53). Later, when Lucy tells Ginevra that it is her first sea voyage, Ginevra exclaims, "Oh how charming! . . . I quite envy you the novelty: first impressions, you know, are so pleasant" (53). To these words, Lucy responds with a smile: "I could not help smiling" (54). Lucy explains that she smiled because she thought Ginevra was too young to be "blasée" about anything, but she also hides her distressing thoughts behind that wordless smile. Remembering Ginevra's curled lip, Lucy knows too well that Ginevra's envy is not genuine. Apparently, Lucy is not the type that Ginevra would feel jealous of, but instead of pointing this out, Lucy just smiles. Also, Lucy's sea voyage is not "so pleasant" as Ginevra describes since it is taking her to a totally unknown future, and that it is her first voyage suggests the limited scope of her past experiences compared to Ginevra. Thus, Lucy's silent laugh conveys—

or conceals—many unspeakable things. Ginevra's comment brings to her mind many anxious, unhappy thoughts, but she rather smiles to dismiss them and move away. Also, her smile, a façade of pleasure or mockery, hides from others what is really going on inside her. Ginevra asks "with a frank testiness" (54), "Why do you laugh at me?" (54), but Lucy prefers to leave Ginevra disgruntled by her superior smile rather than disclosing her vulnerability.

On many occasions, Lucy similarly smiles or laughs as she faces unpleasant, aching experiences in her life. After the challenging first class, Lucy slowly wins the favor of a few students at Mme. Beck's school from whom she receives bouquets and with whom she enjoys short conversations from time to time. But, soon, she says, "an unseen, an indefinite, a nameless something—stole between myself and these my best pupils" (84), and their burgeoning friendship suddenly ends. By talking to one of her students, she realizes that the Catholic priests have intervened to cut their relationship with the foreign, Protestant teacher, and when the student worries about Lucy's going to hell for being Protestant, Lucy laughs: "I laughed, as, indeed, it was impossible to do otherwise" (85). This laugh seems mocking and almost evilly triumphant as it defies the authority of Catholic church for marking her as a heathen, and without explaining what she really thought about the event, she just moves on to narrate another unrelated subject. Though her laugh seems to protect her from the controlling religious power and show her sense of superiority refusing submission, it also conceals her agony over losing the company of "my best pupils." Beth Torgerson argues that while Lucy feels superior to her Catholic students in terms of self-control, her sense of superiority also works as a

defense from being hurt by the "wall of silence" that precludes their friendship (62). Laughter precisely works here as a defense, and seeing the only chance to make friends with her students being snatched from her, she laughs. Also, she adds, "it was impossible to do otherwise." Every effort of her daily life goes to hiding her distress or loneliness from others, and thus, the only possible reaction for her in the face of a new obstacle to her happiness is to laugh. Under the cover of her laugh, she silently endures her harsh fate. Likewise, when she later "pause[s] in the park to laugh" (309) at Ginevra's persistent question of "Who you are?"—as if Lucy is a mysterious being who hides secret powers and identities and not just a poor and plain-looking nobody—her laugh again speaks much more than her pleasure or superior knowledge. Her laughter protects her from any unnecessary acknowledgment of her humble self, reveals her desire to resist any social defining of herself, and conceals any aches from her knowing that she really is a nobody.

Nevertheless, Brontë shows that this laughing façade cannot bring real joy to Lucy or free her from unwanted pains forever. The limitation of her laughter vividly reveals itself when we see that laughter ends up with a sudden burst of bitter, wretched feelings. Among the things that Lucy tries to hide the most from others and herself are her feelings for Dr. John, a young doctor who is also her childhood acquaintance, Graham. Working in Mme. Beck's school, Lucy one day discovers Mme. Beck searching her drawers to find any signs of intimacy between Dr. John and Lucy. Silently watching Mme. Beck's scrupulous work, Lucy feels "secret glee" (118). She knows there is nothing to find in her room and retreats while stifling the urge to laugh.

> How I laughed when I reached the school-room. I knew now she had certainly seen Dr. John in the garden; I knew what her thoughts were. The spectacle of a suspicious nature so far misled by its own inventions, tickled me much. Yet as the laugh died, a kind of wrath smote me, and then bitterness followed: it was the rock struck, and Meribah's waters gushing out. I never had felt so strange and contradictory an inward tumult as I felt for an hour that evening: soreness and laughter, and fire, and grief, shared my heart between them. I cried hot tears; not because madame mistrusted me—I did not care twopence for her mistrust—but for other reasons. Complicated, disquieting thoughts broke up the whole repose of my nature. However, that turmoil subsided: next day I was again Lucy Snowe. (119)

She never tells us what the "other reasons" that complicate her thoughts are. Her laughter strikes a bolt in her mind and what she has tried to repress for so long bursts out of her body. That laughter precedes a moment of emotional eruption indicates that laughter has functioned to support her repression. She wants to laugh at Mme. Beck's misplaced jealousy and feel superior to her, but Mme. Beck's action makes Lucy see the plain truth that stings her: "Loveless and inexpectant of love, I was as safe from spies in my heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse" (119). This is so painful to accept that her laughter as pretense cannot hold her composure any more. Her laughter does not contain or bring her any real contentment, and the tragedy of Lucy's life is that she has to laugh when she really needs to cry.

Therefore, Brontë implies that maintaining a laughing face, when unhappy inside, requires arduous self-control which can add more emotional burden to one's life. Without William's unswaying confidence in his superior mind, Lucy's laughter cannot work as a real weapon or a shield. While not losing a mental battle is vital for Brontë's destitute characters, keeping and acknowledging the real emotions are also important. For commonly laughless Lucy, there is a moment when she actually laughs with pleasure, and the rarity of the experience intensifies the value of the moment. When Lucy attends a grand public assembly sitting among "the aristocracy and first burghers of the town" (310) waiting for some formal speech from a "savant," M. Paul's unexpected appearance as a speaker somehow "tickle[s] [Lucy's] fancy to a laugh" (310). She says, "Indeed, I confess, for my part, I did laugh till I was warm; but then I bent my head, and made my handkerchief and a lowered veil the sole confidants of my mirth" (310). In a situation where she is only feeling out of place, M. Paul's face which, to her, is "so domesticated in the memory, and so knit with many a whimsical association" (310) gives her such a joy that she cannot help laughing. Her laugher is not aimed to be a weapon or a defense here, but is a good sign of her amusement connected to her feelings toward M. Paul. She admits that she was "glad to see M. Paul" (310). Even so, she consciously hides her laughter from others' view. Barreca points out that "No doubt Lucy is responding to the maxim that the laughter of women is naturally suspect" (*Untamed* 69). However, it is peculiar that she now hides her laugh when she did not in other cases. When she laughed to hide other unspeakable things, she did not bother to conceal it from view since her smile or a laugh was what she wanted to show.

But now, she laughs with real merriment, and she suddenly feels the need to hide her laughing face. The hiding of a face indicates the existence of true feelings behind the handkerchief, the real enjoyment for once. For Lucy, feeling a laughing joy is a valuable experience. It shows that within her dreary life, she has a source of joy that could sustain her. It is not irrelevant either that M. Paul is the one who makes Lucy laugh and that it is he who later becomes her loving companion.

While Lucy carefully uses laughter as a strategic means in her everyday life, she also is a tireless and sharp observer of others' laughs. Regarding the two men she loves in the narrative, Lucy gets to see the crucial difference between them through their different laughs. Dr. John appears to be "a true young English gentleman" (63) when Lucy first meets him in Villette, who has "goodness in his countenance, and honour in his bright eyes" (63). But his smile is always described as little unnerving.

> As to his smile, one could not in a hurry make up one's mind as to the descriptive epithet it merited; there was something in it that pleased, but something too that brought surging up into the mind all one's foibles and weak points: all that could lay one open to a laugh; yet Fifine liked this doubtful smile . . . (96)

This "doubtful smile" is a smile of a confident man who knows his superior, masculine charm and of a physician who believes in his skills to delve into the deepest secrets of human mind. Shuttleworth emphasizes the increased power of physicians during the Victorian period as they are believed to have the skill and knowledge to read bodily signs and uncover one's hidden interiority, and she sees Dr. John as "calmly confident of

his ability to define inner experience from outer signs" (220). Even his smile is described to have that penetrating power, but it works only to disclose "one's foibles and weak points," never one's merits. He treats Mme. Beck with a "laughing indifference" (104) that makes the formidable woman deeply sigh afterwards and watches Vashti's passionate performance that enthralls Lucy with "a smile so critical, so almost callous" (260). His smile criticizes, objectifies, and weakens women, and Lucy feels anxious around it.

After suffering long from secretly idolizing and loving Dr. John, Lucy comes to the final acceptance of his true, imperfect nature when she sees how what makes him laugh pains her so deeply. Unaware of already hurting Lucy by describing her as "a being inoffensive as a shadow" (317), at which Lucy smiled while "hush[ing] a groan" (317), Dr. John bursts into a laugh when M. Paul sees Lucy in Dr. John's company and viciously hisses at Lucy calling her a coquette.

> The worst of the matter was, that Dr. Bretton, whose ears, as I have said, were quick and fine, caught every word of this apostrophe; he put his handkerchief to his face and laughed till he shook.
>
> "Well done, Lucy," cried he; "capital! petite chatte, petite coquette! Oh, I must tell my mother! Is it true, Lucy, or half-true? I believe it is; you redden to the colour of Miss Fanshawe's gown. . . and in his soul he is frantic at this moment because he sees me laughing. Oh! I must tease him."

And Graham, yielding to his bent for mischief, laughed, jested,

and whispered on till I could bear no more, and my eyes filled." (318)

Without noticing Lucy's tears, Dr. John abruptly leaves her to approach Paulina, Miss de Bassompierre, his heart's desire. Once before, Dr. John laughed at Lucy for going frantic at losing a letter from himself, and his raillery made her "grave and quiet" (248). His playful laugh ignores Lucy's feelings and makes light of her very existence as a woman capable of desire, and Lucy cannot stand it anymore. He totally enjoys his own laugh, relishing M. Paul's jealousy as well, and Lucy plainly sees his selfish, inconsiderate, and cruel masculinity.

In contrast to Dr. John who shows no interest in Lucy's feelings, M. Paul recognizes that Lucy is grieved and asks for her forgiveness. At the sincerity of the request, Lucy smiles: "Who could help smiling at his wistfulness, his simplicity, his earnestness?" (320). Again, Lucy smiles with pleased mind at M. Paul, and when she finally calls him her friend, M. Paul smiles too. Lucy says, "You should have seen him smile, reader" (321), describing it as "the smile of pleasure, or content, or kindness" (321). And she adds, "It changed [his visage] as from a mask to a face" (321). Brontë distinguishes a "face," a true reflection of human feelings, from a "mask" and highlights the beauty of a "face." A smile of a "face" is not common in *Villette*, and after this mutually pleasing and genuine smile, Lucy's narrative and affective focus changes from Dr. John to M. Paul. In her life, Lucy is used to laugh at unpleasant moments and find not much pleasure from watching others laugh. She positions herself as "a mere looker-on at life" (141) and wears a smile to distance herself from her surroundings. Her laugh

gives her a certain amount of power to protect and control herself, but it also reveals her vulnerability, a need for constantly putting a distance from her own life. Therefore, a smile that breaks the distance and grows into intimacy takes great significance to Lucy. Lucy and M. Paul never get a chance to expand their smile into a fully grown laugh, but the mutually exchanged smile sustains her through her hardships. If Dr. John laughs to humor himself—Lucy once says, "Graham in mirthful mood must not be humoured too far" (248)—M. Paul turns out to be a man "whom it made happy to see others happy" (382). He offers Lucy a chance to break out of her laughing "mask" and see the value of a laughing "face."

Therefore, Lucy gradually realizes that a laugh that only hides her true self cannot really be a power to her. The laughter that negates and distorts her happiness only leaves sorrow and mental breakdown. In this regard, Ginevra Fanshawe is a remarkable character who laughs all the time in the novel, who does not refrain from laughing with joy whenever and wherever she wants. Her laughter represents the core of her character, her extreme selfishness and her active desire for pleasure. It is introduced that "one thing about her that seemed strong and durable enough . . . [is] her selfishness" (85). Also, she is a woman who heartily cries, "Long live joys and pleasure! Down with grand passions and rigid virtues" (92).[39] Ginevra is very pretty and loves being admired by men, and when Lucy calls her a "vain coquette" (87), she just laughs and dances away. She seems like a vulgar, selfish girl without any admirable quality, but Brontë makes it hard to

[39] In the novel, Ginevra says this in French: "Vive les joies et les plaisirs! A bas les grandes passions et les sévères vertus!." The translation is from the footnote (507).

judge her too quickly. Above all, Ginevra never pretends to be virtuous and has a very clear idea of who she is and what she wants. When Lucy criticizes Ginevra for not accepting Dr. John's love, Ginevra replies that the man has an idealized view of her and it makes her uncomfortable: "the man is too romantic and devoted, and he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be. He thinks I am perfect" (91). Lucy disapproves of Ginevra's flirtation with Dr. John, but she appreciates her "whimsical candour" all the same (91), especially since Lucy can never be candid about herself. Ginevra's free, delightful laughter resists the rigid social norms and the idealized image of woman.

This becomes more obvious when Dr. John finally stops idealizing Ginevra after he sees her laughing at his mother, Mrs. Bretton. Until then, Dr. John always defended Ginevra and her virtue when Lucy tried to disillusion him. But suddenly, when he sees Ginevra at the theater "laughingly whisper[ing to] her neighbor" (215) about his mother, another woman he idolizes, he determines that Ginevra does not deserve his admiration. Lucy knows that Ginevra's laughter is "not actuated by malevolence, but sheer, heedless folly" (217), but to Dr. John's perfect vision of woman, this is unforgivable. He is angry because "Ginevra is neither a pure angel nor a pure-minded woman" (218), and Lucy finds his strict judgment unjust (225), just as she deems him unjust for seeing herself as an inoffensive shadow. Dr. John is a man with strict, patriarchal values, who wants a perfect wife like his perfect mother. It takes a long time for Lucy to admit his violent authority that always directs, "*Do* content me, Lucy" (318), while Ginevra is much quicker to notice and reject it. That Dr. John attaches too much meaning to Ginevra's

silly laughter shows well the risk of laughing for women in Victorian society, and that he eventually marries Paulina who only laughs around the men she loves and worships reveals the ideal feminine laughter that the society approves. Ginevra is not an admirable model figure, but Brontë acknowledges the virtue of her upfront laughter and her unbeatable will to say, "Permit me to judge for myself" (148).[40] When we last see her in the novel, she is still "rush[ing] into [Lucy's] arm laughing" (477).

As Ginevra forms a pair with Lucy in many scenes of the novel, many critics have examined her as Lucy's double. Because they are so different, almost opposite, critics see Ginevra as a figure showing Lucy's hidden desire. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that Ginevra embodies Lucy's "attraction to self-indulgence and freedom" (409), and DeLamotte claims that "the self-effacing Lucy is the inverse and therefore the double of the self-aggrandizing Ginevra" (238). The contrast between their laughter supports these arguments. Despite their contrasting features, Lucy does seem to like Ginevra, her frankness, her self-centeredness, and her open laughter. After all, she admits that if she had to share her cup with another, she "always contrived that [Ginevra] should be [her] convive" (234). For Lucy, who lives a self-denying and self-effacing life, Ginevra is an unreachable end. Brontë suggests that this is the strength of Ginevra who does not actually hold wealth or a high social position. Her life is not without hardship,

[40] Ginevra says this to Dr. John when he orders Lucy to bring a shawl to cover Ginevra insisting, "She is delicate; she must be cared for" (148). By rejecting this, Ginevra rejects his notion of her fragile femininity that always requires masculine protection. So, it is significant that when Dr. John reunites with his new idol Paulina, she is vulnerably crushed by the rushing people and requires Dr. John's immediate rescue and care.

and her selfishness can be a burden that others have to bear, but she will live as free and happy as she wishes.

When Lucy sees the spectral figure of a nun over and over again, Dr. John reckons it as "all a matter of the nerves" (249) and prescribes happiness as remedy: "Happiness is the cure—a cheerful mind the preventive: cultivate both" (250). To Lucy, "[n]o mockery in this world ever sound[ed] so hollow as that of being told to *cultivate* happiness" (250). Used to remind herself of her impoverished, hopeless existence, Lucy thinks, "Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven" (250). Lucy teaches herself that happiness is something that is totally out of control and can be only provided by fortune. Compared to this skeptical perspective, Ginevra's determined pursuit of joyful laughter seems like a powerful, subversive mode of living. It is totally selfish and maybe immoral, but Lucy is not just a victim of Ginevra's selfish laughter. Ginevra's selfish, yet happy laughter leaves something for Lucy to ponder. Lucy might not want Ginevra's happiness, or might even repel it as undesirable, but Ginevra's extraordinary laughter leaves its resonance in this narrative full of gloom. It is not a laugh to conceal or control, and this free venting of laughter is so rare in Brontë's novels, especially from one who is not blessed by Fate, that its autonomy appears quite remarkable. Besides, by vividly delivering the pain and weight of Lucy's shadowy life, Brontë leads us to appreciate the value of sunshine in one's life.

Therefore, after all, laughter is indeed represented as power in Brontë's novels though in various senses: Power to subdue, power to control, power to conceal/reveal,

and power to express and pursue pleasure. While making her protagonists manipulate laughter as a mask or a weapon in their struggles in life, Brontë leads us to consider what is being lost in this endless battle of contrived laughs. Also, she marks a stark difference between how male and female laughter works in the Victorian society. Between being criticized and being idealized by laughing, women are given very limited room to laugh as they want. The contrived laughter is in part a result of this oppression, and in *Villette*, Brontë suggests that a true laugh can be materialized in true intimacy. Though *Villette* ends by forever postponing its realization, in one of her earlier, and perhaps less painfully realistic, novels,[41] Brontë ventures to envision a way to end the narrative with her female protagonist's happy laugh that no longer needs to be a mask.

III.3. Pursuit of Alternative Laughter in *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre is Brontë's only novel that closely follows the protagonist's life journey from childhood to adulthood.[42] The progress of the narrative corresponds with Jane's personal and social growth, and as a poor orphan girl finally becomes a happily married, independent woman at the end, Jane is often viewed as a *Bildungsroman* protagonist.[43] Though her progress has been examined from various perspectives,

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[41] *Villette* has been considered as a painful narrative, either for the portrayal of the protagonist's painful, enduring life or for the pain it delivers to its readers. Gilbert and Gubar state, "[Lucy's] story is perhaps the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written" (400). Harriet Martineau, in her 1853 review of *Villette* which led to the breach in her friendship with Brontë, says, "the book is almost intolerably painful" adding, "the author has no right to make readers so miserable" (qtd. in Allott 172).
[42] *Villette* also begins with Lucy's early years, but unlike *Jane Eyre* it does not provide any detailed information about Lucy's personal life.
[43] Sarah E. Maier discusses the needs to differentiate the female *Bildungsroman* from its male tradition. She argues that "due to the widely divergent ideas on appropriate or proper development in boys and girls

however, her change from a laughless, miserable child into a happily laughing woman who understands the value of her laugh has been neglected. As a girl without home, family, and inheritance, Jane struggles throughout her life to find a place in a society that constantly marginalizes and isolates her. Following other Brontë protagonists, Jane develops her own laugh as a strategic device to win the psychological battles of her life and overcome her social disadvantage. However, through observing other women's laughter in different stages of her life, Jane gradually recognizes the inescapable pressure of masculine social norms that confine and criticize female laughter, however strong and superior it may seem at first. While actively participating in the reading of laughter herself, Jane becomes, unaware, the object of a sharp male gaze that demarcates her own laughs. Jane is a character with the most passionate desire for happiness among Brontë's protagonists. But, before she reaches that end, she has to realize that no woman in her life laughs a truly happy, joyful laugh, including herself. The socially inscribed and oppressed female laughter in *Jane Eyre* suggests Brontë's understanding of woman's position in nineteenth-century British society.

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in society" (319), which expected from girls no personal development beyond successful wifehood, the female *Bildungsroman* should "recognize woman's need to negotiate both with and against society's expectations for 'proper' womanhood while exploring how those same expectations may place restraints on the self-creative impulses of the girl-child" (333). Thus, Maier claims that the female *Bildungsroman* is non-linear, multifaceted. From this perspective, she remarks that *Jane Eyre* "provide[s] the possibility to explore the conflict and tensions inherent in the nineteenth-century incarnation of the genre once the question of gender is introduced" (320). Lorna Ellis also claims that *Jane Eyre* "demonstrates most concretely the distinct characteristics of the [female *Bildungsroman*]" (138) and sees Jane as "the ultimate—self-fulfilled and socially integrated—*Bildungsroman* protagonist (151). For other works that investigate *Jane Eyre* in *Bildungsroman* tradition, see Susan Fraiman and Karen E. Rowe.

Even as a child, Jane learns the existence of hierarchy in the experience of pleasure in which she is strictly placed at the bottom. There is not a single laugh for her at Gateshead while she is mistreated by a cold, severe aunt and scoffed at by her mean cousins. The narrator describes how she lived "a life of ceaseless reprimand and thankless fagging" (16) with a "habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression" (13). The emphasized poignancy in the language describing her childhood feelings—"unutterable wretchedness of mind" (16), "indescribable sadness" (17), "all-predominating sense of terror" (15)—indicates a mind overpowered by the emotional suffering that it cannot bear. Trapped in this state of "unutterable wretchedness," Jane sees laughter or pleasure as something that is never hers, something that is never allowed to a poor and plain orphan girl. This alienation from laughter is a sign that reveals her marginalized, deprived position.

From the beginning, we encounter a young girl to whom pleasure is nothing more than absence or decrease of pain. The first line of the novel, "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day" (5), anticipates a disappointment that would follow the confinement and inaction of a cloudy, rainy day, but Jane feels "glad of it" (5). Young Jane's feelings do not work in usual, predictable ways. To her, taking a long walk with her maids and cousins is a "dreadful" experience which makes her feel "saddened" and "humbled by the consciousness of [her] physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed" (5). As she is always being compared to and scorned by others, she prefers a solitary reading behind a closed curtain while the Reed children are "clustered round their mama" looking "perfectly happy" (5). Jane does not expect to be a part of

this happy family assembly, and while reading a book alone she feels content: "With Benwick on my knee, I was then happy: happy *at least in my way*" (7, my italics).

She seems to find pleasure in unusual things and differentiates "my way" from the others'. Being judged against others all the time, Jane adopts a defensive mechanism of seeking pleasure by isolating herself. She says she was happy in her way, implying that she cannot be happy by being one of the Reeds and that she feels a certain pride in it. At the same time, however, she secretly desires what others enjoy. In another scene, after furtively staring at the family's evening party from a distance, she goes back to her nursery and cuddles her shabby, old doll. Knowing how others are sharing mirth downstairs without her, she relies upon a little toy, feeling "*comparatively happy*, believing [the doll] to be happy likewise" (23, my italics). The relative term used again reflects that she is always comparing her own pleasure to that of others and feels like there is something missing in her happiness. Even when she says she is happy, her language reveals some doubt and a tinge of sadness. Inside little Jane's heart, there exists an unfulfilled need to love and be loved, to feel happy and share it with someone. As that need cannot be realized, she strives to obtain whatever pleasure that is allowed in her narrow life. She does not even know what others are enjoying as she has been ever estranged from it, but still, she cannot help lusting after the unknown.

What aches Jane even more is the unsolvable question of *why*: "*why* was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? *Why* could I never please? *Why* was it useless to try to win any one's favour?" (11-12). Jane's "undeveloped understanding" (6) cannot explain why she is the only one who is always

suffering and never truly happy. The answers provided at Gateshead unanimously point at Jane's own nature. John Reed punishes her for being a "bad animal" (7), and Miss Abbot, a servant, calls her "a mad cat" (9). Although Jane's fierce revolt against John—calling him a slave driver and a Roman emperor (8)—was the first ever rebellion she made, Miss Abbot snaps, "it was always in her" (10). But the most persistent and powerful indictment that blames Jane's nature comes from Mrs. Reed.

Mrs. Reed frequently distinguishes Jane from her own children and calls Jane unnatural and unchildlike. She claims "the necessity of keeping [Jane] at a distance" (5) and explains that she is unsuitable to associate with her children because of her unchildlike disposition. To her, it is Jane's displeasing nature that is eccentric, wrong, and repellent.

> … that until she heard from Bessie and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner—something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were—she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children. (5)

Jane is being discriminated against for being unhappy, unsatisfied, unsociable, and thus, an unnatural child. Under this repeated affirmation of her bad nature, Jane sometimes seriously doubts herself and wonders, "All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so" (13). As the ideal image of a happy child described by Mrs. Reed is so different from Jane's real self, Jane has to struggle with the sense that there is something wrong with

her nature. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Reed persists in calling Jane unnatural and unlikeable, and even on her death-bed, she shudders at the memories of "her incomprehensible disposition" (197) and her "unchildlike look and voice" (204). She recalls that even as a baby, Jane was "a sickly, whining, pining thing . . . not screaming heartily like any other child, but whimpering and moaning" (197). Mrs. Reed's view of Jane as a deviation from the "childlike nature" fuels and justifies the aunt's extreme hatred toward the niece.

However, Brontë makes it clear that behind this blaming of Jane's nature lies the social oppression that confines the role of a lowly orphan girl to that of pleasing and being pleased no matter what treatment she receives. Jane, in her trapped, abused life, speculates on the question of "why," and her aunt only says that her own, unchangeable nature is at fault. Yet the narrative reveals the fallacy of Mrs. Reed's claim too plainly to make us believe what she insists upon. Above all, none of the Reed children is adored because of their sociable, attractive manners and pleasant disposition, but because of their higher social position and physical attraction.[44] John Reed, a vicious, tyrannical boy, is respected as the heir and the only male of the family, and Eliza and Georgiana's superior social position and beauty absolve them from any punishment. As Jane knows too well of John's "violent tyrannies" (11) and his sisters' selfish and spoiled temper (12), she cannot accept Mrs. Reed's rationale for chastening her. The Reed children are

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[44] Actually, the image of a natural child described by Mrs. Reed cannot be found in any of Brontë's novels. Little Polly in *Villette* or the Yorke children in *Shirley*, the examples of childhood described in detail by Brontë, are as far from the image as possible. Brontë seems to reject any idealization of childhood.

not "contented, happy, little children," but only privileged children whose happiness needs to be put first. Moreover, later on, we learn that Mrs. Reed hated Jane from the moment she first saw her and that it was because of her jealousy. Before dying, Mrs. Reed confesses that she had a jealous grudge against Jane's mother who disgraced the family by making a "low marriage" (197) but remained to be "a great favourite with [Mr. Reed]" (197) and also toward Jane whom her husband pitied and preferred over his own children.[45] The favoring of Jane over Mrs. Reed's own socially superior children is something she cannot forgive or forget that led to her lifelong hatred toward Jane. After all, Mrs. Reed is justifying her unfair treatment of her niece, which stemmed from her old jealousy and social prejudice, by laying the blame on Jane.

The adult narrator tries to understand the injustice she suffered at Gateshead and writes, "I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child—though equally dependent and friendless—Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently" (12). Yet nowhere in the narrative does she suggest that her circumstance and daily life allowed her to be a sanguine, careless child. The narrator subtly suggests that being a sanguine, romping child was beyond her control as much as being a handsome child. Even in her understanding voice as an adult, Jane knows that her child self was not really responsible for her misery which was the inevitable result of the oppression and violence she suffered. Especially as we see Jane's more romping, happier side near the end of the narrative, it becomes plain that what

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[45] Mr. Reeds recalls the time when Jane was a sickly baby and says, "Reed pitied it; and he used to nurse it and notice it as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at the age" (198).

made Jane a miserable, unsocial, and laughless child was her environment and social condition, not her nature.

Besides, a demand for Jane to be a happy child is a demand to accept her place in society without question. The bad nature of Jane that Mrs. Reed detests is her unwillingness to submit and be subdued. To young Jane suffering and screaming in a red room, the aunt cruelly says, “it is only on condition of perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you” (14). After all, to be a happy, romping child in Jane’s situation is to accept whatever limitation and discrimination imposed on her life. At Gateshead, what everybody tries to teach Jane is to know her place. She is always reminded of her dependent, lowly position, which is her “very first recollections of existence” (10). John shouts, “you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen’s children like us” (8), using physical abuse as a penalty for not being humble and obedient. Even the servants tell her that she is “less than a servant” (10), and Abbot reprimands, “it is your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them” (10). As an orphan girl without social status or money, Jane lacks social power, and her place is to serve others’ pleasure and be useful, agreeable. She is miserable because she is desiring something not allowed to her, something beyond her rightful place.

Therefore, throughout her childhood, Jane learns that there is no equal right to pleasure for everyone. The only position allowed to her is to be a silent, distanced observer. Most readers might remember Gateshead as a dreary, gloomy mansion that oppresses and tortures young Jane, but the house obviously has its own delight and bustle. Only Jane is not a part of them.

> Christmas and the New Year had been celebrated in Gateshead with the usual festive cheer; presents had been interchanged, dinners and evening parties given. From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded: my share of the gaiety consisted in witnessing the daily appareling of Eliza and Georgiana, and seeing them descend to the drawing-room . . . and afterwards, in the listening to the sound of the piano or the harp played below, to the passing to and fro of the butler and footman, to the jingling of glass and china as refreshments were handed, to the broken hum of conversation as the drawing-room doors opened and closed. When tired of this occupation, I would retire from the stairhead to the solitary and silent nursery; there, though somewhat sad, I was not miserable. (23)

Totally excluded from the party, Jane tries to peep at the gay scene from upstairs and to catch the sound of distant merriment. Inside her mind, the desire to differentiate herself from others and the desire to be a part of them coexist in an unsettled state. She says, "To speak truth, I had not the least wish to go into company, for in company I was rarely noticed" (23). This sentence hints at her two conflicting desires. She would have liked to be a part of the company if the others were willing to accept and notice her. She believes that "human beings must love something" (23), but the only thing she is allowed to love is her doll, "a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow" (23).

Thus, Jane's low, marginalized position at Gateshead is demonstrated through her alienation from the feelings of pleasure, and the violence of her surrounding is emphasized through the constant command to be pleased. In a way, she is educated to

see pleasure from a suspicious and negative point of view from the start. To Jane, others' pleasure and laughter are always achieved by estranging someone, usually herself, and thus, they can only look selfish and intimidating. Laughter is a privilege, a manifestation of social power to her eyes. When Jane is obsessing with the question, "Why was I always suffering?", others' happiness both attracts and repels her. She does not know how to be sympathetic to others' laughter, and afterwards we see Jane deliberately choosing not to be a part of a pleasant, laughing company. She approaches friendless Helen Burns at Lowood while other girls are forming "laughing groups" (46), and she finds Rochester agreeable on their first meeting because he does not appear to be good-humoured or gay (97). As a child, Jane forms a notion that someone's pleasure occurs by excluding or discriminating against another, and she chooses to be distanced from the pleasure of a majority which will not expand to include herself. She retains the longing to know and taste it as well, but her later experiences solidify her desire to pursue her own, separate happiness, with her own, alternative laughter.

Jane's childhood is like the red room, totally dark and enclosed where she alone is the suffering soul and from which she cannot escape. The Lowood school where Jane spends eight years after leaving Gateshead provides an expansion of that experience and shows a way to step out of that darkness. Lowood is a patriarchal institution that forces absolute negation of pleasure for its female students. The school is governed by Mr. Brocklehurst's strict discipline that enacts "simple attire, unsophisticated accommodations, hardy and active habits" (29). He claims that his plan in bringing up his students is "not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render

them hardy, patient, self-denying" (53). Departing from Gateshead, the house of punishment and isolation, Jane now enters an institution that regulates her habits and principles to the extreme. However, in this bleak place, Jane finds a germ of laughter that gives her hope. Her first positive experience of laughter occurs when she is most miserable at the place, and by encountering laughter that she can relate to, she gains strength that supports her through her difficult days.

After her passionate and emotionally unstable state at Gateshead, Jane seems to learn how to become more repressed and reserved at Lowood, which later helps her conceal her feelings from others and avoid their censorship. But it is not so much the result of the school's regulative control than the influence of two female characters Jane meets there. For the first time in her life Jane finds friends with whom she could eagerly sympathize, and both of these characters, Helen Burns and Miss Temple, show great capacity in controlling their emotions. Miss Temple never loses her temper and performs a firm, steady, and generous maternal role to the impoverished students, and Helen Burns seeks happiness from another world while bearing her current hardships with patience and detachment. Helen's tranquility affects Jane's feelings, which Helen calls "too impulsive, too vehement" (59), and Miss Temple's "serenity in her air" (61) "precluded deviation into the ardent, the excited, the eager" (61). Their repressed, tranquil manner, however, is frequently viewed as weakness or submission to the governing norms, a sign that they lack power to defy Brocklehurst's patriarchal system. Accordingly, they are considered as insufficient role models from which Jane eventually has to distinguish herself. Helena Michie argues that "Throughout the novel, Jane

[asserts] her identity in opposition to a series of other women" (17), and many think that Miss Temple and Helen are among them. Susan Fraiman, criticizing Miss Temple's role in Brocklehurst's school as the superintendent, asserts, "insofar as Jane emulates the one, she willfully subordinates herself to the others" (104-05). In addition, Karen E. Rowe argues that "Helen Burns schools [Jane] in Christian submission" (75), and Smith views Helen's martyr-like attitude to be "rendering her passive in the face of oppression—an example against which Jane will define herself" (195).[46] In short, in spite of Jane's strong affection toward them and their evident influence on her, Miss Temple and Helen are evaluated as passively accepting their roles as women in the oppressive, male-dominated society.

However, Brontë provides both Miss Temple and Helen with empowering smiles that become light in Jane's darkest moment, illuminating the value of laughter in the face of oppression and injustice. Jane does not simply learn to repress and submit at Lowood, as she learns to stand upright with an inner smile by becoming a witness of other women's smiles. Even though Miss Temple does not confront Brocklehurst openly and submits to work as a part of his system, she perceives his cruel, unfair treatment of the students and uses her limited power to correct the wrongs of the institution. Her offering of bread and cheese to the students after the horribly burnt porridge demonstrates her

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[46] Karen Chase also sees Helen's attitude as a "false solution" (72) and says, "Helen Burns's perfect obedience becomes death-affirming" (72). Elaine Showalter interprets Helen as "the perfect victim and the representation of the feminine spirit in the most disembodied form" (*Literature* 72). Maier admits that Helen and Miss Temple "become the closest model that Jane has known to a loving family" (323), but she asserts that their customary ways of reacting to the patriarchal system lead Jane to refuse them as "alternative female model[s]" (323).

sound judgment, compassionate mind, and determined action, and she makes clear that "It is to be done on my responsibility" (42). Also, when Brocklehurst reproaches her for the act, Miss Temple remains undaunted and insubordinate.

> Miss Temple had looked down when he first began to speak to her; but she now gazed straight before her, and her face, naturally pale as marble, appeared to be assuming also the coldness and fixity of that material; especially her mouth, closed as if it would have required a sculptor's chisel to open it, and her brow settled gradually into petrified severity. (53)

During Brocklehurst's unbearable lecture, she closes her mind from his words, and this is reflected on her marble-like exterior and her sturdily closed mouth. The cold detachment seems to be the best she can do to resist the man's principles. But later, when he unreasonably reprimands some students' naturally curly hair, Jane sees the fixed countenance of Miss Temple change into a suppressed laugh: "Miss Temple passed her handkerchief over her lips, as if to smooth away the involuntary smile that curled them" (54). In accordance with the teacher's smile, the students also, while following Mr. Brocklehurst's order, silently display "grimaces with which they commented on this manoeuvre" (54). Jane understands that "whatever he might do with the outside of the cup and platter, the inside was further beyond his interference than he imagined" (54). Miss Temple's smile offers the students an example of how to face the oppressive and inescapable social rules without total submission and despair. Fraiman claims, "Marble-silent, she teaches Jane strict self-repression as well as complicity in the

oppression of others" (105). But Fraiman misses the insubordinate, superior smile that breaks Miss Temple's marble-silent mask. Perhaps the smile is not intended to be seen, but those who are attentive to her feelings and reaction can see and understand its meaning. The wordless camaraderie between the teacher and the students demonstrated by their similar change of countenance confronts the authority of Brocklehurst, and Jane's observant eyes see this all too plainly.

Emphasizing Miss Temple's gesture to conceal her smile, Jones argues that Jane learns "how not to laugh or smile" (202) at Lowood and that Miss Temple's smile becomes a social lesson to Jane of how public laughter is inappropriate for a woman. Jane does recognize that Miss Temple needs to hide her smile from Mr. Brocklehurst and maintain her outward compliance. She understands that the power of Miss Temple's smile can never beat that of Mr. Brocklehurst's authority. Nevertheless, Jane sees the value of Miss Temple's smile as well. Until now, Jane never has had a chance to see laughter or a smile as a positive, admirable act. It was just a sign of social superiority from which she winced. She did not know how she, as a marginalized being, can laugh or smile. Moreover, the only reaction to oppression she attempted was a passionate rebellion full of hatred which only left her with "the pang of remorse and the chill of reaction" (31). Miss Temple's smile shows an entirely new model of resistance. Hence, Miss Temple's repressed laugh becomes more than a lesson on the inaptness of female laughter. Jane learns that even in a strictly regulated condition, one can steal a moment of furtive laughter which can keep one's spirit impervious. She is understanding not only the inappropriateness of female laughter, but also its resilient power. Miss Temple's

smile does not have power to change the system, but it reveals her unconquered, superior mind that scorns Mr. Brocklehurst's absurd rules.

Furthermore, Helen Burns shows Jane the consoling and sympathetic power of a smile that Jane never knew before. When Jane receives a severe punishment from Mr. Brocklehurst and stands on a stool alone with unbearable mortification, Helen approaches her with a smile that saves Jane from "the rising hysteria" (57).

> Helen Burns asked some slight question about her work of Miss Smith, was chidden for the triviality of the inquiry, returned to her place and smiled at me as she again went by. What a smile! I remember it now, and I know that it was the effluence of fine intellect, of true courage; it lit up her marked lineaments, her thin face, her sunken grey eye, like a reflection from the aspect of an angel. (57)

Helen's wordless support and sympathy delivered through her smile is indeed a mark of her "true courage." Helen is usually considered as a passive and weak figure whose spiritual doctrine cannot sustain her in the harsh reality. But here, Helen actively ventures to come close to Jane solely to deliver her smile, knowing that she will be scolded for the act. The smile lights up Jane's anguished heart as well as Helen's face.

It is significant that Helen acts not for her own benefit, but for Jane's. Helen is used to unjust punishments in Lowood, and she always endures them with grave composure. This "doctrine of endurance" (47) confounds Jane, and while Jane quivers at the spectacle of Helen being whipped, "not a feature of [Helen's] pensive face altered its ordinary expression" (45). Like Miss Temple, Helen adopts detachment as a way to bear

reality. However, when Jane becomes the spectacle of disgrace and suffers alone, Helen takes action and approaches her friend with a supportive, consoling smile. Though Helen does not seek any comfort or reward from the earthly life, she at least tries to give courage to Jane. Thus, from her two new friends at Lowood, Jane learns the power of a smile to resist, to sustain, and to sympathize and bond. After the painful punishment, Jane spends a rare moment of warmth and joy with Helen in Miss Temple's room as the hostess' "smile of gratification" (61) adds to their delight.

Therefore, at Lowood, Jane steps out of her traumatic red room where she alone was the wretched and gains a more expansive view of her situation and the unjust system of the world that compels female uniformity and obedience. Her lowly place in the society has not changed, but she meets fellow sufferers and gets to bond with them through undefeated smiles. She is taught to be more composed and dutiful, but only after she learns to keep a laugh inside her. It is true that Jane or her friends never actually laugh, but only smile. The oppressiveness of the place does not allow their smiles to grow into fully expressed laughs and Jane's hard-working life still denies her much pleasure. But their smiles can be viewed as a bud of laughter as they indicate the characters' will to reject being disheartened by the oppressive reality and to find whatever joy reachable in their lives. When we see Jane after eight years, she shows the ability to use smiles and laughs to protect herself and maintain her independence of mind, but they also suggest her desire for happiness and for another being who can share her laughter. As in the case of Lucy Snowe, Jane faces a task to overcome her social disadvantage in wealth, position, gender, and beauty. She cannot change her given social

conditions, but at least she can try to find superiority inside her and show it through her laughter. Where Jane differs from Lucy is that she never gives up on the desire to achieve her own happiness. Her laughter is never just about concealing or pretending, but about finding her own pleasure, however limited that is. While Lucy constantly schools herself to accept the bleakness of her life, Jane, not forgetting her social position, seeks the room for pleasure she can claim as her own in her narrow life. What Lucy denies as the impossible, Jane ceaselessly pursues.

Once she enters Thornfield, a microcosm of Victorian society where people from different social standings coexist with different privileges, she exists through her role as a governess, not as an individual who is Jane Eyre. Jane's introduction to the place concurs with the clarification of her position inside. On their first meeting, Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, welcomes Jane as a possible companion and talks of the danger of being too close to servants: "you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality: one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one's authority" (82). As a child, Jane was called "less than a servant" (9), but now, as she enters Thornfield as a governess, Mrs. Fairfax immediately recognizes her as higher than servants and more equal to herself. Her comment advises Jane to emulate her careful demeanor and keep the servants at a distance. Jane feels relieved as well to find out that Mrs. Fairfax is a housekeeper, not the owner of the house as she originally thought. Seeing Mrs. Fairfax to be "a dependent like myself" (85), Jane thinks, "my position was all the freer" (85). She is no less conscious of how hierarchy works and where her place in the society is. Jane's social status has gone up through her education at Lowood and

her ability to financially support herself, the absence of which was the cause that made her "less than a servant" at Gateshead. She is living in a society that keeps reminding her of her rightful place and befitting manners. In this intricately fabricated social space, Jane suffers from the confinement and restriction forced upon her body and mind.

Jane expected new pleasures and new experiences as she arrived at Thornfield after eight years of repetitive daily routine at Lowood: "I thought that a fairer era of life was beginning for me, one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils" (83). She cannot explain what exactly she expected, but says, "it was something pleasant" (83). However, her life as a governess turns out to be submitting herself to "the viewless fetters of an uniform and too still existence" (99). Her days are again reiterated with unchanging routines, and the only person she can converse with is Mrs. Fairfax, who gives Jane "a pleasure in her society proportionate to the tranquil regard she had for [her]" (92). The stagnation she feels evokes restlessness, and in this state, Jane one day volunteers to deliver Mrs. Fairfax's letter to the post office just to take a walk outside of Thornfield and its stillness. On her way, she encounters the very being she has been waiting for, someone who can bring new joy, unknown excitement, and unusual experience to her.

Brontë arranges the first encounter of Jane and Rochester outside of Thornfield and its socializing, stagnating influence, suggesting the possibility of an unconventional relationship between them. Indeed, Jane sees Rochester at first as a mysterious being, a creature beyond reality. Listening to the sounds of hoofs striking the ground, Jane

imagines “a North-of-England spirit, called a ‘Gytrash’” approaching her. [47] Although Rochester’s human form “br[eaks] the spell at once” (96), their encounter takes Jane out of her ordinary life for a moment. Unlike her usually retreated self, she offers to help Rochester after he hurts himself from falling off a horse and insists on it until he accepts her assistance. As she “was weary of an existence all passive” (98), this action gives her a rare satisfaction. To Jane, Rochester is “a new picture introduced to the gallery of memory” (98-99) because “it was masculine” (99) and because “it was dark, strong, and stern” (99). His masculinity is novel to Jane’s inexperienced eyes, and she immediately feels attracted to it. Moreover, when she reenters Thornfield with reluctance, expecting “no peace—no pleasure there” (266), the house is suddenly filled with “cheerful mingling of voices” (100), “no longer silent as a church” (100).

The new pleasure Rochester brings with him stimulates and interests Jane. Her daily routine continues, but her afternoon tête-à-tête with Rochester becomes the source of much pleasure. However, the ingenuity of the relationship is constantly under threat as their vast social differences work as an invisible barrier. Rochester, as a master of Thornfield, creates a dilemma for Jane between her desire to get close to him and her need to protect herself from his authority and penetration. Jane is drawn to his mysterious, impenetrable character, but his mystery, the hidden secrets of his life, are also the greatest threat to her happiness. From the beginning, Rochester does not hide his intention to know her character and her opinions by closely watching her and asking

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[47] Jane explains ‘Gytrash’ as a figure from Bessie’s tales, “which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travelers” (95).

questions, and he even warns her of his penetrating gaze: “I flatter myself I read as much in your eye (beware, by-the-bye, what you express with that organ, I am quick at interpreting its language)” (116). Jane is also good at reading characters, but her lack of experience makes her think, “the character of my interlocutor was beyond my penetration” (118). The inequality in status, age, gender, and experience all contribute to Jane’s vulnerability in their relationship of which Jane cannot but be aware.

In this state, Jane smartly uses her smiles and laughs to keep a proper distance in their relationship, a distance that could produce pleasure as well as tension. Their conversations are usually led by Rochester who alternately asks questions about Jane and relates his own life story—though selectively—to her, whose main job is to respond to what Rochester says. To some of his questions, Jane answers quite honestly. For example, when Rochester asks her feelings about Brocklehurst, she straightforwardly says, “I disliked Brocklehurst” (105), and describes him as “pompous and meddling” (105). Though she answers with calmness, she does not refrain from revealing her judgment and feelings. On the other hand, when Rochester asks more personal questions such as, “Are you fond of presents?” (103), her response gets elusive.

> “I hardly know, sir; I have little experience of them: they are generally thought pleasant things.”
>
> “Generally thought? But what do you think?”
>
> “I should be obliged to take time, sir, before I could give you an answer worthy of your acceptance: a present has many faces to it, has it not? and

one should consider all before pronouncing an opinion as to its nature" (103).

Rochester's question brings up the fact that Jane is unfamiliar with what "are generally thought pleasant things," and Jane avoids to reveal too much about her deprived former life. Also, she intimates that what generally pleases others does not necessarily please her. Her childhood tendency to differentiate her pleasure from that of others persists, and her awareness of Rochester's eyes that are "dark, irate, and piercing" (103) makes her wary of disclosing her interiority too much. Obviously, as Shuttleworth points out, the power struggle between the two that "centers on the ability of each partner to read, unseen, the hidden secrets of the other" (3) is going on, and Jane is willing to hide her secrets.

Together with the elusive answers, Jane also uses elusive expressions and emotional pretenses. When Rochester abruptly asks her to just "speak," she returns with a smile.

> "It would please me now to draw you out—to learn more of you—therefore speak."
>
> Instead of speaking, I smiled; and not a very complacent or submissive smile either.
>
> "Speak," he urged.
>
> "What about, sir?"
>
> "Whatever you like. I leave both the choice of subject and the manner of treating it entirely to yourself."

Accordingly I sat and said nothing. (113-14)

Rochester's command is sudden and rude, obviously intending to "draw Jane out," and rather than rejecting his request, she simply smiles. The entire scene is a silent battle for power and for interpretation. Rochester invites Jane to be the speaker in their exchange, putting her out of the passive role as a listener, but it is clear that he is the one who compels her to speak. While not blatantly rejecting his command, Jane responds with a deliberate smile that speaks her intention not to obey. Her smile allows her to stay within the proper social manners while indicating her noncompliance. Although Jane is not amused, she smiles to hide her irritation, and when Rochester pursues with his demand, she turns to be "dumb still" (114). Her stillness is more apparent rejection to comply, and as the pretense of amusement disappears, Rochester notices her annoyance (114).

Therefore, smiling is a method she turns to when she needs to hide her real feelings or thoughts with winning edge, without showing too much. Also, smiling, not laughing, allows her to stay within the boundary of proper manners. With the lessons she learned from Miss Temple's smile, Jane creates her own smile that is compliant and defiant at the same time. As much as Rochester's command piques Jane, Jane's smile piques Rochester. When Jane responds to him with a smile again, he impatiently says, "The smile is very well. . . but speak too" (115). He tries to set the terms of their conversation, but Jane's smile works as a cypher that hinders his penetration and authority. She smiles as she acknowledges herself as one of his "paid subordinates" (114), and though her words speak submission, her smile speaks otherwise. Jane's smile is original, unlike any other smiles in the novel, in that it speaks both submission and

disobedience, both pleasure and displeasure, and intentions both to add distance to the relationship and also to advance it. Jane takes pleasure from her maneuver and says, "I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns; it was one I chiefly delighted in, and a sure instinct always prevented me from going too far" (134).

What is ironic is that as their relationship develops and the two become closer, the pleasure of their exchange decreases, and as she becomes more uncomfortable, her subtle smile changes into a full laugh. She does not laugh until she is engaged to Rochester and until his desire to make her the "young Mrs. Rochester—Fairfax Rochester's girl-bride" (220) starts to frighten her. The more desperate her need to protect herself becomes, the more open her laughter becomes. Jane believes that she can smile and laugh and be happy with Rochester, but in reality, her laughter turns into a mark of her anxiety.

While Jane's curious smile attracts Rochester with its unconventional quality, it is also being idealized and appropriated by his masculine gaze. Rochester repeatedly compares Jane to other women he has been with, and it is revealed later that what distinguished Jane in his eyes, more than anything else, was her smile. After the painful revelation of their wedding day, Rochester confesses how his former experience with the world had left him "sourly disposed . . . against all *womankind*" (266) and he got to "regard the notion of an intellectual, faithful, loving woman as a mere dream" (266). He says he carefully observed Jane after his return to Thornfield and was struck by Jane's smile: "how curiously you smiled to and at yourself, Janet! There was much sense in your smile: it was very shrewd, and seemed to make light of your own abstraction"

(267). He also notes that he liked the way she smiled during their conversation: "you watched me, and now and then smiled at me with a simple yet sagacious grace I cannot describe. I was at once content and stimulated with what I saw" (268). To his view, her sensible, sagacious smile puts her apart from "all womankind" and becomes the central appeal to his critical eyes.

Through Rochester, Brontë reveals her concern with the male gaze that controls and defines female laughter. Jane's smile has its strength and value, but through Rochester's narration, her unique smile turns into a cherished quality of "a very angel" (221) he desires. Although Barreca calls Jane's wit and laughter "transgressive" (*Untamed* 66) and Smith points out the "revolutionary social critique" that accompanies her laugh (193), the subversive power of Jane's laugh is not recognized by Rochester, who turns it into a rare feminine charm. He has a mind to appreciate her novel smile, not dismissing it as deviation, but he is also a man who judges and defines the meaning of that smile. His direct comment on Jane's laughter in their earlier relationship reveals this well.

> Do you never laugh, Miss Eyre? Don't trouble yourself to answer—I see, you laugh rarely; but you can laugh very merrily: believe me, you are not naturally austere, any more than I am naturally vicious. The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother—or father, or master, or what you will—to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly: but, in time, I

> think you will learn to be natural with me, as I find it impossible to be conventional with you; and then your looks and movements will have more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now. I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage; a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high." (118-19).

Rochester's long comment discloses many things. First of all, he is the first person who shows interest in Jane's laughter, or its absence, suggesting that he is interested in Jane's feelings and happiness. He also sees through "the Lowood constraint" that guards Jane's free expressions, and his blocking of Jane's answer shows his awareness of Jane's elusive tactic. Because he does not expect Jane to be honest with her answer, he relies on his ability to read her. He might be correct about Jane being not naturally austere and about Jane's capacity for a merry laugh as we actually see her laughing merrily later. However, his speculation also reflects his own desire, his desire for a woman who is totally different from artificial, deceitful Céline Varens or unchaste, wild Bertha Mason. He recognizes Jane's restlessness and restraint, but he imagines her nature to be like that of a little, curious bird with a cheerful laugh. His view of Jane's nature is opposite to Mrs. Reed's negative one, but both views mirror the desires of those who hold them.

Furthermore, Rochester believes that he could free Jane's caged nature, that she could really be free and open with him. Jane does get to laugh more as her relationship with him develops and they become engaged. The narrator says that she "was so happy" (219) after the engagement and "nothing was so merry or so musical as my own

rejoicing heart" (219). But her following laughs are not the merry, unconstrained laughs of a rejoicing heart. Instead, Rochester's overflowing idealization of Jane drives her to laugh uneasily. She laughs when he calls her a beauty and an angel (221), she smiles as he exclaims how she is not like any other women and how he is conquered by her charm (222), and she laughs as he pledges "awful vengeance" (234) for keeping him at a distance during their engagement. Her laughter at the end of their courtship is a sign of her anxiety and fear and a desire to laugh those uncomfortable feelings away. Rochester sees through the caged demeanor of Jane, her reluctance to express herself more freely, but he does not know that his searching, penetrating gaze and his masculine desire only intensify her caged-ness. He is drawn to Jane's singularity, but he wants to own it as well. When Jane gets a chance to observe him from a distance, she can see that he relishes, and even abuses the masculine privilege that plays a part in confining female laughter.

Rochester is accustomed to his society's artificial codes of manner where "affectation, or coldness, or stupid, coarse-minded misapprehension of one's meaning are the usual rewards of candour" (115), and he understands well how women's laughter works in this society. He is surrounded by women like Miss Blanche Ingram who laughs to attract men and to proclaim her superior position as a woman in terms of beauty and status. But despite his disapproval of the act, he does nothing but encourage and, sometimes, manipulate it. When Jane feels sure that she "really possessed the power to amuse him" (125), Rochester suddenly goes out of her reach and returns with upper-class gentlemen and ladies whose gay gathering excludes and isolates Jane as it did in

her childhood. The closeness she started to feel toward Rochester disperses, and the laughs and joys of the "fine, fashionable people" (134) teach her to know her place once more. After three days of busy and hectic cleaning up and rearrangement of the house, in which Jane participates together with the servants, Rochester and his company arrive with "[a] joyous stir" (141) suddenly filling the house with "soft cheerful laughs" (142) and "a joyous conversational murmur" (143). The whole household is mobilized to serve the needs of the noble guests while Jane and Adèle are left upstairs starving and forgotten (143). To Jane, it is like being the neglected child at Gateshead again. On the first night of the party's arrival, Jane, as she did eight years ago, listens to the sounds of the party downstairs "[sitting] down on the top step of the stairs" with Adèle (143). The laughter and enjoyment still seem far away from her reach. Also, when Rochester requests Jane to come down and join the party the next day, Jane chooses "a window-seat" and holds a book in her hand as a shield (145), repeating another familiar act from her childhood. Jane is marginalized in the whole event, and while Rochester's demand to join the party seems to include her to their gaiety, Jane is at the very edge of it, choosing the quiet nook as her safety zone. However, in her safely veiled position, Jane finally sees what was barred from her view before, and after careful observation, she could completely abandon her past desire for the unknown pleasure and understand that her happiness lies elsewhere.

Behind the curtain, Jane focuses her attention on a particular lady and her laugh, the lady she was told of by Mrs. Fairfax, who calls her the beauty of the group and the possible future bride of Rochester. The first thing Jane notices about Miss Blanche

Ingram is her haughtiness: “there was an expression of almost insupportable haughtiness in her bearing and countenance” (146). Her face is wrought with pride, and her voice is “deep, its inflections very pompous, very dogmatical—very intolerable, in short” (146). Unlike her beautiful, elegant appearance, Jane finds nothing admirable in her character. Blanche looks down at Adèle “with a mocking air” (147) and “scorn[s] to touch [Jane] with the hem of her robes as she passe[s]” (158). She disdainfully calls the whole class of governesses “a nuisance” (151) in front of Jane. Above all, what epitomizes her haughtiness is her laughter: “she laughed continually; her laugh was satirical, and so was the habitual expression of her arched and haughty lip” (147). Her laughter expresses her desire to distinguish herself from others and to make others see her superiority. Jane sees everything about Miss Ingram as “remarkably self-conscious” (147) and “not genuine” (158). Miss Ingram proudly displays her lavish laughter, but it is a depthless shell that only aims to show. After examining her laughter, Jane figures out that Blanche cannot really be in love with Rochester, since “If she did, she need not coin her smiles so lavishly” (159).

While Thornfield is overflowing with diverse entertainment and merry sounds, Jane cannot see genuine feelings anywhere. Jane muses, “the light of the candles had as much soul in it as their smile; the tinkle of the bell as much significance as their laugh” (149). Being disillusioned from her childhood yearning, she believes that Rochester is closer to her than to the soulless laughers. She watches Rochester’s smile that makes “his stern features softened; his eye grew both brilliant and gentle, its ray both searching and sweet” (149) and thinks, “he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine” (149).

However, Jane cannot deny that Rochester is also a part of the group that creates and promotes the meaningless, flirtatious, and scornful laughs.

Even though Miss Ingram's laughter mocks and marginalizes Jane and openly displays her superiority, it is also bound to social norms that restrict the role of women and their expressions. Jones argues, "Blanche laughs to put others in their place, but also laughs in a way that reflects her standing as a woman in a patriarchy" (204). The flirtatious giggles of Blanche and other young ladies of the group, according to Jones, are done "as a response to [the] gentlemen, not to any real humor" (204). There is only one role that is expected from young women, that is to be a wife. So, ladies laugh in gentlemen's company when "words are inappropriate for [them] . . . as too forward yet encouragement is necessary" (204). After the charade in which Rochester and Blanche played as a groom and bride, Rochester banters, "remember you are my wife; we were married an hour since, in the presence of all these witnesses" (157), and Blanche simply giggles. Jane closely watches this all, seeing how Rochester and Blanche act in front of others as if they are a happy couple. She notices "their mutual whisperings," "their exchanged glances" (158) and finds "hourly in him a style of courtship" (158). But she also sees through the façade and realizes how Blanche "could not charm him" (159). Despite Rochester's obvious participation in the flirtation, Jane sees what Blanche cannot see, that every effort of the lady to lure the man is failing and that "her pride and self-complacency repelled further and further what she wished to allure" (159).

Moreover, he later confesses that he acted his part to rouse Jane's jealousy. He says, "I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in

love with me as I was with you" (224). Rochester shares with Jane aversion toward the soulless, artificial laughs of his society, but he willingly manipulates them to demonstrate his power without any sign of regret. Disguised as a gypsy woman, he asks Jane, "I was talking of ladies smiling in the eyes of gentlemen; and of late so many smiles have been shed into Mr. Rochester's eyes that they overflow like two cups filled above the brim: have you never remarked that?" (170). London argues that "[Jane's] love is conditioned by the scenarios Rochester orchestrates" (204), and evidently, Blanche's laughter is given a crucial role in this scenario. Jane never severely blames him for this, but when she says to the gypsy, "The eagerness of a listener quickens the tongue of a narrator" (170), she lets slip her criticism of Rochester's maneuver.

Therefore, at the end of her superior insolent laughs, Blanche is only left defeated by Rochester's manipulative power. Her laugh marginalizes Jane, but it also submits herself to Rochester. As much as her laugh puts Jane in her rightful place, it also puts herself in her rightful place. Her laughter is socially inscribed, works to sustain the social hierarchy, and cannot wield a power of its own. Jane seeks the laughter that could give her power that is denied by her social position, and examining Blanche and her laughter increases that need even further. The mixture of power and helplessness that appears in Blanche's laughter is more distinctly and extremely shown in another laughter that troubles Jane during her days at Thornfield. If Blanche's laugh aims to solidify her position in the society, Bertha Mason's laughter roams entirely beyond the margins of acceptable social behavior. However, after wondering and fearing the sounds of a

mysterious laugher for a long time, what Jane comes face to face with at the end is the most abject and powerless laugh she has ever encountered.

Bertha Mason has been the most curious and controversial subject in the critical studies of *Jane Eyre*. As a character whose presence is mostly veiled and whose history is only conveyed by the voice of a husband who abhors and enchains her, the unreachable Bertha has become the focus of interpretation. Peter Grudin argues that the function of Bertha is "not literal at all, but figurative" (148) and that she functions as "the figurative representation of something unspeakable and as a projection of Jane's own dark potentials" (145). Grudin's analysis echoes Gilbert and Gubar's well-known study of Bertha that named her "the madwoman in the attic" where they state, "on a figurative and psychological level it seems suspiciously clear that the specter of Bertha is still another—indeed the most threatening avatar of Jane" (359). Seeing Bertha as "Jane's truest and darkest double" (Gilbert and Gubar 360) or as a figure onto whom "Brontë projects Jane's anger, female sexuality, and frustration" (Togerson 61) has reduced Bertha to be an auxiliary, symbolic figure who works only on the narrative level to reveal Jane's hidden or repressed interiority.[48] Gretchen Braun even concludes that "Bertha Mason, is never a subject in her own right, only the object of other people's anxieties and hostilities" (196). But, despite the obscurity and hiddenness of the

[48] In more detail, seeing Betha as Jane's dark double means for Gilbert and Gubar that Bertha performs what Jane secretly desires (359), "as if she were an agent of Jane's desire as well as her own" (360). Also, they think that Bertha plays a monitory role "teaching Jane how not to act" (361). They argue that through Bertha's death, Jane can be finally free from her fury and find "wholeness within herself" (362). Togerson also observes that through using Bertha as a double, Brontë creates "a split psyche between the two female characters" (61) and that for Jane to ensure her inner stability Bertha has to die (61). Their interpretations consolidate Gretchen Braun's claim that Bertha is not a subject in her own right (196).

character that makes some see her as less than a concrete subject, Bertha has one distinctive feature that reveals her undeniable presence and materiality; that is, her goblin laughter.

It is true that we cannot see Bertha until Jane's wedding day, but we hear her all the time. After Jane visits the third floor with Mrs. Fairfax for the first time, she hears the odd laugh from time to time. When Jane first hears it, it comes as a sound that is most out of place, and yet so real.

> While I paced softly on the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued. (91)

Jane describes the characteristics of the laugh unambiguously as "distinct, formal, mirthless." Whenever Bertha's laugh is described, it is described with some detail: "the same low, slow ha! ha!" (93) or "a demoniac laugh—low, suppressed, and deep" (126). But none of its features allows Jane to approach the substance of the laugh. It is a laugh that is not like a laugh at all, being formal and mirthless. Bertha's laugh rings as if mocking the idea that laughter is an expression of pleasure. It is loud and powerful, but completely invisible. At the same time, the emphasized intensity and proximity of the laugh makes the laugher's presence almost tangible and so real. The combination of its

peculiarity and palpability startles Jane and makes her think that "the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard" (91). Notably, Jane's description of the laugh does not indicate a single feature that could identify the laugher. No gender or age can be inferred, and no feelings can be recognized. It is important that Bertha's laughter is not represented as a typical laugh of a madwoman, not until we actually see her and are told of her identity.

But, too soon, Jane is told that the laugh is from a servant, Grace Poole, and from then on, her appearance, "a set, square-made figure, red-haired, and with a hard, plain face" (91), obstructs any attempt to access and know the laughter. Bertha is doubly concealed from Jane's perception by Grace Poole's pretense and Rochester's actual locking up of her body. Jane can never perform an accurate reading of her laughter as the signifier and the signified are widely detached. Jane instinctively senses the gap and suspects the real identity of Grace Poole whose "appearance always acted as a damper to the curiosity raised by her oral oddities" (94). Even as she identifies the laugh as "Grace Poole's laugh" (93), she also calls it "the goblin-laughter" (126). She cannot answer the query, "What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice" (179), and the unknowability of the laugh threatens and frightens her. She poses questions about the laugh to Mrs. Fairfax, to Rochester, and to Grace Poole, but the only thing she can be sure of is that "I am certain I heard a laugh, and a strange one" (130). Bertha's laugh is real, but it is placed, by the author as well as Rochester, in a way that could never be grasped.

Brontë structures Bertha's laugh in this way to create tension and mystery in the narrative, and also to put Jane in the position of a desperate reader who craves to interpret the other's laughter. So, when she confronts the gap between her own interpretation and the reality, she cannot but admit the force of that reality. Jane is striving to have a laugh that could disturb the power structure of the society and could make her more equal in her relationship with Rochester. And Bertha's laugh appears as the most powerful laugh she has ever known in that it dominates not just Rochester but all of Thornfield. From Bertha's violent actions and goblin laughter—the only clues provided of the real Bertha—Jane perceives power that works against social hierarchy.

> It was strange—a bold, vindictive, and haughty gentleman seemed somehow in the power of one of the meanest of his dependants; so much in her power, that even when she lifted her hand against his life, he dared not openly charge her with the attempt, much less punish her for it. (132)

Jane's frustration to solve the "enigmatical character of Grace Poole" (132) stems from the incongruity between her lowly position and the power she seems to wield. As her violence goes unpunished and her invasive laughter seems unstoppable, Jane suspects that she possesses or once possessed a different kind of power as Rochester's former mistress. This conjecture reflects Jane's own desire for Rochester and her consciousness of their unequal social status. By seeing Grace Poole as Rochester's lover, Jane gauges the possibility of her own match to Rochester, but she is also disgusted to compare herself to the plain servant whose coarseness only repels her: "it disgusted me. I compared myself with her, and found we were different" (133). She reminds herself, "I

was a lady" (133), and thinks of how her appearance has gotten better at Thornfield with "brighter hopes and keener enjoyments" she tasted through Rochester (133). Suddenly, she is viewing herself through the social standards that stress one's worldly status and beauty, the standards that have always oppressed and marginalized her. She senses the disruptive power from Bertha's laughter, but unknowingly, she is placing the laugher back to her rightful position designated by the social rules and reduces her laughter to just a laugh of a common servant.

What happens here is that Jane is seeing herself and Grace Poole through Rochester's eyes. She seems to believe that Rochester is different from other upper-class gentlemen who only value superficial things, but in her thought, she muses on her advantage as a woman over Grace Poole based on the surface values. She tells herself, "remember his words; remember his looks; remember his voice!" (133) and concludes, "perhaps Mr. Rochester approves you" (133). Trying to see herself from Rochester's eyes, she acknowledges that her social status and beauty are important to him. Thus, between her discerning of the mysterious power of the mysterious laugher and her confidence in Grace Poole's inferiority, she never reaches the truth. Even in her consciousness, the masculine gaze and its ruling principles intervene and reduce the power of a female laugh. Through Jane's fluctuating thoughts, Brontë shows well how women and their laughter are viewed in Victorian society and how Jane herself is also bound to this view.

Thus, while Jane is struggling with the unsolvable question, Bertha's laughter is powerful only through its immediacy. At the moment Jane hears the sound, she is

"thrilled" (93), "affrighted, scared" (126), and "appall[ed]" (179), but through Rochester's false explanations, Grace Poole's appearance, and Jane's own speculation, the laugh becomes uninteresting and unimpressive. The goblin-like, mirthless and "unnatural sound" (126) that defies any categorization as laughter is only powerful at the moment of its occurrence. Brontë represents the process of how the most enigmatic woman and her laughter get caged in by the socializing power of Thornfield. The absence of mirth in Bertha's laugh and its tragic message are dismissed as a servant's drunken gibberish and so is the implication of the stark contrast between Bertha's mirthless, violent laugh and the image of a merry laugh that Rochester desires from Jane. Emphasizing Bertha's laugh as the only thing left of her that "qualifies her body, her materiality as opposed to any need for male confirmation" (207), Jones argues that her laugh "debunks the power of the patriarchy by laughing at it" (209) and "subvert[s] societal expectations of women as meek, quiet, or complaisant" (209). But, even though Bertha's laughter "reminds the society that tried to deny her that she does still exist" (R. Jones 209), her existence and her rebellion are easily disposed of as nonconsequential within the narrative. As Jane remains confused between the threat of the demonic laugh and the image of its weakness and insignificance, Brontë underlines the power of social discourse that appropriates the meaning of woman's laugh.

This becomes clear as the real Bertha is displayed to Jane's eyes through Rochester and his narrative. The revelation of truth comes on Jane's wedding day where she confronts Bertha at last as a mad wife of Rochester. Rochester explains how he thought he married a "pure, wise, modest" women fifteen years ago and found out that

she was only "bad, mad, and embruted" (249). What Jane finally sees is a beastly figure that grovels on all fours as "it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal" (250). As she calls her "it" instead of "she," Bertha loses not only her femininity, but her humanity, while previously her laughter confirmed that she is human.[49] Now, Bertha is lowered to "the clothed hyena" with "a fierce cry" (250) that needs to be bound with cords. She is still a threatening being, but not a real threat with unknown power. She is just a hindrance to the lawful union between the lovers, not a mystery that needs to be solved. She is already trapped and controlled by her husband, and her oral oddities and aggressive actions are merely the proofs of her insanity.

The critical controversy over Bertha includes the evaluation of her subversive, rebellious role. Like Jones, Barreca claims that Bertha's laughter is "indicative of Bertha's uncontrolled and uncontrollable presence in the text" and also "of the danger she represents to the very systems that try to silence her" (*Untamed* 64).[50] On the other hand, Jafari Morteza sees that "Bertha's life epitomizes oppression" (46) as she is tightly locked in her secluded room and "also represents the loss of self that Jane fears" (47). John Maynard interprets Bertha as "conceived after the Victorian idea of woman falling, when she does, into complete sensuality" (107), and Helen Small claims, "Bertha presents pathology of mind as an unchecked progress of decay, a cumulative

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[49] Jane once reminded Grace that "Pilot cannot laugh" (131), suggesting that she knew the laugher was a human being.

[50] Susan Lanser similarly argues that Bertha's voice is "the voice of the woman who refuses entirely both 'women's language' and 'woman's place'—indeed, the entire symbolic order" (192) and that "Bertha's uncontrollable voice . . . insists on being heard even when her body is shackled" (192). However, as Lanser views that Jane's verbal audacity gets "contained and normalized" by Bertha's "voice gone wrong" (191), she does not think that the novel bestows a subversive, powerful role on Bertha's voice.

disintegration of faculties" (166). These views deny any reading of Bertha as a triumphant or a powerful woman resisting social expectations. However, in these differing views, we can recognize that they each focus on Bertha before and after the exposure of her body. Bertha unseen appears to be the uncontrollable force that revenges on her oppressor, while Bertha in full view is a mad creature that demonstrates fallenness, immorality, and incurable pathology.

Shuttleworth shows well how nineteenth-century medical and anthropological discourses define women's nature as closer to animal than men (13) and how women are "figured as bodies containing within them dark hidden recesses harbouring disease or crime, liable to burst out at any moment in excesses of passion or social discontent" (73). According to Shuttleworth, women and their reproductive bodies are regarded as unstable with a "constant predisposition to hysteria" (76) and "[w]omanhood itself is thus figured as a form of pathology" (94). Elaine Showalter also examines how insanity is regarded "as one of the wrongs of woman; madness as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality" (*Female Malady* 3). Showalter studies the psychiatric and cultural history of how madness has been categorized as "a female malady" and warns of the mistake of seeing hysteria as "an unconscious form of feminist protest" (*Female Malady* 5). With woman's mental and bodily instability being demonstrated and repeatedly affirmed by the dominant social discourse, the representation of a mad, violent woman cannot be deemed subversive. In this regard, Bertha is rather the product of social discourse that diminishes and stigmatizes women, while her goblin laughter and violence would only strengthen that discourse. Moreover,

Small explains that the figure of a madwoman in the novel was nothing new, as "the pairing of a sane heroine against a deranged other woman had become something of a standard feature in popular romance" by the time *Jane Eyre* came out (140). However, although the image of a madwoman has been a popular medical and cultural cliché, Brontë diverges from the dominant discourse by veiling her character for most of the novel. Bertha is not a mad, abject figure until we see her and her story is told. Showalter explains that while the photo images of helpless madwomen were widely circulated as "a form of appropriation: a capture of the subject," there was not much opportunity to hear their voices (*Female Malady* 97). Sarah E. Maier also points out that "Women were to be a type of angelic 'object d'art' in Victorian society, and like children, were to be seen but not heard" (322), the meaning of which is that "Women were not to have opinions, comments or desires and thus, no independent thought" (322). If the instability and vulnerability of women were reinforced by the image of their bodies, Brontë overturns the pattern and provides only the laughs and murmurs of Bertha, completing concealing the body. How Jane immediately responds to her and how she understands her through others' explanations differ because of that barrier of invisibility, and through this strategic barrier, Brontë illuminates how Bertha's powerful, impenetrable laugh is gradually reduced to the point of being a meaningless cry of a lunatic. That Rochester leads the reduction is what Jane has to realize in the end. To Rochester, Bertha has always been just a body to be locked up and managed, not an unknowable, subversive force.

Therefore, after listening to Rochester's narrative of his history with Bertha that is full of hatred and disgust and the following idealization of Jane's purity and sensible smile as "the antipodes of the Creole" (265), Jane can only leave in order to escape his appropriation. The last occasion when Jane attempts something that is closest to laughter is when Rochester provides a false explanation of Bertha's nightly visit and Jane responds with "a contented smile" (243) that is only false: "Satisfied I was not, but to please him I endeavoured to appear so" (243). As Jane's smile echoes Bertha's mirthless laughter, the illusion of happiness with Rochester is broken. In Thornfield, Jane meets two different examples of female laughter, the self-conscious, haughty laugh of Miss Ingram and the incomprehensible, goblin-like laugh of Bertha. They seem like opposites, one seeking to obtain desirable social status and one defying the norms of acceptable social behavior. One dominates the magnificent dining-room, as the other haunts the bolted third floor. Nonetheless, they are similar in their lack of real pleasure. Blanche's laugh is hollow and artificial, while Bertha's laughter is flatly mirthless. Jane desires a laugh that could bring joy to both herself and Rochester and also protect her independence of mind, but her experience of women's laughter in Thornfield only reveals the falsity and the danger of that belief. Thus, in her life-long pursuit of happiness, Jane has to choose to leave both Thornfield and its master behind.

Escaping the darkness of Thornfield, Jane unites with her actual family that she did not know she had, with whom she finally tastes the joy of mutual happiness. Jane first learned the value of laughter from her female friends at Lowood, and now, she learns the pleasure of sharing a full laugh within new sisterhood, with her cousins Diana

and Mary Rivers. Rescued by the Rivers family upon starving to death, she immediately feels sympathy toward the sisters who are very much like herself—delicate, accomplished ladies with no fortune, working as governesses, though not finding much pleasures in the work. She relishes "the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles" (298) as they "coincided, in short, perfectly" (298). And as their "nature dovetailed: mutual affection—of the strongest kind—was the result" (299). Before the narrative reaches its happy conclusion, the author already presents a relationship that is like a fantasy where no difference in age, gender, class, or taste exists to hinder ideally mutual happiness. Jane feels no need to protect herself in this perfectly sympathetic relationship. Moreover, after Jane shares her unexpected inheritance with her relatives and save them from their daily toils, Jane revels from being the source of their laughter and joy.

Only, this joy cannot expand to the only male of the family, cold, strict, and serious St. John. Jane notes how "our mutual happiness (*i.e.* Diana's, Mary's and mine)"(337) does not please St. John to whom their "glad tumult, the garrulous glee" is only irksome (336). With Jane at Moor House, Brontë stresses how almost lifeless, hopeless Jane changes into a happy woman full of vivacity through mutually shared pleasure. Finding out that she could help her relatives with her inheritance and they could all live independent lives, she indulges in the romping delight: "I now clapped my hands in sudden joy—my pulse bounded, my veins thrilled" (328). Until now, her body only thrilled with hatred, fear, and frustration. She cries out, "Oh, I am glad! I am glad!" (329) and ignores St. John's advice to be composed. With this "delicious pleasure"

(330), she determines to be "as active as I can" (332) and declares, "I am disposed to be as content as a queen" (333) and "I feel I have adequate cause to be happy, and I *will* be happy" (333). She is all vivacity till St. John's freezing influence restrains her and makes her "no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by," knowing that her vivacity is only "distasteful to him" (339). The conflict between Jane and St. John arises from his determination to turn Jane's mind from what he calls "common-place home pleasures" (333) to a higher, nobler cause and to thwart Jane's will that insists, "I would always rather be happy than dignified" (349).

Even in the perfect sisterhood of flawless sympathy, equality and happiness, Jane cannot escape the male gaze that scrutinizes and defines her pleasure and restrains her laughter. St. John is unashamed to wield the power of his eyes, his "instruments to search other people's thoughts" (295), and makes it plain that he is always watching and judging Jane. At Moor House, Jane sees both the possibility and impossibility of realizing her happiness, and with this lesson, she reunites with Rochester in a condition that makes many see the ending as wish-fulfilling fantasy, or at least an optimistic compromise.[51] Jane's sudden inheritance of a large fortune and Rochester's losing of a limb and vision seem to solve the problem of their inequality too easily and

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[51] Judith Mitchell calls the ending "pure wish-fulfillment" (45) and "the quintessential erotic domination / submission fantasy" (30). DeLamotte argues that "With the air of an optimistic parable, *Jane Eyre* ends, if not in unqualified fairy-tale wish fulfillment, in an idealized marriage and 'safe haven'" (229). Seeing the ending as a compromise, Terry Eagleton states that Brontë seeks a negotiation between "passionate self-fulfillments" and "the social and moral conventions" (16). Ellis similarly asserts that *Jane Eyre* uses the contrived plot device to achieve "the compromise between self-fulfillment and social accommodation" (139). For critics such as Fraiman and Jones, the compromise at the end is viewed as negative, with Jane succumbing to social norms. See Fraiman 118; R. Jones 210.

mechanically, paving the way for the conventional happy ending with marriage and motherhood. However, the happy ending does not imply that the author's perspective is idealistic or unrealistic. Rather, Brontë alludes to the realization that no happy ending is possible in the social reality that Jane is living in. The maiming of Rochester is the only possible way for Jane to have a cheerful laugh at the end without fearing the manipulative power of his gaze. Rochester has always watched Jane, her every move, every change of her countenance, including her silent smile. He tells her how he watched her "myself unseen" (267) while Jane was teaching Adèle and how he was vexed with Jane for "getting out of my sight" (267). He might love her truly and regard her as "my better self" (269), but Jane cannot be really free and unrestrained in front of his possessive gaze.

Consequently, Brontë takes Rochester's vision away. Jane experienced the power of seeing, its defining, confining, and degrading power, when she saw Bertha in the attic. Jane and Rochester's social inequality prevents an equal exchange of interpretive talents and authorities. It can never be a fair competition. Even when Jane hides herself behind the curtain, Rochester is aware of her watching and maneuvers what she sees. The limited space given to Jane becomes a major hindrance to the relationship Jane desires. Janet Gezari argues, "Because we hear without being heard, hearing is not an exchange, a reciprocal activity like touching" (81). With Rochester's vision and an arm gone, Jane has to rely on both touching and hearing to communicate. If the touching could enable a reciprocal, immediate channel, the hearing would allow a certain distance in their relationship so that Jane no longer has to use laughter as a mask. Jane has longed to have

an alternative laugh, a laugh of her own that resists the social order of laughing. Brontë concludes that she can only achieve it by exiling herself and Rochester from society.

Jane finds Rochester in his retreat at Ferdean full of "sullen woe" (367). Placing himself at Ferndean, "a building of considerable antiquity. . . deep buried in a wood" (366), means for Rochester a total withdrawal from the world and any hope for revival. He once said that he could not even place Bertha at Ferndean knowing the "unhealthiness of the situation, in the heart of a wood" (256). Yet when Jane arrives, she determines to rebuild the house as a spring of joy.

> Summoning Mary, I soon had the room in more cheerful order: I prepared him, likewise, a comfortable repast. My spirits were excited, and with pleasure and ease I talked to him during supper, and for a long time after. There was no harassing restraint, no repressing of glee and vivacity with him; for with him I was at perfect ease, because I knew I suited him: all I said or did seemed either to console or revive him. Delightful consciousness! (372)

With her "sole present aim to cheer him" (372), Jane succeeds in making "smiles" that "played over his face, joy dawned on his forehead" (372). The role to please has never been pleasant to Jane when it was her duty and work, but being the active and free agent of joy gives her "delightful consciousness." Nothing expresses her delight better than her laughter. When Rochester asks about her life at Moor House and suspects male presence there, Jane runs away without an answer and laughs: "I laughed and made my escape, still laughing as I ran upstairs. 'A good idea!? I thought, with glee. 'I see I have the

means of fretting him out of his melancholy for some time to come'" (374). Jane uses laughter to elude a straight answer, as she has before, but it is not a laugh to conceal her feelings. Rather, she laughs and enjoys and plans for future laughs. Now, it is Jane who uses jealousy to rouse Rochester from his gloom, but she confesses before long, "To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth" (379). The house rings with Jane's merry laughs and merry designs. Rochester's past desire to see Jane "laugh very merrily" with "more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now" (53) has come true at last.

With Rochester's blindness, Brontë finds a way for Jane to have her own laugh. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas insists that Jane "increasingly loses corporeality" in the narrative "ultimately becoming a voice which the blind hero can only hear" (56). However, Rochester's blindness does not erase Jane's body, but allows Jane to have her body in her own way. Her laughter reveals the very existence of her body as in the case of Bertha. Brontë does rely on the dramatic contrivance to enable Jane's financial independence and Rochester's loss of sight bestowing the unrealistic note to the conclusion. Yet it is not an optimistic ending when the author suggests that happiness is only possible when everything changes.

Like Austen, Brontë represents her protagonist's laugh at the end of her novel to illuminate the happiness she achieves. However, the two authors show different views on the social world they are representing. Austen seeks a balance between Emma's individual happiness and the welfare of the community. Though Emma's happiest laugh occurs when she is alone, she could find a space for that laugh inside her society. She is

still the lady of Highbury at the end. On the other hand, Brontë represents that her protagonist chooses to live outside of society, deep inside the wood, regardless of her newly gained wealth, with minimal contact with the outside world. In *Jane Eyre*, it is St. John's dogmatic voice that becomes just a voice that has lost any concrete tangibility, with the echoes of his words that close the narrative seeming distant and oddly placed. By displacing her own voice at the end of her narrative with St. John's prayer, Jane chooses total retreat from the world, stepping behind the voice that speaks self-sacrifice and noble missions. If Jane has been marginalized throughout her life, in the end, she marginalizes herself from society and finds happiness there. Thus, a rather pessimistic view concludes the novel, telling us that woman's happy laughter can have its place only outside the existing social reality.

Brontë removes the familiarity of laughter by making it scarce in her narrative, by detaching it from pleasure, and by emphasizing the social role it plays in one's struggle for power and survival. Through her representation of laughter, Brontë shows us a fairly limited room for individual pleasure allowed in Victorian society and also suggests how difficult it is for an individual to overcome the confinements of society. Even with her strong will for alternative laughter and happiness, Jane can only achieve them outside of society, and Rochester can be her ideal companion only through external intervention that strips him off of his masculine privilege, not through his own contemplations and endeavors. In *Villette*, Brontë seems to grant the possibility of happy shared laughter to Lucy and M. Paul for a moment, but she quickly and cruelly dispels it by forever separating the lovers. Brontë's inability or reluctance to portray the

realization of happy laughter inside the social reality reveals the severity of her social criticism. For Brontë, the forces of social hierarchy and norms are too great for an individual to surpass. However, her novels continue to suggest the importance of acknowledging women's desire for laughter as an expression of pleasure, and, after all, Brontë's marginalized women show that that desire cannot be quenched by social oppression. The relative absence of laughter in Brontë's novels, therefore, makes us contemplate the ways to expand the scope of the experience in real life.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIMITATION OF ALL-INCLUSIVE MALE LAUGHTER IN CHARLES DICKENS

> There will be few households that will not desire to possess some portrait of Mr Dickens; but alas, how little can any portrait tell of such a man! His was one of those faces which require to be seen with the light of life. What portrait can do justice to the frankness, kindness, and power of his eyes? They seemed to look through you, and yet only to take notice of what was best in you and most worthy of notice. And then his smile, which was most charming! And then his laughter—not poor, thin, arid, ambiguous laughter, that is ashamed of itself, that moves one feature only of the face—but the largest and heartiest kind, irradiating his whole countenance, and compelling you to participate in his immense enjoyment of it.
>
> - Arthur Helps, 'In Memoriam' (1870)[52]

There is no doubt that among the three authors examined in this study, Charles Dickens is the most open champion of laughter. His novels are packed with characters who display all kinds of laughter such as roaring, chuckling, giggling, or sneering, and

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[52] Quoted in Philip Collins, ed. *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1971. 529.

his comic narratives overtly invite readers to laugh in equally various forms. As George Henry Lewes admits, "the laughter is irresistible, whether rational or not, and there is no arguing away such a fact" (qtd. in Collins 571). The power to make people laugh is one of the most outstanding and acknowledged strengths of Dickens, and this is exactly the image of the author that his friend, Arthur Helps, emphasizes in his obituary tribute following the author's death. At the heart of Dickens' wide popularity there lies his power to transport laughter, the power "compelling you to participate in his immense enjoyment." Also, it is never a "poor, thin, arid, ambiguous" laugh that he delivers, but "the largest and heartiest kind." There is no need to hide or repress it because there is nothing to be ashamed of. Active expressing and sharing of pleasure via laughter are what constitute the charms of the author and his works, and, interestingly, this image of a laughing man whose laughter is hearty, pleasant, and powerful, the image through which Dickens is remembered, is what we could frequently encounter within Dickens' own narratives.

Unlike Austen or Brontë, who show great delicacy and shrewdness when discussing or representing laughter, Dickens openly praises the natural, healthy, and even moral values of a hearty laugh throughout his fictional works and was himself viewed as the epitome of "a hearty English laugh."[53] Dickens is especially good at portraying the contagious effect of pleasant, good-humored laughter. In Dickens,

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[53] The phrase is from James Spedding's review of Dickens' *American Notes* (qtd. in Collins 129). Spedding uses "a hearty English laugh" to suggest an open, unrestrained laugh that indulges one's sense of the ludicrous but contains no malice or contempt.

wherever there is a scene of domestic bliss, there is a sharing of happy laughs among families and friends that completes the picture. Laughter is not simply a personal matter for Dickens, as he emphasizes the communal force of laughter over and over again that can work as a channel communicating pleasure, sympathy, and love. An individual laugh growing into the laugh of a group is a recurring image in Dickens which reveals the author's principle of laughter, that laughter can be the force that unites people, provides relief, and brings happiness to many. Thus, "laughing in concert" is an essential element of the Dickensian happy ending, and it represents Dickens' belief in the inclusive power of laughter.

In this view of happy, communal laughter of Dickens, however, there exist some fissures that stem from the limitations of gender norms and regulations of Victorian society, from which Dickens does not seem to be free and which constantly prevent the free exchange and sharing of laughter between sexes. While men take the position of the good-humored and influential laugher, who initiates a laugh that soon transmits to others, which is exactly the image of Dickens in Helps' portrayal, women's laughter remains submissive, responsive, or isolated. In Dickens' happy picture of laughing company, power rests in the openly laughing body of men, while women happily laugh along and comply with that power. Though Dickens attempts to represent female laughter as positive and beautiful and as an essential part of the hearty communal laughter, he nonetheless fails to provide an alternative that moves beyond the confinements of ideal femininity. The open, hearty, and contagious laughter that Dickens praised and that his readers loved was not really allowed to women. At the same time, he

shows an awareness that the division between male and female laughter he himself seems to consolidate can be a pressure not just on women, but on men as well. The image of a happy male laugher recurrently appears in his novels, but in *David Copperfield*, the protagonist who continually fails to be the powerful, hearty laugher faces shame and guilt throughout the narrative. Dickens certainly presents a model of the laugh that is good, healthy, and pleasant, but he also shows that as long as laughter is subject to the constraints of gender norms, true sympathy and the communication of pleasure via laughter is impossible.

This chapter focuses on Dickens' representation of happy, shared laughter in order to assess the limited role given to women in his acclamation of a good, hearty laugher who is always male and also in order to reveal his own complex and, sometimes ambiguous, stance toward that gendered portrayal of laughter. This chapter is composed of three parts: The first section reviews the scholarship regarding Dickens' humor and laughter to understand how Dickensian laughter has been evaluated so far and to consider the importance of studying Dickens' principle of laughter through his own representation. In order to understand Dickens' stance as a comic writer, it is important to examine his own laughing characters who both physically and verbally deliver the author's thoughts on the function and value of laughter. The second section studies several of Dickens' novels to get a general idea of Dickens' attitude toward the value of laughter and his different representations of male and female laughter. The image of a boisterous, happy laugher frequently appears in his works affirming Dickens' belief in laughter's positive function, but women are granted very limited role in this. The last

section concentrates on *David Copperfield*, where Dickens uses laughter as a major hurdle in the protagonist's maturity and progress in society. Female laughter or feminine laughter is represented as something that should be overcome and buried in order for David to reach proper masculinity. In this novel, Dickens deeply contemplates the complicated social implications of having an unrestrained, powerful, and hearty laugh. As an influential male author, Dickens clearly stands in a different position from Austen or Brontë, and his views of laughter reveal how female laughter hovers on the verge of dominant discourse.

IV.1. Dickens and the Comedy of Laughter

That Dickens is a comic writer is too obvious a fact to seem to require further discussion. His humor can sometimes be fairly dark or ironic, but it is always a part of his works. A. O. J. Cockshut is right to say, "The humour of Dickens is his best-loved contribution to our life; and perhaps his most influential" (16).[54] Nevertheless, unlike David Cecil's opinion that "to expatiate at any length on Dickens' humor is unnecessary" (46), how seriously and profoundly Dickens contemplated the role and value of laughter requires further examination since the focus of the previous criticisms has been placed on how Dickens make people laugh, not on how laughter is represented and functions inside his narratives. Despite the universal acknowledgement of Dickens'

[54] James R. Kincaid mentions the same comment in his article "Dickens's Subversive Humor: *David Copperfield*" and highlights the fact that Cockshut describes Dickens' humor as "best-loved" and "most influential" instead of as the "leading" and "highest" quality of the author which is how John Forster described it in his biography (313). Kincaid emphasizes that while Dickens' humor is commonly acknowledged as the main appeal for his readers, its artistic value remains debatable.

humor and its popular appeal, in critical studies, unfavorable views have been more prevalent which led to the neglect of humor or laughter as a significant critical subject.[55] Dickens' comedy has been criticized for provoking laughter simply for laughter's sake, and many critics have thought that Dickens achieved humor at the expense of artistic refinement and realism. If Dickens' contemporary readers "enjoyed the humour and felt little compulsion to explain or justify this delight" (Collins 21), in the critical world, on the other hand, it has rarely been justified as a delightful quality.

Even during his time, Dickens suffered from severe criticism that viewed his comic descriptions or characterization as unrealistic, unnatural and static.[56] Frederic Harrison argues that his comic characters have the elements of "unnatural distortion" (qtd. in Bloom 75)[57] and compares Dickens to "the joker who does not know when to stop," disapproving of his comedy for "forc[ing] the laugh when it does not flow freely" (qtd. in Bloom 76). Lewes, who is also known for his critical assessment of Dickens' comic characterization, criticizes Dickens' characters as lacking the "complexity of the organism" (qtd. in Collins 574) and judges that although his comic, extravagant characters may stimulate a burst of laughter, it could leave "a revulsion of feeling" to the readers (qtd. in Collins 570). Harrison and Lewes agree that the laughter Dickens evokes

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[55] Collins points out this neglect and says, "from how many discussions of Dickens in the learned journals would one ever guess that (as Dickens himself thought) humour was his leading quality, his highest faculty, or indeed that he ever indulged in such an unelevated form of writing?" (19).
[56] Karen Chase explains that "the issue of his characters" (96) is always at the center of the debates regarding Dickens, "who have been variously criticized as melodramatic, static, improbable, inflated, sentimental, stylized, flat, typed, caricatured, extravagant, eccentric, deviant, grotesque, and misshapen" (96).
[57] Harrison argues that Dickens' comic characters are all "overloaded in the sense that they exceed nature, and are more or less extravagant" (qtd. in Bloom 76).

is not a pleasant kind, but excessive, unnatural, and even repulsive. Their critique is in part about Dickens' characterization, in which they are certainly not alone,[58] but they are also attacking Dickens for his excessive desire to rouse laughter. In their view, the laughter is too much, and it hinders not only the stylistic accomplishment of the works, but harms the pleasure of reading.

It seems that Dickens, whose novels ring with laughter inside and outside of them, faced a need to justify the principle that determined his use of laughter. George Vasey writes *The Philosophy of Laughter and Smiling* in 1875, condemning the contemporary cultural tendency that seeks fun and laughter, which he deems as unnatural, vulgar, and demoralizing. He argues that laughter is not at all "voluntary expressions of pleasure" (31), but a mere product of stimulation. He claims that children only learn to laugh by being stimulated with tickling and laments the contemporary society "where levity and frivolity, and every species of folly, constitute the predominant characteristics of the inhabitants" (45). He criticizes literature that provokes excessive laughter and states, "Gravity and seriousness always exert a beneficial influence, whereas frivolity and levity, on the contrary, produce a demoralising and vulgarising effect" (77). His essay shows that during Dickens' time there existed disparaging views on laughter and those who seek or provide opportunities for laughing. As will be

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[58] George Eliot as well comments that though Dickens is good at reproducing external traits of characters, he nonetheless fails in capturing their emotions and psychology (qtd. in Collins 343). Anthony Trollope also notes that "want of art in the choice of words and want of nature in the creation of character" has been the major target in critical views on Dickens (qtd. in Collins 324). The criticism of his comic characterization has continued after the nineteenth century, and as George H. Ford explains, "Most of the assessments of Dickens in the past hundred years have been based on the extent to which his stylized manner and attitude towards probability have been acceptable to the critic" (145).

discussed in the following section, Dickens obviously has a very different view from Vasey on laughter, but the critical assessments of his comedy suggest that he was not free from the charges of being frivolous and extreme in provoking laughter.

Another prevailing opinion on Dickens' comedy is that his use of comic tones and descriptions frequently conflicts with the darkness imbedded in his representation of Victorian society, which harms the integrity and consistency of his work. It is generally understood that Dickens' novels grow darker and more serious as he moves from his early works toward the later ones. Yet even in his early works there is a critical portrayal of social institutions and values just as there remains humor—although in much lesser degree than before—in his later works. Many critics view this coexistence of the comic and the tragic as conflicting and inconsistent such that it undermines the claims of both sides. P. J. M. Scott notes that Dickens' comic tone is often seen as "effervescently irresponsible high spirits" (6), and John Lucas criticizes the way that Dickens arrives at "large social inexactness" (67) by improperly mixing comedy with social criticism. From this view, Lucas unfavorably calls *Nicholas Nickleby* "something of an incoherent muddle" (55) filled with conflicting tones and inconsistent characters, particularly criticizing Dickens' handling of the Yorkshire school. According to Lucas, Dickens represents the dire reality of the boys' school while he invites us to laugh at the comical portrayals of the Squeers family at the same time, which "allows his comic genius to take over but only at the expense of disastrously compromising his somber prose about the boys' hell" (60). Lucas also points out how good people become triumphant too easily and miseries get avoided so comfortably (70), especially in Dickens' early novels.

This is a critique not just of Dickens' comic style, but of his overall comic vision. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, the entrance of the Cheeryble brothers opportunely solves the aggravating miseries of the Nickleby family, and every good character meets a happy ending sharing together the most cheerful, hearty, and sociable laughs. In this regard, the criticism of Dickens as producing an unsatisfactory social critique is closely related to his desire for a good laugh.

Thus, Dickens' humor that makes us laugh and that allowed him to earn his readers' affection also made him the prey of critical judgments. Dickens is blamed for lacking complexity and probability, and even seriousness. By this logic, if the comic elements harm the social message that Dickens intends to deliver, then it means that Dickens failed as a master of his own materials. So those who try to defend Dickens make claims that Dickens shows a serious consideration of humor and his comic vision. George Gissing argues that Dickens shows true humor which, by his definition, "always suggests a thought, always throws light on human nature" (qtd. in Bloom 87). It is this humor, according to Gissing, that allows him to succeed not only as a social critic, but as a novelist. He says, "Only because they laughed with him so heartily, did multitudes of people turn to discussing the question his page suggested" (qtd. in Bloom 84). He regards the humor as a public appeal that helped Dickens to deliver his social criticism more effectively and more widely by "soften[ing] the bitterness of truth" (qtd. in Bloom 86) that would have been too unpleasant to remember without humor. Thus, Gissing evaluates Dickens' humor as a successful novelistic device, not a defect or a failure.

George H. Ford, also declining to view Dickens' humor as a fault, states that humor is "an integral feature of Dickens' techniques" (140) and that "[t]he tragi-comic mixture is more firmly ingrained in his novels than is sometimes recognized" (138). Unlike Lucas who criticizes Dickens' comic descriptions of the villains, Ford argues that Dickens intentionally adds a juxtaposition of the serious and comic to his characters to make them closer to reality (138-39). Ford considers this the "form of complexity" in Dickens (140) and sees that comic elements help characters to be more credible and rounder. Scott also claims that Dickens is as serious in his comic vision as in his dark visions and that the comic comes "from the very centrality, the catholicity of his response to our human situation" (6). He asserts, "The almost continuous activity of humorous vision and comic language rises up as honestly as his graver intimations, derives really from the same order of perception as of the predicaments he describes" (6).[59] Though not specifically interested in humor, Barbara Hardy also provides useful insight to an understanding of Dickensian comic vision. Hardy states, "What distinguishes Dickens's moral questioning from that of Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Hardy, is his combination of social despair and personal faith, his capacity to distrust both society and social reform while retaining and perhaps deepening a faith in the power of human love" (3). For Dickens, highlighting the sympathy, joy, and affection generated through laughter is one obvious way of illuminating the power

[59] Roger B. Henkle also argues that having a comic attitude does not mean that Dickens is treating the matter lightly. He states, "he makes a strategic choice to present serious concerns in a way that transmits the effect obliquely or ambivalently" (9).

of human love. Hence, these critics encourage us to see Dickens' comic technique and vision as a thoughtful, deliberate choice and a reflection of his understanding of the human world and his faith in humanity.

The conflicting assessments of Dickens suggest that his views on humor and laughter are critical when evaluating his achievements as a writer. There are not many critics who particularly deal with laughter, beyond its relation to humor or comedy, but two studies that focus on the act of laughing in detail provide more complex insights into Dickens' ideas on laughter. Both Malcolm Andrews and James R. Kincaid are interested in the way Dickens makes his readers laugh and they, from different perspectives, analyze what Dickens wants to achieve by that laughter, strictly opposing the views that Dickens' humor is unnecessary or excessive. For these two critics, Dickens purposely engages his readers in the act of laughing with a clear understanding of the function of laughter. Andrews examines various means by which Dickens' humor works, such as the extravagant incongruities, the pantomimic descriptions, or the reveling in human eccentricities of speech and behavior, but the most interesting part of his study is how he sees laughter as a connection between the reader and the author: "Dickens' genius as a humorist was the result of his skillful and strenuous cultivation of a community of readers who would laugh with him, and who would come to relish his particular idiosyncratic humour" (*Dickensian Laughter* 1). Andrews pays attention to the social, contagious aspects of laughter that are emphasized in Dickens' novels and argues that laughter, as a physical demonstration of enjoyment, "stimulates and liberates others to share that enjoyment" (*Dickensian Laughter* 99) and that Dickens regards "audible,

unreserved laughter [as] usually the cause and sign of good moral health in individuals and communities" (*Dickensian Laughter* 133). In his view, Dickens' belief in laughter's positive social function, its merging and releasing effect, motivates the author to write comic narratives. Andrews claims that through laughter, Dickens wanted to give his readers "relief from the strain of maintaining the tone of mid-Victorian culture in that 'popular dark age'" (*Dickensian Laughter* 173).

Andrews' view allows us to see that Dickens is doing more than pursuing the laughter for laughter's sake. However, he presents a fairly flat opinion on Dickens' ideas on laughter saying that Dickens shows a firm belief in the positive effects of laughter, its uplifting and binding power. In contrast, Kincaid argues that Dickens has more complex, ironic views on laughter and that his novels do not simply promote laughter as a favorable social act. Kincaid asserts that humor is one of Dickens' most certain rhetorical tools used to deliver his dominant themes and visions more effectively and sees the resulting laughter as "one of the most complex and intimate responses a reader can make" (*Rhetoric of Laughter* 1).[60] Refusing to accept the division between funny and dark Dickens, Kincaid observes that different elements such as laughter, terror, or pathos always coexist within his novels and that Dickens' humor can be "often dark to the point of grotesque" (*Rhetoric of Laughter* 7). In his view, Dickens not only diverges from the conventional comedy through the use of "deliberately ironic" humor

[60] In his preface to *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter*, Kincaid explains, "'Rhetoric of laughter' simply means the use of laughter to persuade. In Dickens, our laughter affects very strongly our notion of what the novel is, and the vision of that novel is partly defined by the nature, quantity, and control of our response" (vii).

("Subversive Humor" 316),[61] but also makes his reader more deeply engage with the tragic implications of his novels by using humor "as a foundation out of which serious and tragic incidents grow" ("Subversive Humor" 328). Unlike Andrews who stresses laughter's role as a social cure and relief, Kincaid remarks, "Even if there *is* genial or harmless laughter, I think it is very rare in Dickens" (*Rhetoric of Laughter* 10).

Kincaid argues that Dickens masterfully controls the distance between his narrative and his readers through laughter, which complicates the reader's response to his characters and subject matters. For example, in his study of *David Copperfield*, Kincaid examines how Dickens makes the reader laugh at Dora and her impractical housekeeping skills and then soon makes them feel sorry for their laughter when they watch Dora die. The emotional aloofness created by laughter is overturned, and Kincaid says, "our reaction to the pathos in Dora's death is intensified by the guilt we feel at having once laughed at her" ("Subversive Humor" 318). According to Kincaid, Dickens leads us to see the cruelty and injustice of laughter as he makes us laugh at the same time, and eventually, this makes his readers "be more and more hesitant about laughing so easily" ("Subversive Humor" 318). Kincaid's analysis significantly reveals the complexity in Dickens' approach to laughter which has been seldom acknowledged, and he helps us see that Dickens believes the comic and the tragic are always mingled in our lives, closely following and constantly overturning each other. What Kincaid fails to

[61] Kincaid states, "Normally comic situations are established and subtly subverted, and comic characters are developed along traditional lines, only to be expanded beyond these limited roles" ("Subversive Humor" 316).

address is that the characters, not just the readers, encounter situations where their laughter soon makes them feel unsure of their act and that this becomes the crucial moment where Dickens' complex thoughts on laughter are revealed to us. In order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of Dickens' ideas on laughter and its significance, which will eventually lead to a more thorough evaluation of Dickens as a comic writer, it is necessary to expand the scope of study to the various occasions of laugher that take place within his narratives.

While Andrews emphasizes the positive social effects of laughter that Dickens advocates, Kincaid argues that Dickens recognizes many different faces of laughter, both its bright and dark sides. The closer examination of Dickens' novels reveals that Dickens is indeed conscious of both the positive value of laughter and its limitation. For example, discussing the episode of Squeers' boys' school in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Lucas criticizes how Dickens improperly mixes the comic elements with the horrible representation of the institution, but by neglecting that Nicholas is the one who laughs at the comical Squeers family, he misses the ambivalent stance of Dickens. Nicholas is introduced as a naturally cheerful character with a sense of humor, but while working as Mr. Squeers' assistant, he feels miserable about the reality of the boys' school and the role he is playing there. Still, he cannot stop himself from laughing at the ridiculous flirtation and bashfulness of Miss Squeers who holds a romantic fancy toward Nicholas. During the tea time with Miss Squeers and her friend, Nicholas realizes this absurd notion and falls into "irrepressible laughter" (107). The narrator says, "despite his miserable condition, he laughed till he was thoroughly exhausted" (107). The phrase, "despite his miserable

condition," implies that Dickens is aware of unsuitability of such a laugh in such a situation, and soon enough, Nicholas himself feels sorry about his laugh and accepts the unhappy breakup of the tea party as his punishment: "I was glad . . . to grasp at any relief from the sight of this dreadful place, or the presence of its vile master . . . Well, it is a just punishment for having forgotten, even for an hour, what is around me now!" (113). Therefore, by making his good protagonist laugh an "improper" laugh, Dickens probes both laughter's role as a welcoming relief and its limitation in that role. Even in the most dreadful situations, we laugh, and though it cannot change reality, it helps one keep up one's spirits and fight back. Also, because Nicholas is usually seen as an uninterestingly and flatly virtuous character, his laughter adds a complicating aspect to the character.

More than anyone else, Dickens himself is conscious of how laughter could stand out as incongruous at certain moments and incorporates this consciousness into his own narrative. He simply believes that a good laugh can benefit even in unpromising situations. He delivers this faith straightforwardly through the voice of Kit Nubbles in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

> "Can you suppose there's any harm in looking as cheerful and being as cheerful as our poor circumstances will permit? Do I see anything in the way I'm made, which calls upon me to be a snivelling, solemn, whispering chap, sneaking about as if I couldn't help it, and expressing myself in a most unpleasant snuffle? on the contrairy, don't I see every reason why I shouldn't? Just hear this! Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as walking, and as good for the health? Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as a

> sheep's bleating, or a pig's grunting, or a horse's neighing, or a bird's singing? Ha ha ha! Isn't it, mother?" (172)

Kit is a poor servant boy who has a mother and a baby brother to look after, but he never loses a good-natured and hearty laugh, and this becomes the positive force that sustains him and his family. Through Kit, Dickens asserts that laughter is as natural and healthy as walking, and it is better to face life with a laughing spirit than with an "unpleasant snuffle." Therefore, we can see that Dickens' ideas on laughter are most distinctly presented within his own works, and it is impossible to talk about Dickens' attitude toward laughter or humor without examining the various aspects of laughter he represents. Above all, concentrating just on how Dickens makes readers laugh leaves out all the laughs that are not comical. Dickens' characters laugh a lot at the comical elements of their life, but they also frequently laugh with no apparent reason, or at no clear target, as Kit does in the above scene. In other words, laughing is not always "laughing at" in Dickens, but concentrating on Dickens' humor and the reader's laughter limits our attention to the scenes that are funny or ridiculous enough to make us laugh. We need to consider laughter outside of humor in order to achieve a more thorough understanding of Dickens' attitude on laughter.

Another subject that is absent in prior studies of Dickens' humor and laughter is gender. This seems to be another result of focusing on the question, "what makes us laugh?" The most that is done in the humor studies is to see how much Dickens sticks to or moves away from the traditional comic types of female nature such as the nagging

wives or the sour old maids.[62] However, when we turn to examine the representations of laughter and think of the question "who is laughing," gender gains added significance. As laughing is such an important, basic human act in Dickens, the difference in manner or frequency between male and female characters becomes a major issue. Austen and Brontë have already shown us the difficulty of seeing laughter as a free channel for pleasure, especially for women. If we go back to Helps' portrayal of Dickens, what is too obvious to remark is that "the largest and heartiest kind" of laughter that induces others to participate in its immense enjoyment is radiating from the face of a male author. The laughter is described to emphasize the dead author's cheerful, generous, and compelling heart that suits his influential, fatherly position as a writer. In his novels, Dickens also presents characters with cheerful, influential laughs, but those laughs always come from the male bodies as well. If Dickens' novels reflect his belief in laughter's power and significance in our life, his gendering of different laughs could reveal his view on the power relations of the society. Tara MacDonald notes that Dickens is "a highly contentious author amongst feminist critics in both the Victorian period and today" (25). He is renowned for reproducing the conservative ideals of women, the doll-like heroines or 'the angel in the house,' but as Natalie McKnight points out, recent criticism "increasingly questions long-standing assumptions about Dickens' gender characterization" (51). Reinvestigating Dickens' characters who move

[62] For examples, see Cockshut 16-18 and Michael Slater 223-42.

beyond the gender stereotypes and norms is an ongoing job in feminist criticism.[63] My study also intends to participate in this discussion and show that the study of laughter can contribute to the assessment of Dickens' perspectives on gender. He represents various aspects of laughter through many different characters, both male and female, but he ultimately fails to overcome the gender difference that Victorian society upholds in those representations. In the next section, I will examine Dickens' representations of laughter in detail to form a more complex understanding of Dickens' view of laughter while focusing on the gender issues that arise therein.

IV.2. Dickens' Boisterous Laughing Men and Others

If Bergson identifies emotion as the foe of laughter, Dickens takes an entirely opposite direction. For Dickens, laughter is, more than anything else, a mirror of one's emotional scope and condition. Laughter is frequently used as a character trait in Dickens, and how a character laughs reveals an important aspect of that character's personality. If a character is described as laughing a "good-humored laugh," for example, then it is safe to assume that s/he will never be a villain. In Dickens' world, a character with an evil mind can never laugh a "good-humored laugh." A representation

[63] Many critics have done studies in this stream. For example, Brenda Aryes argues, "Even as Dickens' text overtly promotes an ideology of womanhood, however, at the same time it modifies and subverts that ideology" (2), and her study includes examining female characters that survive outside of domesticity. MacDonald also asserts that Dickens moves beyond the conventional gender stereotypes by investigating, for instance, how Dickens depicts happy companionate marriages in which husband and wife work professionally alongside each other or how he represents ideal male characters that incorporate feminine characteristics. Also, critics including Kelly Hager, Charles Hatten, and Catherine Waters perform a similar job by focusing more on Dickens' deviation from the dominant domestic ideology of his time.

of laughter does not simply convey the exterior of a laugher, but is closely associated with the person's inside. For example, Mr. Bounderby in *Hard Times* is a "big, loud man, with a stare and a metallic laugh" (20). A man whose life is only concerned with facts and money, with no room for feelings or imagination, he goes around "rattling his money and laughing" (38). Since it is impossible to envision what a "metallic laugh" will look like—though its unpleasant sound is conceivable—Dickens is clearly using the description to highlight the total lack of sentiment in the character, not his exterior. Being metallic—that is, being cold and inhumane—is what directly negates the quality of a good, hearty laugh. As Bounderby only laughs to show his superior position and unsympathetic stance to others, never from real amusement, his laugh almost seems like a non-laugh. Similar characters like Ralph Nickleby or Mr. Jaggers are explicitly described as laughless,[64] and this highlights their character as heartless businessmen. That Dickens uses laughter, among other behavioral features, to stress their cold minds suggests how for Dickens, laughter is a crucial measurement of human sentiment.

Dickens often introduces characters through their memorable laughs to provide a quick look at their hidden nature. For young Pip who first visits the mysterious Satis House in *Great Expectations*, what reveals the cold mind that governs its world is Miss Havisham's "weird smile" (58) and Estella's contemptuous laugh (65). Miss Havisham, while touching her heart, utters, "Broken!", with "a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it" (58), and Pip later muses, "Saving for the one weird smile at first, I should have

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[64] The descriptions in the two novels are identical. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, the narrator says, "Ralph never laughed" (437); in *Great Expectations* it goes, "Mr. Jaggers never laughed" (198).

felt almost sure that Miss Havisham's face could not smile" (61). An old lady smiling at her own broken heart is such a grotesque image that not only Pip but the reader could feel the deeply distorted mind resting inside her "corpse-like" body (60). The only time she laughs in the novel is when she laughs at Pip's broken heart after informing him of Estella's departure abroad. With "such a malignant enjoyment," she breaks into "such a disagreeable laugh" that Pip is "at a loss what to say" (116). Turning heartbreaking sorrow, including her own, into a laughing matter, Miss Havisham shows a total twistedness of mind. Besides, Estella, who is raised by Miss Havisham's twisted desire, can only laugh a contemptuous, cold laugh that belittles Pip and all others. Estella laughs at Pip's tears on their first meeting and afterwards at his naiveté, shame, and admiration, which pricks Pip to despise his own position and desire what he does not have. Dickens allows Estella, who declares that she has no softness, "no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense" (237), to have only this scornful laugh in order to show what it means to be heartless.

For Dickens, the inability to laugh naturally is closely related to rigidity of mind. As manifested by Kit's acclamation of laughter, naturally arising laughter is the essence of a natural, happy mind, and when it is absent, it either reflects the limited scope of emotional life or the extreme restraint put on one's emotional experience or expression. Newman Noggs in *Nicholas Nickleby*, for example, is a character with profound sympathy, but as his life does not allow him to express his feelings naturally, what he feels is only articulated though his curiously twisted face, "whether of paralysis, or grief, or inward laughter, nobody but himself could possibly explain" (19). The narrator

explains, “The expression of a man’s face is commonly a help to his thoughts, or glossary on his speech; but the countenance of Newman Noggs, in his ordinary moods, was a problem which no stretch of ingenuity could solve” (19). Working as Ralph Nickleby’s clerk and chained to his avarice, Newman has come to repress his natural good heart, and what he outwardly expresses is always a product of a strenuous struggle between his true heart and the repressive mechanism he cannot cast off. So when he hears poor Smike’s story of being captured and beaten by Mr. Squeers, Newman strives to repress his anger and sympathy until he could hold them no longer and bursts out in “a laugh composed of one loud sonorous ‘Ha! ha!’” (512). He gives vent to his intensified distress through a laugh that conveys no mirth, and that he laughs when he is most anguished shows how he is unaccustomed to expressing what he truly feels. Dickens effectively represents Newman’s sadly oppressed life through his distorted laughter.

Judy Smallweed in *Bleak House* is another interesting character who does not know how to laugh at all. She is raised in a household which “has discarded all amusements. . . and banished all levities whatsoever” (308), and her life made her totally alien to laughing.

> It is very doubtful whether Judy knows how to laugh. She has so rarely seen the thing done, that the probabilities are strong the other way. Of anything like a youthful laugh, she certainly can have no conception. If she were to try one, she would find her teeth in her way; modelling that action of her face, as she has unconsciously modelled all its other expressions, on her pattern of sordid age. Such is Judy. (309)

Implicitly attacking those who see laughing as unnatural, as Vasey does, Dickens presents a character with no laugh, no mirth, who is thus, so unnaturally odd. Dickens suggests that rigidity in life, especially in terms of affective experiences, leads to rigidity in laughing. Though this reveals Dickens' rather unkind use of a twisted face—which could be a matter of ill health or disability—as a sign of a character problem, it shows how Dickens sees laughter as a visible indication of one's mind. If Newman's peculiar laughter shows the cruel oppression of his life that restrains natural expressions of feelings, Judy's lack of laughter indicates the extremely limited scope of her feelings that know no mirth to express. In both cases, laughter as an expression of pleasure is absent, and the laughter that lost all its natural elements is just a hollow sound or a ridiculous twitching of a face, which is no laughter at all. Dickens repeatedly praises open and natural laughter, which suggests natural human sentiment, and when it is absent, it signals that something is wrong.

Dickens praises good laughter not only because it is for the benefit of the ones who laugh, but for the benefit of the entire society. Dickens is greatly interested in the social effect of laughter, and laughing is always a key to a true friendship in his writing. When Pip meets Herbert Pocket in London as a stranger, without knowing their childhood encounter, he notices his new friend's "agreeable smile" (175), and before exchanging few words, they find themselves lying on the ground thrown by an abruptly opened door, laughing together. They laugh again and again, and this casts away any awkwardness of the first meeting. Herbert's laughter is a mirror of his "frank and easy way" (177), and the merry laughing between them foretells that they will be good friends

from that moment. Sharing laughter is a meaningful experience in Dickens as it suggests the affinity and sympathy between characters. When Esther is on her way to Bleak House, knowing nothing about what will happen to her, her nervousness is dispelled when she meets Ada and Richard and shares numerous hearty, cheerful laughs with them. As they "looked at one another, half laughing at [their] being like the children in the wood" (43), three strangers become friends. As much as laughter works as a device to reveal an individual character's nature, it also works to indicate the nature of connection between characters. Laughing together can form or intensify friendship, and being unable to laugh along can imply the emotional gap between characters.

It is remarkable that Dickens uses laughter to emphasize the bond between characters considering the theories that basically see laughter as devoid of feelings or as a reflection of one's sense of superiority. Of course, it is common knowledge that laughter has contagious influence, that "laughter happens best in company" as Andrews points out (*Dickensian Laughter* 125). Even Bergson, who identifies the absence of feeling as the prerequisite of laughter, argues that laughter needs an echo (64). Since Bergson firmly denies the emotional aspect of laughter and sees it as an intellectual reaction, this means that the echoing reaction to laughter he stresses is not caused by an emotional motive but comes from shared intelligence. For Andrews, laughing is like infection as "the presence of other laughers consciously or unconsciously encourages *audible* laughter" (*Dickensian Laughter* 125). He states, "Laughter generates responsive laughter, almost as a demonstrative reflex, and thereby signals community of feeling" (*Dickensian Laughter* 125), and so, "the echo is a kind of auditory contagion"

(*Dickensian Laughter* 126). In other words, Andrews thinks that we laugh when we see or hear someone else's laugh as an almost involuntary impulse and thus what generates laughter is laughter itself. Dickens, however, suggests that responsive laughter is more than an intellectual agreement or an automatic reflex. Dickens specifically designates the source of contagiousness of laughter to be the sympathy and affection between people.

The chain of laughter that frequently appears in his novels when an individual laugh spreads to those around clearly shows how Dickens accentuates the emotional ground of contagious laughter.

> Kit laughing so heartily, with his swoln and bruised faced looking out of the towel, made little Jacob laugh, and then his mother laughed, and then the baby crowed and kicked with great glee, and then they all laughed in concert, partly because of Kit's triumph, and partly because they were very fond of each other. (112)

When Kit returns home with a bruised face, his mother gets worried, but as he just laughs if off, saying he fought for what he wanted—Little Nell's canary—and won, his laughter shortly casts off the gloom and turns the atmosphere into merriment. Kit's laughter spreads to his brother and to his mother, and this chain of laughter is only possible because "they were very fond of each other." In this case, the "community of feeling" Andrews refers to is not merely the outcome of laughing together, but its origin as well. Kit's mother laughs because she loves her son and is happy to see his merry laugh. Perhaps Pip and Herbert's mutual laughter is more of an involuntary reflex at first, but numerous laughs that come afterwards are obviously the result of their friendly,

supportive feelings. In short, emotion and laughter are never separate matters for Dickens.

Fred Kaplan argues that Dickens shows a belief in moral sentiments which "locate[s] the grounds of moral performance in feelings, innate moral feelings" (16) and that this belief pervades his fiction (40). He uses the examples of "tears of sentimentality" which he sees as "an effective expression and communication of moral feeling" (45). Yet it is not only tears that communicate the moral sentiments. Laughter also appears as a vehicle of good, sympathetic, and virtuous feelings in Dickens. The ability to participate in others' joyful laughter or to make others laugh along with delight is repeatedly shown as the marker of one's moral goodness. The frequent descriptions of laughing with tears suggest that laughing and crying are not separately categorized in Dickens. When Nicholas is first introduced to the Cheeryble brothers, their pleasant laughter tinged with tears represent their jolly, good-humored, and most benevolent nature. Talking about their old friend Tim, "[t]he fine old fellows laughed pleasantly together: each with a tear of regard for old Tim Linkinwater, standing in his eye" (454). It is impossible to see laughter here as a sign of a mocking, arrogant, or unfeeling mind. The Cheerybles' tearful laughter represents both their concerned, sympathetic attitude toward their aging friend and their spirited mind that does not resign itself to sadness and always endeavors to promote the happiness of others. Mingling of tears with laughter is Dickens' most powerful way to show that emotion is, by no means, the foe of laughter and that laughter can be a channel to express and share sympathy. A pleasant laugh often

reflects one's intention to do good for others, and those who can make others truly happy through their own laughter are always depicted as kind-hearted.

It seems that for Dickens, having a laugh that is both good and pleasant and finding someone who can share one's laughter are much easier tasks than for Austen and Brontë who are more concerned with the way individual laughter gets isolated and alienated in society. Yet further examination of Dickens' laughter reveals that the power of laughter that unites people, communicates sympathy, and spreads joy are essentially characterized as masculine, which suggests that women's laughter is still being alienated in Dickens' praise of the inclusive power of laughter. In Dickens' viewing of laughter as an act of emotion, what stands out is the fact that the characters with most influential and notable laughter are commonly male. Even though emotion was usually categorized as a feminine quality in Victorian discourses,[65] Dickens makes sure that in case of laughter, it is men who are more qualified to deliver its affective power. Even though the age and the benign nature of the Cheeryble brothers and the youth and the lowly social status of Kit make them appear far from strictly masculine, they are still all male, and they appear most powerful when they make others laugh through their own open, pleasant laughs. Dickens rejects the traditional, negative views of laughter as a vulgar, unfeeling act, but, at the same time, he seems to agree to the prevalent notion that laughter stems from and delivers a sense of power and that power suits men better than women.

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[65] For this reason, Dickens himself suffered from critics effeminizing him for writing sentimental novels. Mary Lenard explains that the identification of Dickens with "sentiment and sympathy, and with popular culture, aligned him with nineteenth-century cultural constructions of femininity" (80).

There are laughing women in Dickens as well, but the prominent laughing characters, especially the ones that can be called "companionable boisterous laughers,"[66] are unexceptionally all male. These boisterous laughing characters are those who most clearly exhibit Dickens' belief in the effect of a good, hearty, and sociable laugh. In Dickens, the ability to make others laugh along is a kind of power, and this power is essentially masculine. Dickens' boisterous laughing men have such exaggerated laughs that laughter nearly becomes everything there is to know about the character, and their laughs are so piercing and imposing that it is impossible not to join in.

Above all, John Browdie in *Nicholas Nickleby* has such an irrepressible tendency for loud laughter that at first, it appalls the reader as well as Nicholas. Meeting Nicholas first at Miss Squeers' tea party, Mr. Browdie laughs wildly at Nicholas, who has just finished up his plate full of bread and butter, joking about the scantiness of food Nicholas gets at the school. Mr. Browdie laughs while saying, "Ye'll be nowt but skeen and boans if you stop here long eneaf. Ho! ho! ho!" (108). What is more, he laughs "until he found it necessary to apply his coat-cuffs to his eyes" at the recollection of the last teacher's leanness (108). To Nicholas, who feels miserable about the school's reality and his own vulnerable position, this laugh is almost like an attack. He can feel no sympathy toward this laughing man, and so, Nicholas scornfully retorts, "I don't know whether your perceptions are quite keen enough, Mr. Browdie, to enable you to understand that your remarks are offensive" (108). As this happens before we actually

[66] This term is borrowed from Andrews (*Dickensian Laughter* 136).

get to know the character, it seems that Mr. Browdie is either an insensitive, mean brute, or a fool.

But gradually we learn that Mr. Browdie is in fact a warm-hearted, generous man, who only has a too-excessive relish for a big, wild laugh. He has a right mind to appreciate Nicholas' virtue and to despise Mr. Squeers' greed and cruelty. He lends Nicholas money when he runs away from the school, cutting off Nicholas's thankful remarks with loud laughs, and rescues Smike from his old master's evil grasp. Yet none of these good deeds exceed the power of his boisterous laughter. Having a chance for a good laugh is his greatest pleasure, and the reward for his good deeds is also his laugh. Soon, it becomes a great pleasure for a reader to watch him laugh. When Mr. Browdie secretly plans to help Smike escape from Mr. Squeers, we see him "cramming the corner of the pillow into his mouth, to prevent his roaring out loud with laughter" (507), and the narrator remarks, "If there could only have been somebody by, to see how the bed-clothes shook, . . . that somebody would have been scarcely less amused than John Browdie himself" (509). The portrayal of this laughing man is quite comical, but it never works as a mockery of him. Instead, his laugh eventually gains a contagious power making everyone, including the readers, join in. Nicholas cannot participate in Mr. Browdie's laugh at first, but once he understands his friendly nature, he wholeheartedly joins in whenever he laughs. As Mr. Browdie laughs "with such a keen and heartfelt delight," Kate, Nicholas' sister, says, "If I were oppressed with I don't know how many cares, it would make me happy only to look at him," and, even in her worried mind, she feels "a disposition to join him" (587). With a character like John Browdie, Dickens

conveys well the contagious, elevating power of purely delightful laughter. His laughter lights up the darkest moments of the novel and spreads amusement.

Another example of Dickens' laughing man can be found in one of the late novels, *Bleak House*. Mr. Lawrence Boythorn is introduced as Mr. Jarndyce's old friend who has an outstanding lung capacity: "there's no simile for his lungs. Talking, laughing, or snoring, they make the beams of the house shake" (129). Indeed, his entrance is accompanied by his stentorian voice and recurring "Ha, ha, ha!" Esther narrates that he laughed and laughed "until the flattest echo in the neighborhood seemed to catch the contagion, and to laugh as enjoyingly as he did, or as we did when we heard him laugh" (130). His thundering laugh and his superlative style speak power in most discernable way, but at the same time, Esther says, they "seemed to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing" (130). Mr. Boythorn is a curious mixture of inflated power and extreme gentleness. He carries a very little canary that loves to sit on his master's head, and while his echoing laugh shakes his body and the entire house, the canary "whose sense of security was complete" (132) is not disturbed at all. As the size and color of the bird as well as its close attachment to Mr. Boythorn denote, the canary is the personification of femininity that Mr. Boythorn possesses that cannot be expressed through his masculine figure. John Browdie's laughter was at first misunderstood by Nicholas as offensive, and he could share the delight of the laugher only after he realized Mr. Browdie's kind nature. In Mr. Boythorn's case, however, Dickens more distinctly conveys the gentleness of his nature and harmlessness of his laughter from the start through the little, yellow canary peacefully resting upon his laughing body.

Through this image of a powerfully impressive and contagious, yet entirely harmless laugh, Dickens captures the virtue of laughter that he upholds. It is unrestricted, contagious, and inoffensive, and the power these laughing men exert comes from their ability to make others sincerely join in their pleasure, which is different from the power that simply makes others submit. For instance, Sir Mulberry is a man "whose joys, regrets, pains, and pleasures, are all of self" (357), and whenever he laughs, his "toads" (237), Mr. Pyke and Mr. Pluck, join in. Their laugh is always targeting the weak such as Kate, and the manipulative power of Sir Mulberry is highlighted through the automatically echoing laughs of his two companions. They unconditionally laugh when their leader laughs, and they are "only engaged to laugh for Sir Mulberry" (238), never for others. Sir Mulberry is certainly described as a man with authority, but this authority comes from the forced compliance on the part of his weak companions, not from real correspondence of pleasure. This is obviously a superficial, false version of Dickens' happy, communal laughter. As much as Dickens advocates the positive power of good-natured, contagious laughter, he also warns us of the power of aggressive, authoritative laughter that seeks only selfish pleasure while disregarding or harming the pleasure of others. It seems evident that Dickens relates laughter with power, but through the different examples of powerful male laughter, Dickens suggests that the ideal masculine power that he seeks in laughter is the one that could truly embrace and encourage others' happy laughter. As Dickens' ideal male laughers, John Browdie and Mr. Boythorn have the power to make others feel genuinely pleased with their pleasure.

Also, Dickens calls attention to the power of his laughing men through their laughing bodies. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's nephew appears as another male character with the power of "Ha-Ha."

> It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way: holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions: Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out, lustily.
>
> "Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" (86-87)

Dickens represents the nephew's laugh through its physical as well as auditory descriptions in extravagant fashion. Simon Critchley remarks that "laughter is an explosion expressed with the body" (9), and no other author demonstrates this better than Dickens. Laughter is represented as an uncontainable force that bursts out from one's body, and the underlined physicality conveys the tangible, solid power of laughter.[67] Laughter can be contagious only when it is exposed through a body, and Andrews points out that for Dickens, morally healthy laughers "laugh with their whole

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[67] In some cases, Dickens uses the exaggerated physical descriptions of laughter to make it look appalling. For example, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Quilp's laughing face that makes "every vein in it [to be] swollen almost to bursting" (383) shows the ugliness and violence of his nature that finds pleasure in torturing others. The detailed portrayal of a laughing body, including Quilp's, shows the uncontainable quality of laughter, but Quilp's laugh is described as impossible to sympathize with, making his laughter another undesirable example of powerful male laughter. Interestingly, as the description becomes more specific, to the point of depicting veins, it becomes more unpleasant to look at.

body and voice, not just one or two parts" (*Dickensian Laughter* 139). And this is how Helps describes Dickens' laughing face in his obituary tribute as well: not a laugh that "moves one feature only of the face—but the largest and heartiest kind, irradiating his whole countenance." Uncertainty or restraint cannot be found from these laughing men. John Browdie and Mr. Boythorn's powerful laughter is also expressed through their shaking bodies, and these bodies are evidently large, masculine bodies.[68] The massive effect of their laughs matches their massive bodies, through which Dickens suggests that the irresistibly contagious power of laughter lies in the masculine body. Of course, a kind, sympathetic mind, which is culturally associated with the feminine, is also required in order for their laughter to have truly contagious power and make others sincerely share their pleasure, but in the descriptions of laughter, this feminine part takes as much room as a tiny, yellow canary.

There are critics such as McKnight and MacDonald who assert that Dickens creates a model of masculinity that incorporates the traits that are typically defined as feminine and so, overcomes the conventional gender stereotypes of Victorian society.[69] The ideal models of the powerful male laughter in his works also seem to consolidate this opinion. However, that the most unrestricted, hearty, and powerful laughter is always given to male characters and that its power is emphasized through their

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[68] John Browdie is described as "over six feet high, with a face and body above the due proportion" (107), and Mr. Boythorn is an "upright and stalwart" man with "a massive grey head" and a corpulent body (130).

[69] McKnight observes that Dickens "create[s] a model of masculinity that blends the masculine and feminine gender ideals" (54), and MacDonald sees a character such as Tommy Traddles in *David Copperfield* as Dickens' new model of gentleman who is a "mixture of conventional feminine *and* masculine ideals" (44).

masculine body make us doubt if Dickens really defies the gender ideals of his culture. Moreover, in Dickens' celebration of laughing men and the chain of laughter they create, women's role remains subsidiary. Kit's laughter always transmits to his mother, but her laugh is never the one that starts the laughter. The laughing bodies of female characters are minimally described and not associated with a contagious power. Dickens does not hesitate to describe the shaking body and the ringing voice of an ideal male laugher, but he seems to think that clear descriptions of a laughing female body cannot but harm the laugher's feminine virtue. Miss La Creevey in *Nicholas Nickleby* is represented as a kind lady with a sense of humor, but her laughter is confined within herself. After meeting Miss Knag to inquire of Kate's whereabouts, she finds out Miss Knag's unfriendly feelings toward Kate and inwardly spits out cutting words toward Miss Knag. As this puts her in "great good humour," she laughs "a hearty laugh" (246).

> Here was one of the advantages of having lived alone so long! The little bustling, active, cheerful creature, existed entirely within herself, talked to herself, made a confidant of herself, was as sarcastic as she could be, on people who offended her, by herself; pleased herself, and did no harm. If she indulged in scandal, nobody's reputation suffered; and if she enjoyed a little bit of revenge, no living soul was one atom the worse. (246)

Miss La Creevey laughs as she wants and finds relief from the act. Having a laugh of one's own is an uncommon feature for a woman, but her laugh exists "entirely within herself." Her laugh is as harmless as Mr. Boythorn's laugh, but she needs to be in

isolation when she laughs. In this way, Dickens precludes any harm that could come from her laughter, ensuring her position and virtue as a kind matron, but this also precludes her laughter being communicable. Also, Dickens omits any bodily descriptions of her laugh and just writes that she laughed "a hearty laugh." Miss La Creevey is the first friendly soul that the Nickleby family encounters in London, but the way she comforts and helps them is not through her laughs. Esther is another female character who has a benevolent nature, but laughter is not her main tool to infuse happiness. Her goodness does help others to laugh, especially Charley, but it is not Esther's laugh itself that makes Charley merry. They laugh along when others laugh, but the loud, uninhibited laugh with contagious power is never given to these women. Having a virtue that is transmissible and powerful is allowed for both men and women, but having a laugh that is transmissible and powerful is only allowed for men. This shows that the good, powerful laughter Dickens praises is basically gendered as masculine.

That Dickens' views on laughter assume a gender difference, rather than confront it, is observable in the two tales he includes in the beginning chapters of *Nicholas Nickleby*. These two tales that seem irrelevant to the overall plot of the novel are highly relevant to the issue of laughter. As Nicholas is on his way to Dotheboys Hall, the coach he is on gets overturned, and while the passengers are waiting in the nearby public house for a new coach, a "merry-faced gentleman" (55) suggests telling stories to lighten the time. So, a "grey-haired gentleman" (56) begins with a story, "The Five Sisters of York," and then the merry-faced gentleman continues with his own story, "The Baron of

Grogzwig." As much as two gentlemen look as if they have opposite temperaments—one is stern and subdued while the other is sociable and merry—their stories have different tones, different backgrounds, and different effects as tales. The first story is a serious and melancholy tale about five sisters who lived in the ancient city of York, and it is enclosed in the gloom of their death and the time past. In contrast, the second tale is a comical and more plainly fictitious story about a baron of Grogzwig of Germany and about his dissipated life. These stories play no part in progressing the plot of the novel or in providing important morals to Nicholas. Rather, as soon as the merry-faced gentleman is finished with his story, the fresh coach is announced to be ready "prevent[ing] any discussion relative to the last story" (75), and the plot moves on without mentioning the tales again. It is not clear why Dickens included these tales, and Lucas criticizes the author for ignoring "the justifiable demand of relevance" (57). However, these incongruous stories with no definite morals are actually leading us to think of laughter and pleasure's role in our life, which is Dickens' major interest not just in *Nicholas Nickleby* but in most of his works. Moreover, a clear contrast established between the two tales and their representations of laughter is noteworthy.

Firstly, "The Five Sisters of York" presents five maiden sisters "of surpassing beauty" (57), among whom the youngest is the most beautiful and the merriest. The youngest is portrayed like an ideal girl in a painting with "the blending of the rose and lily in her gentle face, or the deep blue of her eye" (57), but above all, her mind is said to be most beautiful.

> The heart of this fair girl bounded with joy and gladness. Devoted attachment to her sisters, and a fervent love of all beautiful things in nature, were its pure affections. Her gleesome voice and merry laugh were the sweetest music of their home. She was its very light and life. (57)

Sweet, angelic Alice lived a secluded life with her sisters in an old wooden house "surrounded by a rough stone wall" (58), and their happiness was complete as Alice's joy and cheerfulness became the joy of them all. Then one day, a black monk gloomily enters their house following the "noise of soft voices in conversation and of merry laughter" (58) as Alice and her sisters are "all busily plying their customary task of embroidering" (58), and there arises a debate between the monk who reprimands the sisters for passing "the fleeting hours" on "this senseless task" (59) and Alice who believes that sharing "harmless mirth and maidenly pursuits" (59) would bind them forever through the happy memory which would keep their spirits cheerful in the worldly trials of life. The monk speaks like a deputy of Death constantly reminding the girls of the rapidly decaying life that leaves only "dreary change and wasting sorrow" (61) and proposes to abandon all earthly pleasure and take the veil. In response, Alice steadfastly states, "To die is our heavy portion, but, oh, let us die with life about us" (60), and urges her sisters not to abandon the pleasures of life. After years passed, the same monk reenters the house, and this time, Alice is long gone and the sisters have all suffered from sorrows of life. The monk proposes them to choose the veil again, but the sisters refuse by recollecting Alice's young, bright heart. The tale ends with how they all

died one by one while their finished embroidery was copied into "five compartments of richly stained glass" (64) of a church, and this is the only remains that deliver the tale of the Five Sisters.

This is a strange tale indeed where an innocent, angelic girl conflicts with a grim, religious man, and her pursuit of earthly joys is praised as beautiful, but is shown as short-lived and long gone by. From the beginning, the grey-haired gentleman emphasizes that the sisters of his tale all died long ago and that "their names have passed away, and dusty antiquaries tell of them as of a fable" (58). The brightness of the girls and their sheltered happiness are too fragile to survive the ruthlessness of life, and the memory of their merry time together can only bring subdued joy in their later days. The story does not seem to take the side of the melancholy monk, but it is also ambiguous about Alice's firm belief in merry laughs and joyous pursuits. The discussion between two gentlemen after the narration reflects this ambiguous stance.

> 'There are shades in all good pictures, but there are lights too, if we choose to contemplate them,' said the gentleman with the merry face. 'The youngest sister in your tale was always light-hearted.'
>
> 'And died early,' said the other, gently.
>
> 'She would have died earlier, perhaps, had she been less happy,' said the first speaker, with much feeling. 'Do you think the sisters who loved her so well, would have grieved the less if her life had been one of gloom and sadness? . . . Take any subject of sorrowful regret, and see

with how much pleasure it is associated. The recollection of past pleasure may become pain—'

'It does,' interposed the other.

'Well; it does. To remember happiness which cannot be restored is pain, but of a softened kind. (65)

The merry-faced gentleman fluently claims that even the pleasure that is gone is precious and that it is better to have "many little rays of sunshine to look back upon" (65) than not, but the curt, firm response of the other leaves a deep impression as well. As the narrator only delivers the conversation between the two gentlemen while Nicholas or others remain silent, Dickens does not seem to take side in this debate. However, the images of the sinister monk and the restrained grey-headed gentleman are less favorably presented than those of the beautiful, laughing girls or the sociable, merry-faced man. While the positive and negative views of both sides are conflicting, the grey-haired gentleman finally says, "Possibly you are correct in that belief. . . I am inclined to think you are" (65). So, it is not a matter of true of false, but a matter of believing or not. Alice and the merry-faced gentleman believe that life becomes happier and richer through pleasant memories, and this belief motivates them to keep their cheerful minds in all circumstances. This attitude can be found in Nicholas, Kit, Mr. Browdie and the Cheeryble brothers, and thus, is closely related to what Dickens want to show through his novel. However, what Alice leaves behind is a faint memory of her laugh and a stained glass-like beauty, while the merry-faced gentleman leaves a tale that rings with a powerful male laugh.

The second tale, “The Baron of Grogzwig,” which is told by the merry-faced gentleman, is a story of much less complication and melancholy. The narrative is more fit to the original purpose of the storytelling, which is to please the audience, since it is plainly comical and filled with funny digression and witty descriptions. The Baron of Grogzwig is introduced to be “as likely a young baron as you would wish to see” (66) who was the leader of “jolly, roystering, rollicking, merry-making” crew of the region, but the pleasures and excitements he sought for years gradually became all dull and weary. To add new amusements to his life, he decides to marry, but his marriage only makes him a prey of his controlling wife, and years later, “he had no feasting, no revelry, no hunting train, and no hunting—nothing in short that he liked, or used to have” (69). After losing all appetites or spirits, the baron is sitting “gloomily and dejectedly” (70) feeling a sudden rush of suicidal impulse, when “the Genius of Despair and Suicide” appears in front of him. To cut this long story short, the baron finds himself laughing for the first time in many years during the conversation with the genius, and this laughter brings backs his cheerful mind. And with loud and boisterous laughter, he dispels the genius and lives the rest of his life as a happy man. Thus, the tale begins with various external means of pleasure seeking—hunting, drinking, smoking, fighting, and even marrying—but ends with the happiness that comes from a merriment within. It highlights the importance of one’s mindset and says that a merry mind brings a merry life, and laughing out loud is the best way to defeat melancholy. The message of this story seems quite simple: never losing a joyful laugh is the way to win over life.

Evidently, the laughter in the latter tale works as a power that defeats even death, while the laughter in the former is too weak to last. If Alice is the symbol of a peaceful, past joy, the baron is the symbol of wild, living joy. Alice finds pleasure in nature or in needlework or from simply being with her sisters, while the baron cannot find any joy from such ordinary, simple things. The laughter of both is depicted positively, but one is weak and the other is strong. Alice's laughter is merry, but of a softened kind, while the baron laughs "so loud and boisterously that the room r[ings] with it" (74). Just as Alice is portrayed as an angelic beauty, her laugh is idealized as "the sweetest music" (57). The actual laughing body is erased and is soon buried under the ground. The softness of the bygone joy is feminized and the power of the living joy is masculinized. Moreover, the laughing girls become the subject of masculine discipline and the unrelenting power of death, whereas the masculine baron, "a fine swarthy fellow, with dark hair and large moustachios" (67), gets to be the master of his life and his enjoyment. The baron is a different version of John Browdie who will later appear in the novel as another master of his own laugh. "The Five Sisters of York" is Dickens' attempt to envision the beauty of female laughter, but its stained glass-like beauty is too weak, fragile, and inconsequential compared to powerful male laughter. It appears that Dickens can only imagine the beauty of female laughter by confining it both in terms of time and space. Dickens' representation of laughter implies his perspectives on gender, and the power that he attaches to laughter is clearly characterized as masculine.

At the same time, the tales also imply that this gender difference becomes a crucial obstacle in the contagious, communal power of laughter. The two stories are

strangely alike in that they are both about the intrusion of the other sex that is threatening and unpleasant. Alice and her sisters are perfectly happy until the monk enters and disperses gloom over their merry laughs, and the baron and his men are free to enjoy their time until the Lady of Grogzwig comes in to stop all the fun and start having countless children. The pleasures and laughter of each sex do not transfer to the other, and each is most happy when left alone. This actually negates the happy picture of hearty, communal laughter that Dickens consistently endorses. The gender divide established in the two tales does not allow any true communication of pleasure or sympathy between men and women. Though the two stories that are included side by side share a similar topic, they only appear to be distanced and separate. Even though it is unclear how seriously Dickens considered this division and the limitation in the power of laughter when writing these tales which take but a small space in the entire narrative, the juxtaposition of the two explicitly gendered tales suggests at least some intention to produce a comparison.

By the time he writes *David Copperfield*, Dickens' consciousness much more distinctly reveals itself. The novel resonates with laughs that cannot spread to others, and the social norms gendering laughter preclude any perfect communication of pleasure between characters. The novel is about David's progress in life until he reaches proper manhood and respectable social status, but it is also about what David suffers and loses on his way to maturity. David laughs many laughs that are neither masculine nor good-natured, and women he loves also laugh in a way that is neither feminine or virtuous. David desires to be the companionable laughing man, but he always falls short of the

ideal and becomes shameful or miserable. The female characters like Clara, Emily, and Dora—who are each at one time David's love object—laugh the laughter of a woman, and this laughter is incomprehensible and unreachable to David. The scene where everybody shares a hearty laugh is almost nonexistent in the novel, and Dickens deals more with the failure of communication and sympathy in laughter than he has elsewhere. The social world David faces is highly gendered, and the novel suggests that this makes it extremely difficult to achieve a happy communal laugh where everybody laughs together with genuine pleasure. David searches for the ideal masculine laugh that he does not originally possess, but the notion of what masculine or feminine laughter should be like restricts his and many others' true happiness. Dickens' ideas about laughter which had seemed quite clear and simple, suddenly become complicated and ambiguous in this novel that echoes with thwarted pleasures and lost, but unforgettable, laughter.

IV.3. The Laughter That Survives in *David Copperfield*

The two short tales in *Nicholas Nickleby* offer one clear fact about the power of laughter. To survive is power, and a powerful laugh can defeat even death. Dickens unnoticeably repeats this idea in his novel that is an account of all the things the protagonist once loved that are now gone. *David Copperfield* follows the basic plot of the *Bildungsroman* by tracing the male protagonist's progress in life, the conflicts and hardships that he encounters and eventually overcomes in his journey, and the ultimate establishment of his stable social identity and happiness at the end. However, many

critics have argued that the novel is so replete with a sense of loss that to view its conclusion as simply a celebration of everything the protagonist has achieved would be an error. They claim that *David Copperfield* is more of David's "profound nostalgia for happiness lost" (Federico, "*David Copperfield*" 70) than a story of progress and success.[70] Among the things David loses on his way to maturity and success, there exist the laughter of his own innocent, childish self and the laughter of the women he loved. Although these laughs are still alive in the narrator's memory, in reality, they are defeated by the life David pursues.

Upon the completion of his education, Aunt Betsey advises young David that she wants him to obtain a firm character.

> "But what I want you to be, Trot," resumed my aunt "—I don't mean physically, but morally; you are very well physically—is, a firm fellow. A fine firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution," said my aunt, shaking her cap at me, and clenching her hand. "With determination. With character, Trot—with strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything." (268)

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[70] From this perspective, several critics focus on the theme of loss, memory and mourning in *David Copperfield*. For example, Alan Barr states that the novel can be seen as David's "embedded elegy to lost innocence" (63), and Vereen M. Bell defines the work as "a novel concerned with loss" (638). Similarly, Robin Gilmour argues, "Throughout the book there runs an undercurrent of loss and sadness" (31), and Kincaid also points at the novel's "famous tone of melancholy" (*Rhetoric of Laughter* 164). Hatten remarks that even at the end of the novel there exists "the nostalgia for lost youth" which "seems ineradicable and darkens the mood of the novel's ending" (122). At the same time, most critics admit that while David yearns for the things lost, he understands that the loss is inevitable for him to become a successful middle-class man.

The novel indeed shows well various characters with different levels of firmness—for example, Mr. Murdstone who is the epitome of firmness that is cold and cruel, Clara Copperfield who is too fragile to stand any kind of firmness, Aunt Betsey whose formidable firmness hides a softness laid within, Mr. Peggotty who is a combination of a gentle heart and an unyielding, firm will, and James Steerforth who seems firm and confident from the outside, yet does not really have the strength to withstand fleeting temptations—and it seems that David's task is to figure out the right kind and amount of firmness that he needs to obtain in his path to maturity. Starting off as a timid, sensitive boy, David has to achieve a firmness of character "that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything."[71] As a matter of fact, the different laughs that are lost and buried in David's journey are lost because they lacked the firmness that is required to survive in the harsh reality.

David's childhood is described as blissful and happy through the adult narrator's longing eyes. Loved by his childish, pretty mother and competent, caring Peggotty, young David is fully protected within the domestic peace, and the affection and happiness shared among them seem so intact that when Mr. Murdstone enters the scene, he immediately feels like a sinister intruder with "ill-omened black eyes" (18). This first male who seriously gets involved with David's life breaks the feminine heaven David grew up in where David was the center of love and care. Patrick McCarthy argues that it was the world of "Freudian bliss" in which David was "master without rival" (26) and

[71] Gwendolyn B. Needham defines young David's character as "too pliant, too easily influenced" (87).

that he never gives up a desire to find a suitable replacement throughout his life. However, young David's recurrent musings on his absent father and his lonely grave suggest the gloomy lack he feels inside. It was not a perfect world David enjoyed as a child, though safe and peaceful enough, and once a sinister man enters and thrusts David out to the outside world, the lack and vulnerability that existed in his past life become clearer. Kincaid remarks that David grew up "in the midst of gentleness and joy" (*Rhetoric of Laughter* 162) and adds it was "unfortunate that he had enjoyed such an idyllic childhood" (*Rhetoric of Laughter* 163). Beth Herst, on a similar note, claims that David's childhood was "an Eden of unknowing innocence" and that his later experiences are like "a type of the inevitable, but ultimately fortunate, fall" (46). It seems ironic how having an idyllic childhood is deemed unfortunate, but they both agree that David had to grow out of his happy childhood which was too fragile and limited. His blissful past was based on his "unknowing innocence," and the protection provided by his young mother was too weak to last. The loss is great because the transition was too sudden, and the adult world he first experiences is by no means joyful and peaceful.

The first laugh David laughs outside of the safe boundary of his home exposes his vulnerability and feminizes his young self. If he enjoyed reciprocal happiness with his mother and Peggotty, now he faces harsh and cruel laughs that exclude him and negate his pleasure. One pleasant autumn morning, Mr. Murdstone takes David out to meet his friends. While these gentlemen slyly talk about David and his reaction to Mr. Murdstone's courting of his mother right in front of him using the nickname, "Brooks of Sheffield," David naively listens to their jokes and even participates in their laughter.

David feels “quite relieved to find it was only Brooks of Sheffield” (22), not him, that they are discussing and wonders who that mysterious gentleman is. The adults are ridiculing the boy who does not even know that he is being ridiculed, but David is not familiar enough with malice to notice it. Moreover, when Mr. Quinion proposes a toast saying, “Confusion to Brooks of Sheffield!” (23), David willingly joins in: “The toast was received with great applause, and such hearty laughter that it made me laugh too; at which they laughed the more. In short, we quite enjoyed ourselves” (23). The “we” young David perceives is fake, and the pleasure he feels while laughing is self-deceiving. He is only laughing somebody else’s laugh.

Andrews claims that laughter “signals community of feeling” as it usually generates responsive laughter (*Dickensian Laughter* 125) and that Dickens’ novels show well how the author views laughter as “the cause and sign of good moral health in individuals and communities” (*Dickensian Laughter* 133). Dickens does celebrate the goodness of “companionable boisterous laughers” in many of his novels, but, nevertheless, Dickens also warns here about the falseness of the “community of feeling” that laughter can create. Laughing together does not guarantee a fellow feeling at all times, and laughter’s assumed contagious effect can be a pressure that forces one to mechanically laugh along. While laughing with Mr. Murdstone and his friends, David fools himself to believe that he is being a part of the company, but, in fact, he is only being ridiculed and humiliated. Innocent and inexperienced, David chooses to laugh like others to dispel his confusion and to participate in their mirth, and he believes that laughing brings him joy. He thinks, “we quite enjoyed ourselves,” but he does not

understand the true meaning of the laugh he is joining in. In reality, the community of feeling is formed only among the gentlemen by excluding the little boy.

The world of men David newly experiences makes sure that he is not ready to enter it. It is full of smoking, drinking, and malicious fun, and David is a mere joke to the mean adults. Also, it is a world of clear hierarchy. Mr. Murdstone who willingly joins in laughing at David is usually a laugh-less man, and David notices that Mr. Murdstone does not laugh at all that day except at the Sheffield joke (23) and that the other two gentlemen do not dare to target their incessant jokes at Mr. Murdstone: "They joked freely with one another, but seldom with [Mr. Murdstone]" (23). Mr. Murdstone's superior authority is recognized by his fellows, and David witnesses that laughter and jokes only work in a certain direction. The power is given to the one who controls laughter—his own and the others'—and while Mr. Murdstone only laughs when he wants to, David laughs to imitate others. Because he grew up in a feminine world where a mother, a child, and a servant lived peacefully as companions, David finds the glimpse of this new masculine world that hierarchizes and discriminates people puzzling and intimidating.

Once outside his domestic haven, he does not even know what is truly gratifying, and his timid and responsive nature exposes him to a variety of social laughter that pains or deceives him. He frequently becomes a butt of others' jokes and laughter, or participates in a laughing group without actually sharing their sentiment. The one who controls laughter owns power as Mr. Murdstone does, but for David, laughter repeatedly reminds him of his own weakness, immaturity, and femininity. Although Dickens shows

interest in the social influence of laughter and how laughter works in a community, he affirms that, at times, fighting against the communal laughter rather than passively going along with it can signal one's good moral health. As Aunt Betsey says, "strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason," is essential in laughing. David's vulnerability that is often associated with femininity manifests itself when he complies with others' laughter. Margaret Myers asserts that "All that is best in David—his artistic and moral impulses—is identified as feminine" (108), but at least in his laughter, his femininity is emphasized when he fails to exert agency in his own laughter. It is assumed that to be the master of his own laugh, David needs to overcome his feminine self.

While the mockery of Mr. Murdstone and his friends goes unnoticed by young David, he later experiences more open slights that he cannot but perceive on his way to Salem House. A helpless boy, travelling alone, David gets tricked by a waiter who manages to eat all of his food and even takes three shillings from him by making up false stories to rouse the boy's sympathy. And for that, David is unfairly laughed at by others for his unusual appetite and called "a young phenomenon" (66). David finds it unjust that he has to be a laughingstock for what he did not do: "I felt it rather hard, I must own, to be made, without deserving it, the subject of jokes between the coachman and guard as to the coach drawing heavy behind, on account of my sitting there" (67). Moreover, he has to skip his supper in spite of unbearable hunger because he knows he "should be ashamed to eat anything" and "couldn't muster courage to take any" (67). Being a target of tricks and ridicule shakes David's selfhood along with the Murdstones'

tyranny and schooling of firmness. He feels solitary when others laugh, and in the middle of their neglect and insensitivity, David feels "perfectly miserable" (68). Dickens makes a contrast between the joy David enjoyed in his childhood and the joy of the outside, adult world that he could not be a part of. By making fun of the poor boy, the waiter, "the women-servants" (66), and "the outside passengers" (67) all enjoy merriment among themselves, forming a communal feeling through the joke, but their laughter is utterly unsympathetic from young David's point of view.

Dickens takes an interesting stance by depicting the situation that is cruel to the boy as amusing to others, even to the readers in some degree. The way the whole episode is described, including the slick ploy of the waiter and the comical portrayal of the fellow passengers, prevents the scene from being overly emotional, and the readers are invited to laugh at young David's gullibility, though not like the malicious adults in the scene. There exists a mingling of pity and entertainment in the tone of the narration, which reflects the first-person narrator's ambivalent view toward his past innocent self which is not just an object of regret and pity, but an object of affection and nostalgia.

In both the scene that takes place during David's outing with Mr. Murdstone and the scene in which the waiter makes him a laughingstock, the narrator does not make any direct comments on his childish, foolish behaviors during these past occasions. He does not express any regret for having been the silly boy who adds to the laughter that humiliates himself or express any resentment toward the cruel adults. The adult narrator can clearly see his past mistakes and ignorance, but for him, his past innocence is also an

object of endearment, not just a shame. It is pleasant to recall his naiveté which was fostered by his happy childhood and which is now irrecoverably lost.

> I am inclined to believe that with the simple confidence of a child, and the natural reliance of a child upon superior years (qualities I am very sorry any children should prematurely change for worldly wisdom), I had no serious mistrust of him on the whole, even then. (66)

Explaining how he could not see through the waiter's true intention, the narrator reveals his attitude toward his past self. Although he had to endure others' giggling over his innocence, he treasures "the simple confidence of a child" that he once had. This attitude allows his narration to retain a certain amount of comedy. George J. Worth discusses the above scenes and explains that the comedy comes from the gap between what young David knows and what the adult narrator and the reader know and says, "in the resultant amused superiority that we feel toward David, much of the humor of the novel resides" (99). The gap of knowledge Worth points out clearly contributes to the amusing tone, but the narrator does not just laugh at his past self with a sense of superiority; he also appreciates the boy's simple, childish innocence which is pleasing to recall. The novel, in this regard, takes a double-sided attitude toward David's innocence. For young David, it is paramount to overcome his simple, trusting nature and gain some "worldly wisdom" to proceed in life, but, on the other hand, the adult narrator knows the value of his past innocence which is totally absent from the laughing adults. Together with his innocent reliance upon the elders, the child retained a simple belief in the positive role of laughter

that made him laugh along with the mean adults but of which he eventually gets to grow out.

However, the comic tone of the narration disappears when David becomes the one who laughs at the pathetic other. Suffering from others' laughter, David learns the power of influential laughter and yearns to be a part of it, not its object. When he enters Salem House, his biggest fear is to be isolated or laughed at once again. Forced to wear a placard saying, "Take care of him. He bites" (74), David feels like always being watched and fears how other students will react to him. Fortunately, the first boy who sees the placard is Tommy Traddles, whose laughter and enjoyment do not make David miserable as there is no malice there. To David's relief, Traddles' laughter invites David to be his company, rather than excluding him from it. But largely, Salem House is a place of emotional abuse and oppression, and David's dread of being secluded or disgraced follows him throughout his school days. Audrey Jaffe explains that "David's choice appears to be one of harming others or being harmed by them, of victimizing or being victimized" (116), and Salem House is precisely a place that forces him to make this difficult choice. So, when he has to choose between being a part of a laughing group or its victim, he chooses the former.

Since David arrives to the school without any secure sense of self, he finds a way to secure his position through a close relationship with a dominant figure, James Steerforth. To David, Steerforth's superiority is apparent in many ways—"[he] was reputed to be a great scholar, and was very good-looking, and at least half-a-dozen years my senior" (80)—, and on their first meeting, David learns to respect Steerforth's

feelings more than his own. Unlike the waiter with fake stories, Steerforth takes money from David through a direct order that somehow checks any rejection. After asking David how much money he has, Steerforth says, "You had better give it to me to take care of" and adds, "At least, you can if you like. You needn't if you don't like" (81). Steerforth, with his authority, so easily makes David comply with his own needs, and even though David feels unsure to trust him, he obeys and calls his new friend "sir" (81). David says, "I smiled because he smiled, but I was a little troubled in my mind, too" (81), and this kind of emotional compliance recurs many times in their relationship. David tends to believe what Steerforth feels is right and sometimes shows no doubt that Steerforth will feel as he does. When David introduces Steerforth to Mr. Peggotty's boat house for the first time on the day of Ham and Emily's engagement, David does not catch his friend's sneer calling Ham "a chuckle-headed fellow" (309) and exclaims, "I know that there is not a joy or sorrow, not an emotion, of such people, that can be indifferent to you. And I admire and love you for it, Steerforth, twenty times the more!" (309). Unfortunately, David's belief that his friend can perfectly sympathize with the poor fisherman's happiness like he does eventually leads to the misery of that fisherman. Besides, even when he doubts the righteousness of his friend's emotion or behavior, he rather passively follows his lead than opposes to it.

If David experienced a certain emotional fall by being abruptly thrown out of his childhood happiness and being humiliated by others' laughter, he experiences an even greater fall, a moral fall, by being the one who laughs at others. While David secures his position at the school through Steerforth's patronage, there exist others who have to

endure students' laugh and scorn. Mr. Mell, for instance, is a poor teacher whose guidance helped David to actually learn something in "a school carried on by sheer cruelty" (90). Yet when Mr. Mell suffers from derision and laughter from the students making fun of his poverty, David remains silent and eventually joins the laughter. Mr. Mell has always been an object of Steerforth's "systematic disparagement" (90), and it is Steerforth who urges other students to make fun of the poor teacher. David feels guilty about the situation as he was the one who told Steerforth about Mr. Mell's poor mother, but he does not stop Steerforth when he calls Mr. Mell "an impudent beggar" (92). David thinks how Mr. Mell looks "homely and plain" in front of "noble" Steerforth (93) and even cheers when Mr. Mell finally leaves the school: "we gave three cheers—I did not know what for, but I supposed for Steerforth, and so joined in them ardently, though I felt miserable" (95). Although he feels great self-reproach and contrition, he could not show his emotion from the "fear that Steerforth, who often looked at [him] . . . might think it unfriendly" (96). David does not directly attack Mr. Mell, but his silence and his cheering of Steerforth make him a part of the laughing group. Just as he complied to Steerforth's order despite his initial doubt, David complies with his friend's power that casts out the blameless man.

This is a more serious problem for David than being a target of laughter since it shakes David's moral ground. Inside him, there exists sympathy for Mr. Mell and disapproval of Steerforth's act, but as long as it is repressed, his outward compliance only settles that he is also at fault. In contrast, Traddles is caned by Mr. Creakle for "being discovered in tears, instead of cheers, on account of Mr. Mell's departure" (95-

96) and blames Steerforth for hurting Mr. Mell. Although Traddles gets beaten by Mr. Creakle and mocked by Steerforth, his behavior shows his moral integrity that is contrasted to David's moral failing. David's weakness is no longer innocent, nor seen as an endearing quality. His uneasy laughter does not bring him or the readers any joy, but only pain and regret.

Later, a similar situation occurs when Steerforth laughs at Miss Mowcher and David laughs along without feeling amusement. He says, "Steerforth laughed to that degree, that it was impossible for me to help laughing too; though I am not sure I should have done so, but for this inducement" (326). When Miss Mowcher later denounces "people so unreflecting or so cruel, as to make a jest of me" (450), the blame also goes to David. Kincaid explains how Dickens induces the readers to laugh at Miss Mowcher's oddity and later makes them feel sorry about the very act ("Subversive Humor" 322-23). Kincaid's analysis is restricted to the reader's laughter, but the very person who directly has to face the wrong of his laughter through Miss Mowcher's words is David. By participating in his friend's pleasure on several occasions, David gradually learns that inconsiderate laughter can be a violence, which harms not only the one being laughed at, but also his laughing self.

On both occasions of David's being a victim and a partaker of aggressive laughter, David shows a vulnerable, easily-influenced nature that increases his pain. He could not argue with the uncaring laughers who mock him or resist the inclination to laugh with others when he feels otherwise. He is too weak to understand or assert his own feelings, and this limitation shakes his morality. Salem House is a brutal, immoral

institution as it denies any spontaneous feelings or cultivation of moral sentiments. The students are used to respond as forced by its master, and they actually learn to laugh in the most miserable situations. Mr. Creakle "had a delight in cutting at the boys" (85), and David vividly remembers "how abject we were to him!" (86). Mr. Creakle makes jokes before beating a boy, and the students have to laugh along while feeling dreadful inside. David narrates, "we laugh at it,—miserable little dogs, we laugh, with our visages as white as ashes, and our hearts sinking into our boots" (86). In this environment, David misses any opportunity to honestly express what he feels, and while adhering to a powerful, admirable figure, he passively resigns his feelings to the authority of another.

After entering the real, social world, David quickly learns the power of influential male laughter and aspires to have such a laugh, but the laughter of his vulnerable self can at best be an echo of another's laugh. Steerforth is a powerful, masculine character whose authority is demonstrated by the influence he has over others, but his power is not represented as ideal. His laugh is often aggressive and scornful, and he does not take others' feelings into account. He once laughs in church, for which Traddles is wrongly punished (87). David relates this episode to explain how Traddles was an honorable, loyal friend, but he does not remark on Steerforth's irresponsibility or cowardice. Steerforth freely chooses when to laugh, but does not take the responsibility for his behavior. In other words, he has a power which could never be called a bravery. Fascinated by his assertive manner and relying upon his apparent authority, David too easily excuses Steerforth's irresponsibility and immorality as negligible flaws and firmly regards him as "a person of great power" (84).

After leaving Salem House, David reunites with Steerforth when he is most conscious of his immature manhood. His insecure sense of masculinity again makes him adhere to the most masculine figure he perceives, but this only heightens his femininity. Even after David is finished with his education and feels ready to be "a young man at [his] own disposal" (266), people he encounters uniformly treat him like a juvenile youth. He loses his reserved box seat on a coach to another gentleman who makes him "blushingly offer to resign it" (277), receives a bad wine at an inn, which he just drinks because he is too "bashful" to complain (279), and gets assigned to "a little loft over a stable" at an inn (281). All these occasions make him "painfully conscious of [his] youth" (278), and although he knows that he is frequently cheated, he cannot fight back because of "distrust of [him]self" (277). He feels like he is not properly mature or manly and everybody else senses that. In this state he meets his old friend and again feels bashful in front of one who is "so self-possessed, and elegant, and superior to [him] in all respects (age included)" (283).

With Steerforth, David's immature masculinity is most emphasized, and Steerforth openly treats David like a girl, calling him "Daisy" (284). Steerforth does seem like "a paragon of masculinity; robust, vigorous, apparently straightforward in both speech and action" (Dowling 50), and most people naturally obey and look up to his authority like David does. However, lacking a proper discipline or morality, his actions mostly stem from his wayward desires. Also, he fortifies his authority by mocking, degrading, and feminizing others. When Traddles criticizes him for tormenting Mr. Mell, Steerforth makes fun of him by calling him "girl" and "Miss Traddles" (96).

Feminization is his weapon to affirm his own masculinity, and patronizing David and calling him "Daisy" humors him because David's solid admiration makes him feel superior and manly. He frequently laughs at David enjoying his childishness and unconditioned loyalty, but his laugh also suggests his enjoyment of superiority. As Myers argues, Steerforth "identifies a feminine in David which is central to the nature and development of their friendship" (111), and their relationship is based on the assumption of inequality, gladly acknowledged by both.

Therefore, adherence to the powerful male laugh, which David first perceives as a way to secure his social position, actually feminizes him even further. It is not Steerforth's naming him "Daisy," but David's willing submission to his power that feminizes him. More precisely, not being able to be the master of his own laugh puts David in a subordinate, feminine position. As Miss Mowcher rightly points out, David is "soft wax in [Steerforth's] hands" (451), and David needs to recognize that humoring his friend with an echoing laugh only endangers the virtue he wants to uphold. Through Steerforth, Dickens shows an example of the unhealthy influence of masculine laughter. Steerforth can easily make others laugh, but he cannot make them laugh with true pleasure. David admires the power Steerforth has, his "inborn power of attraction . . . to which it was a natural weakness to yield" (99), but this power fundamentally works through inequality and fear. As a boy, David thought, "to disappoint or displease Steerforth was of course out of the question" (88), and this desire to satisfy Steerforth and the fear of crossing him makes David laugh without joy and be just "Daisy." Exactly

understanding this, Agnes calls Steerforth a "bad angel (357) and warns David of "the influence he has over you" (358).

Characters like Mr. Murdstone and Steerforth understand the power of laughter and display it as they like. Others have to be either the accomplice or the victim like David, or choose to be an outsider like Traddles. As David's goal is to be a successful part of the society, not an outsider, his choice is fairly limited, and it is more so since his soft self does not allow him to take the position of the powerful masculine laugher either. However, not all male laughs in the novel create hierarchy and yield power. If Dickens represents through Steerforth the undesirable masculinity that oppresses the spontaneous emotional responses from the others, he also presents a character whose strong influence supports, not restrains, others' pleasure. Mr. Peggotty is a masculine character whose persistence, strength, and unswervingly cheerful nature sustain the happiness of his family and friends. When David first meets him at his boathouse, he cannot but be "very sensible of [his] entertainer's goodness" (32), and it seems that Mr. Peggotty's sole purpose in life is to support and cheer his household including Emily, Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge. This unconventional family is united through Mr. Peggotty's devotion and love, and he is depicted as a masculine figure despite his strong domestic attachment. Mr. Peggotty and Steerforth represent two very different versions of masculinity, one pursuing selfish, restless excitements and one dedicated to the care and pleasing of others. Mr. Peggotty's sympathetic nature and low social status sometimes make him appear vulnerable, especially when he is with Steerforth who patronizes "poor fishermen" as much as he patronizes David, but he always retains robust masculinity that

stems from his untiring strength and unshakable will, from the image of the "solitary figure toiling on" (460) to reclaim what he has lost.

Most of all, Mr. Peggotty's uninhibited, hearty laughter distinguishes him from the feminized characters such as David. Mr. Peggotty seems to fit into Dickens' idea of the companionable, boisterous male laugher. He is never hesitant to burst into laughing when amused, and his open, happy laugh naturally spreads to the company around him. Watching him laugh with true delight is itself a treat for his family and friends, and David laughs most happily in his company. When Mr. Peggotty and Ham visit David at Salem House, he enjoys a free vent of emotions for the first time at the place, momentarily released from the chain of the oppressive institution.

> I could not help laughing; but it was much more in the pleasure of seeing them, than at the appearance they made. We shook hands in a very cordial way; and I laughed and laughed, until I pulled out my pocket-handkerchief and wiped my eyes. (97)

This scene occurs right after the distressing event with Mr. Mell, which explains why David cries after laughing. David has suffered for a long time, first from the Murdstones' cold, hard treatment and then from the fearful, oppressive atmosphere of Salem House, and finally he enjoys the pure joy with his friends who truly care about him. Besides, despite the differences in their age or social status, Mr. Peggotty, Ham, and David share joys on equal terms. In this relationship, laughter just naturally flows: "They made me laugh again by laughing at each other, and then we all three laughed until I was in danger of crying again" (98). They relish this mutual pleasure until they

become “abashed by the unexpected coming in of Steerforth” (99). The cheering effect of Mr. Peggotty and the humbling effect of Steerforth’s presence are starkly contrasted, and the hierarchy is reestablished the moment the latter enters.

Mr. Peggotty’s laugh not only delivers his own merriment but clearly adds to the gaiety of others. The happiest moment of the boathouse family that David witnesses is completed through Mr. Peggotty’s wild laugh. When David unexpectedly visits the boat with Steerforth, Mr. Peggotty, “his face lighted up with uncommon satisfaction, [is] laughing with all his might” (303) celebrating the engagement of Ham and Emily. Emily, though shy, is “delighted with Mr. Peggotty’s delight” (303), and David thinks it is a treat to see him “laughing with such glee and triumph” (303). There is no faltering in Mr. Peggotty’s expression, and his assertive laughter heightens the joy of everybody else. Although David unexpectedly enters the scene, “passing from the dark cold night into the warm light room” (303), he could immediately share their joy through their unrestricted expressions of happiness. He exclaims, “I never saw people so happy. How delightful to see it, and to be made the sharers in their honest joy” (309). The bright, warming influence of the boathouse originates from Mr. Peggotty, and his joy has an infectious power.

However, Mr. Peggotty’s low social status does not allow David to view him as an ideal masculine model he could follow. Moreover, on a deeper level, Mr. Peggotty’s laugh is not represented as entirely ideal either. In the above laughing scene, which seems like another perfectly happy scene of domestic bliss that is typically Dickensian, Dickens conceals an unnoticed seed of distress. The joy and happiness at the scene are

not in fact complete, which may not be perceptible to overly delighted Mr. Peggotty or David, but is somewhat plain to the readers. Emily, who is the heroine of the celebrated engagement, is mainly "delighted with Mr. Peggotty's delight," not assured of her own delight. Whatever discomfort or doubt hidden inside her heart cannot be articulated in front of Mr. Peggotty's overwhelming joy, because he is the pillar of her life. Mr. Peggotty's simple mind cannot penetrate into Emily's secret desire, but when Emily intently listens to Steerforth's stories with her "eyes . . . fastened on him all the time" (308) and "laugh[ing] until the boat rang with the musical sounds" (308), it is plainly revealed to the readers. The happy laughing scene is soon followed by disturbing hints that later lead to tragic ends. Dickens here moves away from his acclamation of the happily laughing crowd and suggests that the power of influential male laughter can work to silence differing minds and desires. Emily submits to the pleasure and laughter of others, and by doing so, she unknowingly steps onto a sinister path.

In *David Copperfiel*d, purely happy laughs are hard to find, and many of the troubles stem from the gender norms attached to laughter. The masculine norms of the society uphold the laughs of those like Steerforth, which only has power to oppress and exclude, while constantly feminizing David and shaking his own belief in his manhood. On the other hand, the idea of what the ideal female laugh should be like hinders Emily from expressing her desires frankly, and even when her laugh actually reveals her true mind as when she laughs at Steerforth's words, others just take it as simply the sympathetic, responsive laugh of a charming girl. Regardless of what Emily's laugh really tells, they "all laugh . . . in irresistible sympathy with what was so pleasant and

light-hearted" (308). The tendency to appreciate only what is pleasant and light-hearted in female laughter is what eventually leads to the early demise of that laughter. While David aspires to have a good, masculine laugh, female laughter has to either submit to be a part of that laugh or move out of the happy picture. The novel contains many laughs of women that David finds attractive, but cannot really sympathize with or approve of. These laughs do not appear to have any contagious, pleasing power, and their merriment is strictly limited to the laughers themselves, which violates the conditions of the ideal, feminine laughter. As the narrative progresses, all the pretty, yet fragile laughs disappear or die away, not having the strength to survive or be appreciated in life, and the only laugh that survives is the one that is purely feminine and good. The overall nostalgic tone of the narrative hints at Dickens' regret toward the laughs that are lost, subtly alluding to the unfairness of the treatment they receive both from David and Dickens himself, but it is also the author who makes it seem necessary for those laughs to vanish in order for David to achieve his desired progress as a man. The tone of the narrative reveals Dickens' ambivalence, but the progress of the plot negates any alternative fates for the female laughter.

As a child, the first woman David ever loves is his pretty, childlike mother Clara. Many critics agree that at the heart of all the things lost and mourned in David's narrative lies his young mother. Clara signifies the lost world of peaceful, simple pleasures and love for David, and with her death, David is completely forced out of his childhood. David, the narrator, recalls her as "poor dear mother" (6), and Aunt Betsey refers to her as "a most unworldly, most unhappy, most unfortunate baby" (206). This

poor, unfortunate, infantile mother is, unsurprisingly, much more associated with crying than laughing. When we first see her in the novel on the night of David's birth, she is crying, "desponding heavily about herself and the fatherless little stranger" (3), and Miss Betsey's entrance only increases her fear and agitation. From then on, she is shown crying quite often, mostly deploring others' unkindness and her own unfortunate self. Before giving birth to David, she feels "very timid, sad, and very doubtful of ever coming alive out of the trial that was before her" (3-4), and she remains so for the rest of her life. In her troubled life, she seeks pleasures from small matters that cannot really bring happiness to her or to David, and her laughter is an indication of her weakness.

What David remembers most about her mother is her looks, "her pretty hair and youthful shape" (12). He recalls quite vividly "her winding her bright curls round her fingers, and straitening her waist" (15). He narrates, "nobody knows better than I do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being so pretty" (15), and David's concrete, detailed memory reflects that he himself was also proud of her beauty. Her laughter as well is closely related to how she looks as her laugh illuminates her beauty and indicates her pleasure from her beauty. Clara laughs merrily when David returns from his daytrip with Mr. Murdstone and tells her how his friends called her "Bewitching Mrs. Copperfield" and "The pretty little widow" (22). David knows that it pleases her as she laughs again and again while making David repeat those words several times. As if this image of laughing Clara has left a deep mark on his memory, the narrator wonders, "Can I say of her innocent and girlish beauty, that it faded, and was no more, when its breath falls on my cheek now, as it fell that night?" (24). When Miss Murdstone later says,

"You're much too pretty and thoughtless" (46), Clara blushes and laughs once more, "seem[ing] not to dislike this character" (46). What pleases her most is praise for her beauty, and her laugh candidly expresses her enjoyment.

However, her pleasure unfortunately cannot be a pleasure to her son, and while David treasures her laughing face in his memory, he has to suffer great loss because of what pleases her. David's day with Mr. Murdstone and his friends was actually a disturbing experience to him, but because Clara only asks about what they said about herself, David loses a chance to understand what really happened to him that day. Clara does not show any motherly concern for David and how he was treated, and her vanity leads to her marriage to Mr. Murdstone who tortures both herself and her son. The narrator depicts Clara as an innocent, childish, and pretty mother who was incompetent to protect those she loved. David always feels sympathetic to her and never blames her incompetence. Nevertheless, it is clear that David's misfortune starts from Clara's insufficiency as a parent. Charles Hatten observes that the fact that David says he has always remembered his dead mother as she was before her unhappy remarriage is "the most damaging critique" of her (119) as it reveals his desire to forget his mother after her remarriage. U. C. Knoepflmacher also claims that though David never explicitly expresses it, he carries a repressed anger toward "the sexual mother who yields to Murdstone" ("From Outrage" 80). Of course, David has deep affection for her, probably more than anger, but it is painful to recall the later days of his mother, and when David later tries to correct Dora's incompetence as a housewife, his unresolved anger toward the incompetent mother reveals itself again. In David's memory, the only moments of

his mother's laughter that he remembers are where her weakness revealed itself most plainly. Moreover, the hidden meaning of her laughter—that she is enjoying the flattering attention from Mr. Murdstone and wants it to continue—is totally unfathomable to her naïve son, making him only admire her pretty face and unable to participate in her joy. The whole progress of her courtship with Mr. Murdstone remains foggy to the inexperienced boy, and her laughter is a part of that incomprehensible matter. It might have looked charming to the young boy's eyes, but the adult narrator knows that her laughter was heading toward a sad conclusion. It is as much a sinister sign as Mr. Murdstone's black eyes.

In a similar way, Little Emily's laughter captivates as well as puzzles David at the same time. When David first meets her, he feels anxious watching Emily running along a jagged timber which extends dangerously over the deep sea, and the adult narrator says it was like "little Em'ly springing forward to her destruction" (34) as if "the life before her could have been revealed to me at a glance" (34). The narrator admits that it may be premature to "set it down too soon" (35), but Emily's fate is revealed to the reader on her first appearance, and, afterwards, precariousness follows her every move. So when she reappears, her constant laughing is read as a dangerous sign.

When David visits the boathouse for the second time, the most notable change that David senses from Emily is her laugh. Emily frequently laughs, especially when David shows his childish affection by chasing her, kissing her, and declaring his love. Instead of corresponding to his confession, Emily just laughs and laughs. David says, "She liked me, but she laughed at me, and tormented me" (137), but he also admits,

"[she] laughed so charmingly that I forgot the pain . . . in the pleasure of looking at her" (140). Emily's precocious laughter is clearly a sign of her developing sexuality. In *A History of English Laughter*, Manfred Pfister discusses the relation between history of sexuality and history of laughter as they are "both closely linked to our corporeal nature" (vi) and argues, "what emerges is that both their histories are mainly histories of attempts to limit, control and civilize them" (vi). He also asserts that "both sex and laughter have frequently found themselves in direct opposition to, and therefore repressed by, dominant notions of what is pure, sublime and sacred" (vi), and that for this reason, female laughter was more rigidly and more narrowly restricted than male laughter. Because of this correlation between laughter and sexuality, it is common to read improper female laughter as an indication of one's sexuality. What is interesting in the representation of Emily is that she is still a child when her laughter is used to reveal her sexuality. The sexuality of a girl that cannot be overtly expressed is hinted through her laugh, and David feels enchanted "more than ever" (135) in front of her newly adopted manner of "being both sly and shy at once" (135). Dickens, in a way, marks Little Emily with her laughter, making her carry a potential for a sexual fall from then on.

Emily's precocious, womanly laugh reminds us of her daring jumping that once scared David. As she jumped on the border between the land and the sea, her laugh makes her appear as a troubling mixture of a child and a woman. She is still Little Emily, but her laugh that both draws and rebuffs David is beyond his childish understanding. Unlike David, whose laughter mostly reveals his youth that he so eagerly wants to hide,

Emily's laughter reveals her blooming sexuality. At the same time, both of their laughs make them appear vulnerable in different ways. Emily's jumping and laughing are disturbing to David and also to the readers, who are keeping the narrator's unpromising foretelling in mind. Emily is shown as desiring to reach beyond the safe boundary, her humble boathouse and her protected childhood. She is deeply conscious of her lowly social status as a child and wishes to be a lady (33). And it is assumed that her captivating laugh is a way for her to be a lady. As Clara's laugh suggests her vanity and sexual desire, Emily's laugh alludes to her hidden, more complex and stronger desire. To young David, they are both mystifying, making it impossible for him to join in, and to the mature narrator, they are both sad signals for their unfortunate future.

In this way, *David Copperfield* represents female laughter as charming and pretty, but essentially fragile and limited. It has a power to attract, but not to transmit pleasure or sympathy. If there is any other power that Dickens allows to the laughter of Clara and Emily, it is a power to destroy themselves and others. Clara laughs while pushing her and her son's life into misery, and Emily laughs as she unknowingly steps into her own miserable fate. Representing female laughter from a male point of view, Dickens stresses its beauty, but he also emphasizes the inability of the male protagonist to relate to the laughter. Female laughter is to be looked at, not to be understood or shared. In both Clara and Emily's case, their laughter is represented as selfish, vain, and thoughtless, signifying their lack of feminine virtue, and this makes each woman's individual pleasure look equally selfish, vain, and thoughtless. Pursuing their own pleasure outside of ideal femininity, they laugh a laugh that is isolated and powerless.

Although Steerforth's laughter is not described as ideal, his laughter is respected by David who senses masculine authority in it that he desires. Dickens presents various examples of powerful male laughter, whether ideal or not, in *David Copperfield*, but female laughter appears only ineffectual and short-lived. This confirms that for Dickens, the hearty, contagious laughter is only possible for men.

Among similarly portrayed female laughs, Dora Spenlow stands out as an unusual character with unusual laughter. Commonly, Dora is read as a replica of David's dead mother who reflects his ongoing yearning to recover his lost childhood. Many critics highlight that Dora is an "exact counterpart of his own child-mother" (Herst 48) as she resembles Clara "in her frailty and incapacity before the demanding rigors of the practical world" (Barr 67) and they are both "bewitching orphans and incompetent housekeepers" (Bottum 448).[72] Jane W. Stedman reads both as "Dickens's child-wives" who are "pretty, artless, and innocent girls" (113) and argues that they represent the "losses David must sustain during the process of growing up" (116), the ideals that are unable to cope with the real world. Sometimes, critics see Emily as a part of this group of childlike, unfortunate women, or the "defeated women" as Andrews call them, with "their inability to meet the demands of maturity" (*Grown-Up Child* 137). Moreover, Hatten compares Dora to Steerforth as both are "physically attractive upper-class

[72] Needham also sees Dora as "an almost exact replica of the lad's mother—prettily pettish, innocently vain, truly fond, charmingly childish" (96). She argues that as they are both "[i]ncapable of responsibility in the world," death is the "kindest fate Life can provide for them" (106). Likewise, John Carey emphasizes the resemblance of Clara and Dora stating, "The resemblance is firmly etched. Both are willful, pettish, curly haired" (170).

figures" who are "associated with a passionate emotional response from David" (112).[73] Thus, Dora is placed side by side to other characters and recognized as a composition of early ideals of David from which he needs to be disillusioned in his way to proper maturity.

However, Dickens makes clear from the beginning that Dora is a very different character from Clara, who has her own charm and her own laugh. The "captivating, girlish, bright-eyed lovely Dora" (380) David first meets has a "delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways" (381). Unlike Clara, who first entered with anxious tears, Dora is associated with joyful laughter from the start. Also, as if to highlight her connection to Clara, Dora appears in company with Miss Murdstone who is playing the role of her "companion and protector" (380), but Dora's attitude toward her companion is entirely different from that of Clara. If Clara was submissive to Miss Murdstone's authority, Dora is "not very much inclined to be particularly confidential to her companion and protector" (380). Dora calls Miss Murdstone "such a vexatious thing" (384) and "a sulky, gloomy old thing" (385), dismissing her supervision as "nonsense" (383), and, in saying so, Dora laughs "in the most melodious manner" (383). Dora has a free spirit that cannot be controlled by the Murdstones' discipline, and this clearly distinguishes her from Clara. Dora is a character who affirms, "I am sure *I* don't want a protector" (384), and shows a mischievous nature saying, "we'll make ourselves as happy as we can in spite of her, and we'll teaze her,

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[73] Joseph Bottum also argues that Dora and Steerforth are similar in the way that they have to die in order for David to see the true value of their successors—Agnes and Traddles (455).

and not please her,—wont' we, Jip?" (385). The image of Dora as a frail, incompetent, and fatally limited woman only appears after her confrontation with her new future with David in his sadly humbled situation. During their courtship, Dora remains happy with her unrestricted, joyful laugh, and it is David who is bashful and vulnerable in front of laughing Dora.

As Margaret Darby notes, Dora is "the most intractably unknowable woman in *David Copperfield*" (158) because she is portrayed through David's eyes that are at first excessively mesmerized by the idealized image of Dora and that, later disillusioned, only see the lack in her. Maria Ioannou argues that David misses the strength and complexity of Dora since he only sees her from the perspective of "the male-centered world of angelic domesticity" (149), and Rebecca Rodolff remarks that "[w]hat David remembers illuminates Dora's story in such a way as to reflect his own story" (32). Therefore, Dora's melodious laugh is one of the few things that reveal the real Dora to the readers. If Clara or Emily's laugh represents their vanity or sexual desire, Dora's laugh is not restricted to one cause. She laughs at Miss Murdstone's absurdity, at David's awkwardness, and at her pet Jip's behavior. She laughs whenever there is an opportunity for it, and she is active in pursuing those opportunities. Dora delightfully enjoys Sunday morning as "the brightest time of the whole day" (383) and asserts, "I must do something" (383). Her life as an overly protected, upper-class girl does not provide her with much freedom, but she finds enough joy from things allowed to her. Until David confesses his changed state that requires frugality and hard work, Dora does not seem to be "a timid little thing, and easily disturbed and frightened" (551) as David later

describes her. Once David starts trying to make her better suitable for housework and wifely duties, Dora stops laughing and cries out, "I haven't got any strength at all" (526). In front of David's expectation that tries to fit Dora into a certain, unwelcomed, role, Dora suddenly becomes the easily frightened, undisciplined, and physically as well as mentally fragile woman: in short, an unfitting mate for David. Furthermore, her laughter, which seemed to illuminate her bright nature, now becomes the sign of her weakness, her incapability to fit into the expected feminine role. Though Dora's laughter showed her desire for pleasure and her will to achieve it, David only saw from it a charm of a beautiful, attractive girl. And after he starts to view her as his wife, even that charm becomes meaningless.

David, the narrator, records the early stage of love with Dora in such an unrealistic, dreamlike, and abstract way to stress how he was blinded by the exquisite joy and wonder of "a girl and boy attachment" (490).[74] He says he was "intoxicated with joy" (472) which was "too happy to be real" (472) and looks back upon that time as "an unsubstantial, happy, foolish time!" (476). He emphasizes that the joy Dora pursues and provides is dazzling and surreal, and also, futile, trifling, and short-lived. It seems that Dora's joy has no substance, and when David starts to view it from a more realistic and practical perspective, which is what he does after his proposal, it only seems inconsequential. Everything about Dora is described as "rather diminutive" (381) including her "gayest little laugh" (381). Her friend Miss Mills also calls Dora "a thing

[74] This is how Aunt Betsey defines David's relationship with Dora after exclaiming, "blind, blind, blind!" (489), obviously pointing at David's blind infatuation.

of light, and airiness, and joy" (527). Dora's laugh is never harmful or dangerous, but it is perceived as ever so light and insignificant. Dora's pleasure and laugh are judged by how others perceive them, not by how she herself perceives them. Dora loses her individuality once she is placed in the new position of a housewife.

David once says, "all that was delightful to her was delightful to me" (469), but it is evident that he was just fooling himself. What was delightful was watching Dora laugh, not really enjoying and sharing her joy. Looking at Dora wearing her wedding dress, her aunt says "Dora is only to be looked at, and on no account to be touched" (614). If Dora is similar to Clara, it is this "only-to-be-looked-at"-ness that David recognizes. Although he adores both women and loves their beauty, he can never really sympathize with what lies beneath their surface. Dora is a girl of "natural gaiety" (629), but David could not share her "pretty joy" (631). After few fruitless attempts to form Dora's mind, David gives up and says that they should "go back to our old way, and be happy" (677), but what he secretly realizes is that he can never truly be happy with Dora.

All three of these laughing women—Clara, Emily, and Dora—show in common the fatal limitation in their laughs. Even though David feels attracted to their pretty laughs, not once does he laugh with them. Their laughs are not feminine laughter which is supposed to be supportive, comforting, and submissive. Therefore, their laughs become a hindrance in David's path for maturity and success, as they are mostly concerned with themselves, not with David or anybody else's happiness or comfort. Their laughs cannot evoke any echoing laughs or be a part of a shared laugh of a group. So, necessarily, they have to be laid aside for David to move on to a better object. It is

ironic that what accentuates their charms as women is what harms their femininity. They are represented as laughing with improper, unsubstantial pleasures, and they are expelled from David's life and narrative.

In this regard, it is only natural that the woman David finally settles with rarely laughs, or more precisely, rarely laughs with her own pleasure. Agnes is the embodiment of ideal femininity, which makes the critics see her as not very interesting as a character, and sometimes, even less than a human. Vereen M. Bell claims that Agnes is just a symbol, "not very convincing as a character" (643), and that she exists "more as a set of values and virtues than as an animated and substantial being" (643).[75] Agreeing to this view, Rachel Ablow argues that what is most characteristic of Agnes is her "quakerish sobriety and absence of joy" (223). On the other hand, some critics claim that Agnes is much more than an amalgamation of virtues and that she is a character with complexity. Annette R. Federico points out that while Agnes seems like an entirely selfless being, we can see at the end when she reveals her long-hidden heart that "Agnes has wanted selfishly to achieve her *own* happiness very much" ("*David Copperfield*" 90).[76] John Kucich also asserts that Agnes is not a symbol of morality, but "an image of perfected internal conflict" (235). Thus, what makes Agnes an animated human being is her

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[75] Many critics share this idea. Rachel Ablow calls her "the epitome of female virtue" (33), and Robert Garnett sees Agnes as "lacking any corporeal presence or particularity" (214) and as "an icon of feminine virtue, a stained-glass Madonna with a basket of housekeeping keys" (226). Kincaid also reads Agnes as "a vaporous and shadowy attitude rather than a woman" (*Rhetoric of Laughter* 164).

[76] Hatten also focuses on the pain Agnes has to endure to cover her "frustrated passion" (124). He argues that David cannot see her true self because he just sees her as an angelic form (125).

concealed, yet strong, desire for David and her long-suffering heart. And interestingly, the few times she laughs, she laughs to cover this heart.

If Clara's or Emily's laughter reveals their heart's desires by suggesting what pleases them, Agnes's laugh also reveals her heart, but only by covering her true desire. In other words, we get a glimpse of her heart only as she tries to hide it. While Agnes cherishes an unspoken love for David, David simply treats her as a sister and a moral guide. When he praises her as "so good, and so sweet-tempered" and says, "Whenever I fall into trouble, or fall in love, I shall always tell you" (269), Agnes laughs. As he continues to wonder why Agnes is "not in earnest" about anyone, she "laugh[s] again, and s[hakes] her head" (270). Agnes does not laugh very often, but whenever she asks a question about or refers to David's love interest, she laughs.[77] Her laugh is to cover any frustration or pain in front of David who has no idea about her veiled heart. So, what he perceives as her "pleasant laugh" (500) is not pleasant to her at all. This self-effacing laughter is one of her feminine virtues, hinting at her effort to put others' comfort first before asserting her own. The stark contrast between what makes Agnes laugh and what makes other women laugh highlights the unique position Agnes takes in the narrative, as the one true companion that David distinguishes at the end.

Throughout the narrative, Agnes appears as the good angel of David with her good, soothing influence. No other character is attached with "influence" more often

[77] One time, Agnes laughs when asking David if anybody has succeeded his last love, Miss Larkins (359), and later, when he calls her his "good Angel," she laughs "her pleasant laugh" and says "one good Angel (meaning Dora) was enough" (500).

than Agnes. She carries "the influence for all good" (226), a "calm, good, self-denying influence" (262), and near the end, David says, "her influence was so quiet that I know no more" (750). He feels her good influence just by entering her house (275), by writing her a letter (477), or by simply going to the town she resides in (547). This noiseless, serene, invisible, and all-compassing influence is the opposite of the influence that comes from the boisterous, hearty laughter. Laughing is "an explosion expressed with the body" as Critchley explains (9). It disrupts the composure of both body and mind by temporarily disintegrating the self (Andrews, *Dickensian Laughter* 99), and its contagious power comes from the lively demonstration of the laughing body. Dickens himself assisted this idea through many of his laughing characters. Yet the contagious power that he allows to his most ideally feminine character is the calming, self-denying influence that comes from her "noiseless presence" (500). There is no room for the power of laughing in Agnes' character.

Therefore, Dickens' representation of female laughter in *David Copperfield* is constrained by gender norms that he ultimately reinforces. Still, he shows a certain ambivalence when he infuses David's narrative with deep regret and even guilt especially regarding the memory of Dora, which reveals David's doubt of whether he treated her justly. Dora' s laugh is different from the laughs of Clara and Emily since her laugh does not signal or bring about actual pain or loss to David. He does not suffer from Dora's laugh, but suffers from his own misconception of Dora's quality. Aunt Betsey once advises him "to estimate her . . . by the qualities she has, and not by the qualities she may not have" (622), and shows her own regret toward those "who are in their

graves, with whom [she] might have been on kinder terms" (621), such as Clara. David is unjust when he blames Dora for not being a better wife, when he was not interested in her wifely virtues as he fell in love with her. If Clara and Emily's laughter reveals their sexual desire that leads to unfortunate ends, Dora's laughter is a sign of her innocent pursuit of joy, the innocence that makes her blind to understand what David is truly offering. Dora's losing of her gay laugh after her marriage indicates that David is not the only one who suffers from the unfortunate marriage. Besides, the narrator's repetitive emphasis on how much he loved Dora and how genuine and deep his feeling was only increases the doubt that he feels the need to justify his past love. As Kincaid points out, the reader who once laughed at or blamed Dora for her impractical, childish ways is led to feel sorry as she dies so selflessly leaving David in Agnes' care. Worth describes Dora as a character "whom Dickens saw fit to kill off" (103), and McCarthy says Dora is "created to die" (28), but by making her die and representing her death as a sad, regretful event that haunts David's future life, Dickens leaves unresolved ambivalence toward David's judgment and treatment of Dora and also toward his own treatment of the character. The weakening, and eventual silencing, of Dora's laugh is one major element that darkens the tone of the remaining narrative together with other occasions of death and loss.

After all, as the story proceeds and David approaches nearer to his desired end, laughter becomes more scarce in the narrative. The novel at first seems to place on David a task to overcome his vulnerable laughter that feminizes him so that he can become a master of his own laugh that is good and powerful. However, David's life

provides fewer and fewer occasions for laughing, and as more and more people leave his side, the chance for the good, communal laughter becomes minimal. Still, at the end, Dickens presents a happy laughing scene once again that occurs at the heart of David and Agnes' blissful home. As they are "sitting by the fire" (844) on one spring night surrounded by the sounds of their children playing, Mr. Peggotty makes a sudden entrance after many years of separation. He is now an old man, but "in a ruddy, hearty, strong old age" (845). While they are sharing news about their lives with deepest sympathy, David asks for news on Mrs. Gummidge which provokes Mr. Peggotty into his familiar wild laugh.

> It was a pleasant key to touch, for Mr. Peggotty suddenly burst into a roar of laughter, and rubbed his hands up and down his legs, as he had been accustomed to do when he enjoyed himself in the long-shipwrecked boat.
>
> . . .
>
> I never saw Agnes laugh so. This sudden ecstacy on the part of Mr. Peggotty was so delightful to her, that she could not leave off laughing; and the more she laughed the more she made me laugh, and the greater Mr. Peggotty's ecstacy became, and the more he rubbed his legs. (848)

Mr. Peggotty is still Mr. Peggotty with his good-humored, unrestrained laugh, and the pure delight expressed through his laugh easily makes others to participate. It is indeed the laughter of a survivor. Though he is among the ones dispelled from the main scenes of the narrative, he is also the only one allowed to return at the last moment. As Mr.

Peggotty laughs out loud, Agnes laughs along, for the first time with a whole-hearted joy, delighted with Mr. Peggotty's delight. Lastly, David joins in completing the perfect laughing chain. This seems like a typical happy ending that is celebrated with hearty, communal laughter.

At this point, however, we know that this happy scene is only possible through excluding other, uncontainable laughs—those of Clara, Emily, and Dora. Also, the roles of Mr. Peggotty and Agnes are distinct, one leading the act and the other sincerely supporting it. It is this perfect harmony that makes David happy. As he says Agnes does not usually laugh this much, it is implied that the domestic bliss he and Agnes enjoy is more of a serene and subdued kind. David does not seem to have become a boisterous male laugher he once aspired to be. Instead, he became a writer with an influence that could make his readers laugh and cry. Experiencing the danger of a masculine laugh and the limitation of feminine laugh, David settles with a power, not of his own laughter, but of his writing that can bring about innumerable laughs. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens raises a question whether laughter that makes everybody happy is possible, and a positive answer is blocked by the echoes of the lost laughs. In a world where a timid boy has to grow into a respectable, prosperous man and pretty laughing girls have to grow into good, dutiful wives, a perfect correspondence of pleasure via laughter is portrayed as unreachable. Even Dickens, who repeatedly shows confidence in the positive force of laughter that moves beyond oneself, cannot overcome the limitation of gender norms and fails to envision the joyful and powerful female laughter that survives. The author might feel sorry for the loss, but he also suggests that the sacrifice is inevitable. In *David*

Copperfield, Dickens points at the fissure that exists in his own vision of happily shared laughter, but he implies that that vision is still the best he could envision in the patriarchal society.

Therefore, in Dickens' happy picture of a laughing group, we can find the inherent power structure that resembles the one working in Victorian society. No equal exchange of power of laughter is possible inside that picture. Even though Dickens seems to be most confident in his belief in laughter's role in forming and consolidating relationships, compared to Austen and Brontë, he, at least in *David Copperfield*, represents more occasions where laughter becomes a factor that confines or disrupts the development of relationships than otherwise. The limitation of the gender norms restricts Dickens' perspective on what laughter can achieve as an expression of pleasure, and as a result, Dickens cannot find a place for female laughter that does not comply with the compelling power of masculine norms and laughter in the world of the living.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have tried to investigate the place of pleasure in women's life through their experience of laughter in the novels of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens. The way each author positions women's laughter at the end of their novels that I most closely examined in this study—*Emma*, *Jane Eyre*, and *David Copperfield*—reflects their different perspectives on the issue. As we see Emma laughing alone, supposedly in her own room, hiding her laughing self from others' view including her fiancé Mr. Knightley's, it becomes clear that Austen is wary of the eyes that will harshly judge Emma's happy laughter as a sign of her lacking propriety and morality. Still, it is also important that in her thoughts, Emma is mindful of the happiness of her friends and neighbors, which makes Emma a good member of her society. The space given to Emma's laughter is small, but that space is placed in the midst of the Highbury society where Emma will always perform a crucial role as the lady of Donwell as well as Hartfield.[78] Austen makes a bold assertion that individual woman's laughter can be the site where her own happiness and the overall wellbeing of a community get connected. The moment when Emma laughs with ecstatic joy while being considerate of others' happiness is the happiest moment for all. Every conflict is resolved, every problem is solved, and so, Emma's happiest moment matches the height

[78] Hartfield is an estate owned by the Woodhouse family, while Donwell is owned by the Knightleys.

of the overall happiness of her community. It is truly subversive of Austen to claim that we need a place for woman's individual pleasure in the very heart of the existing society. By seeking laughter that holds both goodness and pleasure, Austen tries to find a balance between individual and communal happiness.

In Brontë, a poor, plain, and lonesome orphan girl grows into a happily married, independent woman, but her last laugh is placed outside the boundary of society. Laughter functions in a way that supports the social hierarchy, which makes Brontë's marginal characters feel alienated from the experience of laughter. Brontë's characters strive to overturn that hierarchy through their own laughter, but they cannot change the fact that their laughter cannot really bring or express pleasure. Brontë suggests that women's easy and happy laughter can be possible within female communities, but she also shows how that community is constantly being threatened by the vigilant and authoritative male gaze. Therefore, while Brontë acknowledges and supports the need to find a place for women's laughter, she denies the possibility that it can be realized in the society she is living in. Jane's last laugh at Ferndean is an expression of her strong will to find and enjoy happiness despite all the pains she went through, but that laughter is enclosed by the thick wood surrounding the place, separating her laughter from the outside world. As Jane moves from Gateshead and its red room to Lowood, to Thornfield, and to Moor House, she realizes the force of social oppression that exists in all those places and finally chooses to put a distance from them all. It is this distance, or separation, or isolation that enables Jane to laugh at the end. So her laugh is powerful, declaring her unyielding desire for happiness, and yet, also powerless, unable to affect

the social reality in any way. Laughter is relatively absent in Brontë's novels, and the author suggests that this is inevitable.

In Dickens, there are only two places allowed for women's laughter at the end: near the domestic hearth, or in the land of death. If Austen and Brontë imagine ways to provide women's laughter with some room of their own, either inside or outside of society, there is no possibility for that room in Dickens. Women's laughter should either be a part of a happy laughing group, or totally remove itself from the picture. The individual pleasure of a man can expand to the pleasure of all, but that of woman cannot have the same power. What women's laughter which is not ideally feminine indicates in Dickens' novel is their innate weakness, their inability to bring others' happiness or to make themselves survive. Removing their laughter from David's present life, Dickens makes it unnecessary for David to deal with them anymore. Guilt and remorse can be sensed in David's narration, but he is exempt from any efforts to adjust the notion of happiness he wants to achieve as a man. There is no place for Emily or Dora's laughter in the picture of happiness David attains at the end, which would have been impossible to realize if Dora was alive. The dismissed female laughs are also a part of David's life that he treasures, and his narrative makes the reader question why those laughs have to disappear or die away, suggesting the cruel force of the gender norms. At the same time, the novel's critique of social norms is much softened as it describes the laughter of certain women as innately weak, precluding the possibility of their survival or growth.

Austen, Brontë, and Dickens all represent laughter as a significant factor that motivates and reflects the protagonist's personal and social growth. Emma, Jane, and

David's development as characters goes together with their efforts to achieve happy laughter, and in that process, the way they laugh changes from scene to scene. Laughter is fluid, although the social reality is not, and while learning how laughter works in society, the characters never forsake their desire for a happy laugh. However, in Dickens, women's laughter is not allowed to be fluid. Its fragility and futility are acknowledged, regretted, and discharged from the text, and in David's memory, the lost laughter of women is fixated as a mark of their vanity and insubstantiality. Whatever complexity of Dora's laughter hinted at in the narrative is reduced by David's male consciousness that could not find any value from it, and, in this regard, Dickens seems to choose being ambivalent in his attitude toward women's laughter. His decision to exclude inappropriate female laughs from the novel's happy conclusion seems to reveal his avoiding of dealing with the subject more seriously and thoroughly. On the other hand, Austen and Brontë not only represent women's laughter as fluid and complex, but also attempt to add some unknowability to women's laughter at the end. Emma's last laughter is hidden from others' view, and Jane's last laughter is blocked from outside penetration. Austen and Brontë both aim to protect women's laughter from being appropriated and defined by the social norms that confine its meaning and significance.

Anca Parvulescu argues, "Only children laugh 'heartily'" (24). She explains that the "civilizing process has pruned laughter to a moderate size: we laugh moderate, civilized laughs" (24). During the nineteenth century, the civilization of laughter was an ongoing process which was supported by various literary texts. In Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, laughter is introduced as a sign of physical and emotional

cure, a result of the magic that the young characters experience in the natural world of "the secret garden." The cross girl, Mary, and the sickly, selfish boy, Colin, go through a wonderful change as they work in a garden full of natural beauty and pleasure, and the first sign that hints at their change is their most child-like laughter.

> they both began to laugh over nothings as children will when they are happy together. And they laughed so that in the end they were making as much noise as if they had been two ordinary healthy natural ten-year-old creatures—instead of a hard, little, unloving girl and a sickly boy who believed that he was going to die (107).

The description implies that there are certain ways how "ordinary healthy natural ten-year-old creatures" laugh, and the novel continues to show the beauty of "laughter of young things, the uncontrollable laughter of children" (207). Also, when Burnett describes the laughter of Mrs. Sowerby, who seems no less prone to laugh a happy and healthy laugh, it is said she "laughed a motherly little mellow laugh" (196). In the novel that emphasizes the value of laughter as a healthy, natural, and remedial act, different laughs are not depicted in equal terms. Children laugh like children, and a mother laughs like a mother. It seems that Burnett agrees to Parvulescu's idea that only children can laugh heartily.

However, when Emma laughs with a jumping and dancing spirit, unable to repress her urge to laugh out loud, Austen shows us that the civilizing force does not always win over our desire for happy, wild laughter. Emma laughs a laugh that is not categorizable as either child-like or maidenly. It is simply a laugh of Emma. Jane Eyre,

who knew no laugh as a child, builds a life where she can laugh and be happy at the end. In a way, she reverses the civilizing process and becomes a woman who can more freely and heartily laugh than before. Ironically, though, she can achieve this only after she gains certain social power through wealth and status. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens portrays Agnes as an ideal woman from the beginning, who even as a girl is so serene and womanly that it is impossible to imagine her laughing a loud, child-like laugh. The civilizing process is unnecessary for a woman who is born with ideally feminine virtues. Austen, Brontë, and Dickens are all conscious of how laughter is being civilized by social rules, but they do not represent it as a linear, uniform process, and they show that each individual engages with that process in different ways. How much individuality one retains in the face of that social process is what I have tried to emphasize in this study.

The novels of Austen, Brontë, and Dickens reveal the conflict between the social restrictions and regulations of laughter and the individual character's desire for free and joyful laughter. Women are represented to be facing more strict and oppressive observation and judgment in their laughter, but we can also see that many women pursue the moments of pleasant laughter that do not suit their expected role as submissive, self-sacrificing, and dutiful women. We are now living in an era that no longer teaches us to laugh only moderate, civilized laughs. Laughter is widely recognized as a means of psychological and emotional cure, and it is also viewed as a force that liberates, transgresses, and explodes.[79] The philosophical, psychological, and cultural attempts to

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[79] Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "carnival laughter" introduced in *Rabelais and His World* sees laughter as having a "positive regenerating power" (38) that liberates people from "all hierarchical rank, privileges,

reveal the meanings of laughter are still going on. However, I believe that it is always important to pay attention to the individual laughing bodies and the conflicts they face in their endeavors to taste the delight of happy laughter. Through my study of women's laughter in Austen, Brontë, and Dickens, I hope I have illuminated the need to study what laughter reveals about the laughing individuals and their society and the danger of demarcating the meaning of one's laughter in a few, fixed ways.

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norms, and prohibitions" (10). Bakhtin notes, "Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor" (94). Ingvild Sælid Gilhus argues that though Bakhtin discusses the role of laughter in medieval folk culture, his idea "is, perhaps, more a product of the thinking about laughter of twentieth century" (104). Bakhtin's study is one example of how laughter is perceived as liberating and subversive in modern culture.

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