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The Moral of the Story: Growing up in
A Gossip's Story, Sense and Sensibility,
Jane Eyre and *Little Women*

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Abstract

In nineteenth-century literature, the heroine is often a young woman growing up and learning about the restrictions of gender and society. If she learns from the mistakes she is inevitably going to make, she may be rewarded ... with a suitor? How does this correlate, who are the heroines and who are the suitors? This essay aims to answer these questions, along with evaluating parents in literature and assessing their relationships with their daughters to see if that has any effects on their marital outcomes. The novels discussed are *A Gossip's Story*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| BILDUNGSROMAN..... | 2 |
| THE PROTAGONISTS | 4 |
| THE ABSENT FATHER..... | 7 |
| THE SUITORS | 11 |
| LESSONS LEARNED..... | 16 |
| CONCLUSION, OR THE MORAL OF THE STORY | 17 |
| WORKS CITED | 19 |

Introduction

According to Goss, numerous studies (165) have considered that Jane Austen was inspired by or based her novel *Sense and Sensibility* (first written in the late 1790s but published in 1811) on Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796). Not only do they share the same premise – two sisters who are each other's opposites; one wears her heart on her sleeve and the other closely guards hers – two of the main characters also share the same name. They also happen to be courted by much older men, something the two Marianne's have in common with the other two heroines in the novels I will investigate in this essay. Marianne Dudley marries Mr. Clermont; Marianne Dashwood eventually sees beyond the age of Colonel Brandon and sees his charms for herself. Jane, in *Jane Eyre* (1848) by Charlotte Brontë, has to leave Thornfield Hall and mature herself before the older Mr. Rochester is a suitable husband for her, and finally Professor Bhaer and Jo, in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), become the unlikely pairing. The husbands are in some cases as much as 20 years older than their female counterpart and are significantly more fiscally secure than their damsels in distress.

The purpose of this essay is threefold. I am going to investigate whether or not all four of these novels, or just some of them, fulfill the criteria to be called a *Bildungsroman*. Can they be said to guide a girl to womanhood through the events that shape her, and as such provide a check list of “good” behavior? The second thing I want to see in these texts is what the moral of the story is. These novels tell of the protagonists' upbringing, going from child to woman, and what lessons they are taught of how to behave and conduct themselves in society. What are these girls taught through their failures and what do they gain by adapting to the story's moral? Who are teaching them this and how does that affect the outcome? More often than not, the adaptation to society rewards the protagonists with the best suitors the novel has put forward – which leads me to my last research question. What makes these men so suitable to our heroines? What demands do they have to fulfill to be prospective husbands? What role do they play in the protagonists' life before marriage (if any)? It is my belief that the heroines are rewarded with intellectual, financially stable men for adapting to society and its beliefs regarding female moral.

The *Bildungsroman* is a genre introduced in Germany during the late 18th century, but it did not achieve widespread status until a century later. The reader follows the protagonist from child to adult, and they traditionally fulfill different tropes of the genre (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The four novels being discussed in this essay are vastly different from each other and may or may not fulfill all aspects as a novel of development. The two older novels, by West

and Austen, I believe will not meet the criteria. In part because they deal with older characters, but also because they were written before *Bildungsroman* became a known concept and therefore were not as concerned to write towards the criteria as *Jane Eyre* or *Little Women* might have been.

In *A Gossip's Story* and *Sense and Sensibility* both of the younger sisters are named Marianne. In order to differentiate between the two when discussing their similar situations, the author's surname will be written in parenthesis next to show which author's Marianne I am writing about in cases where it might be ambiguous. Additionally, to easier distinguish the works of fiction, the following abbreviations will be used: GS for *A Gossip's Story*, SS for *Sense and Sensibility*, JE for *Jane Eyre* and LW for *Little Women*.

First, I discuss and establish a criterion for the genre of *Bildungsroman*. This will aid my analysis of the novels in the later sections. I will then present the main characters of each novel, so that focus later can move to discuss my research questions concerning parental figures and how their presence or absence effect the marital prospects of their daughters. After that, the suitors are presented. What makes them good or bad prospects for our literary women? The final section deal with whether or not the heroines learn from their mistakes and what those lessons are.

Bildungsroman

In *Season of Youth* (1974), Jerome Hamilton Buckley lists the criteria of what a *Bildungsroman* contains. He writes that the protagonist grows up outside of a major city, dreaming of going there to stimulate his intellect and social skills, something that is not done in the home setting. The father is either dead and hinted to have been a good, supporting father had he lived, or alive and very negative to the protagonist's ambitions in life (Buckley 19). Due to these circumstances, the main character leaves home early for the big city (in English novels this is London, in American novels it is more often than not New York) where he begins his coming of age through gaining an education to both a profession but also for the purposes of becoming a good man. During this period of growing up Buckley says that the protagonist will have two love interests, "one debasing, one exalting" (17). In the end, after having reached maturity, the main character travels home to show the family or society what he or she has become, and ultimately provides a visual of how far he has journeyed.

Buckley has been criticized for only discussing the male *Bildungsroman*, not considering that a female *Bildungsroman* that meets the same criteria would have been "extraordinarily progressive" according to Sarah Maier (319), who also writes that one of the first steps for the

female *Bildungsroman* is that the main character realizes her limitations in the patriarchal society, and then to adapt and overcome the societal obstacles that the men and women in the novel put in place for her.

The criteria put forth by Buckley and Maier can be used to see whether or not the novels discussed in this essay could be said to belong in the genre *Bildungsroman*. Buckley says that a father is either good and dead or bad and alive, which is true in two of the novels. Mr. Dashwood, for example, can be seen as a very caring father in the early stages of his daughters' lives, wishing to inherit the Norland estate more so to secure a livelihood for his second wife and their daughters than for his own sake. With his death as the catalyst for the Dashwood move to Barton Valley, Mr. Dashwood can be said to fit with the pattern.

Buckley can be further criticized in his endeavor to map out the *Bildungsroman*, since his study only relates to British authors. Roberta Sellinger Trites creates a different set of criteria for the male protagonists in *Twain, Alcott, and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel* (2007). Trites argues that the American novel of development, at least for boys, includes a boy on a trip that you follow until he grows up, and during these adolescent years he faces "exploitation at the hands of corrupt adults" or in other ways are ostracized from a less than tolerant society (144f). In relation to *Little Women*, Trites introduces a new sub-category of the *Bildungsroman*, namely the *Künstlerroman* (146). According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the *Künstlerroman* can be translated as the "artist's novel" from German. The reader still follows the main protagonists through life, but the struggles or main goals are artistry of some sort – in *Little Women*, both Jo and her sister Amy strive towards artistic fulfilment, Jo as a writer and Amy as a painter. While Trites does not elaborate further on criteria for the female *Bildungsroman*, she notes that a theme that is very common in American novels of development is political rebellion and awareness by the protagonist, male or female (150).

A female protagonists' choices are entirely influenced by the men in her life, argues Susan Fraiman, and the protagonist is very aware that she is "what other people, what the world, will make of [her]" (6). Fraiman adds a limited or troubled education to the criteria for a female novel of development and adapts Buckley's "dead father"-trope to apply to the mother instead. She also notes that the typical main character in this genre has some kind of trouble with either her education or her mentor – who, if a man, often ends up marrying her (6).

Maier presents the theory that a female *Bildungsroman* is not the anti-thesis to the male, but rather a subcategory much like the *Künstlerroman*, or rather a "radical extension" of it (320). As Maier writes, the criteria for a *Bildungsroman* that Buckley discusses is far too progressive for a woman of the 19th century to attain, but many of the points are checked off by the four

novels this essay will discuss and therefore they will be a part of the analysis. However, Maier, Trites and Fraiman bring up valid conditions for the female counterpart and they will also be regarded when discussing the novels.

The Protagonists

In both *A Gossip's Story* and *Sense and Sensibility*, the reader meets two sisters who are each other's opposite in personalities and in how they conduct themselves. In each novel, it is the older sister that is the sensible one, who becomes a role model for her younger sister of how to get to the end goal, i.e. marry the man with the best prospects in life. Louisa Dudley and Elinor Dashwood have a calmer, more rational approach to love than their younger sisters, both named Marianne. Because Louisa and Elinor achieve their goals of marriage through 'proper' behavior, as considered by the authors, I would argue that they have already understood and applied the moral education that I will discuss in this essay. Therefore, they will not take center stage. Instead their younger sisters will be discussed, as their behavior has greater consequences for both their lives and the texts themselves. Both Mariannes go through life-alternating events that show the reader the consequences of not applying the moral code of conduct that they are taught throughout the novel.

Though there are similarities in characters and names, the plots take different routes. Marianne Dudley in *A Gossip's Story* has spent her formative years with her maternal grandmother, Mrs. Alderson, in England, rather than with her father as he moved to the Caribbean with her elder sister Louisa. West uses this as a way to explain the differences in personalities between the two sisters. Mr. Dudley is revered as a gentleman and the late Mrs. Dudley is often mentioned as amiable, and through telling stories of her and acting in a gentlemanly manner himself, Mr. Dudley has imparted both "moral and mental excellence" in Louisa (GS 14f). Marianne, on the other hand, is indulged by her grandmother and has never been allowed to face misfortune could old Mrs. Alderson help it. West's narrator, Prudentia Homespun, praises Marianne's beauty and says that the young woman of nineteen "must have appeared uncommonly attractive" (GS 15), but is far more critical of Marianne's behavior:

In her character I wish to exhibit the portrait of an amiable and ingenuous mind, solicitous to excel, and desirous to be happy, but destitute of natural vigour or stability; forming to itself a romantick standard, to which nothing human ever attained; perplexed by imaginary difficulties; sinking under fancied evils, destroying its own

peace by the very means which it takes to secure; and acting with a degree of folly beneath the common level, through its desire of aspiring above the usual limits of female excellence.

(GS 30)

This paints an unfavorable picture of Marianne from the start, showing characteristics that does not align with what the 18th century expected or wanted from a young woman.

Marianne inherits fifty thousand pounds at the death of her grandmother and is financially independent from her father, and Prudentia Homespun also tells us that Mr. Dudley and Louisa are now dependent on the young woman, which places them all in a precarious situation. They solve this by leaving Stannadine for a smaller property Louisa owns in her own name, leaving Marianne's life almost as swiftly as they entered it. Whereas many of the other heroines are allowed to better themselves, or at least come to terms with their bad habits, Marianne is pushed further into "bad" behaviors by her less than ideal marriage, and this manifests on Marianne's outward appearances; "the beauty of Mrs. Clermont withering under the worm of discontent, her features contracted by peevish melancholy, and her temper rendered irritable by disappointment" (GS 228).

Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* is the romantic, vivacious and highly dramatic sister in the family. She is often overcome with feelings and gives her comments on events or people freely and unabashedly. She is quite a quixotic heroine, dreaming of the man she will once wed and is at moments afraid that he does not exist. Marianne appreciates the love her sister Elinor and her suitor Edward Ferrars feel for each other, though she laments to her mother that Edward lacks spirit when reading poetry (SS 17). Marianne's manners leave much to be wished for according to Elinor, who still stands by her sister as Marianne first is so improper as to flirt with Mr. Willoughby whilst in public and is later being openly distraught when they visit London and Willoughby does not respond to her letters. When Marianne finally meets him again at a ball in London, Elinor begs her to be composed and not make a scene (SS Th133). After a near death experience, having been taken ill from a cold which she caught being outside wallowing in pain after Willoughby, Marianne wakes up with a fresh perspective. She reconsiders her behavior and tells Elinor that she was hastened to believe herself in love with Willoughby and that his intentions were pure. It is this event that sets Marianne on a path towards redemption and her changed behavior is rewarded in the end – with a better suitor.

Jane in *Jane Eyre* is the only orphan amongst the protagonists under scrutiny in this essay. This has affected her in a number of ways, but especially in that she has never really had a

father figure in her life. Her parents both died from typhus when she was young and as a result she grew up with her maternal uncle and his wife. Her uncle stepped in as a father figure and he was the only one in the Reed household who was ever kind to Jane. Things change drastically after he dies, and Jane is left in the care of Mrs. Reed, who dislikes Jane. Jane has always had a strong sense of herself and does not fear to be alone in the world. She severs the ties with her aunt before leaving for Lowood school, essentially solidifying her status as an orphan (JE 37). Jane feels that it is worse to be related to the Reed family than being alone in the world, which is a strong sentiment and even stronger statement in a time when family was so highly valued.

It is at Lowood school that Jane learns how to be a woman, as well as the morals and ethics that goes with her role in society. She idolizes Miss Maria Temple, the head teacher, who is one of her first positive female role models – Jane’s school friend Helen Burns being a second good influence – and who Jane feels can do no wrong. Jane thinks so highly of Miss Temple that when she marries a clergyman, Jane says that he is “almost worthy of such a wife” (JE 97). In Freudian terms, Miss Temple is no doubt the Superego, there to remind the main character of the rules of society, something that Miss Temple easily does through being a teacher. She continues to be at the back of Jane’s mind throughout the novel when Jane battles with her own ideas of right and wrong. After the devastating news that Mr. Rochester is already married, Jane struggles with how much she loves him and how much she loves and respects herself.

In *Little Women*, a protagonist is once more pitted against her sister, making them opposites. Where Jo March is loud, foul-mouthed, wild and rough (LW 5), Meg March, the eldest, is of “sweet and pious nature” (LW 14) and prioritizes family life. Alcott writes that Meg has a subconscious influence over her sisters, all three of them, and they try to be as good as her. Another sister that wields influence over Jo is her younger sister, Beth. Jo admires Beth’s calmness and knows that she should adopt more feminine ways in her behavior, but also feels it is constrictive as well as not at all suitable to her. She thrives when playing the male parts in the stories she writes to entertain her sisters.

Jo fights an inner battle with being a woman, more so than the others. While the other protagonists struggle with the consequences their behavior has, despite being on the outside conventionally female, Jo very much wants to be a man:

It’s bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys’ games and work and manners! I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy; and it’s worse than ever now, for I’m dying to go and fight with Papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!

(LW 5)

Jo feels that she is not fit to be a woman. She would much rather fight a rebelling soldier from the South than do the female tasks she is put to at home (LW 11) and willingly takes on the role of the man in the house during the time that Mr. March is away during the American Civil War. She plays all the male characters in the plays that she writes, partly because there are no boys to play them but also because that is where she feels at home. Jo is very much aware of the limitations her gender presents, and therefore ticks of one of Maier's criteria for the female bildungsroman. Alcott's heroine struggles with this for the bigger part of the first half of the novel.

The main characters all spend the majority of their lives outside the big city. The Dashwood family move from Sussex to Devon, Jo and her sisters grow up in rural Massachusetts, Jane lives on various estates in the north of England. Marianne Dudley spends her life on the English countryside, with the exception of a trip to Bath – though popular, it neither is nor was a metropolis. The other criteria to match, from Buckley's perspective, to be considered a novel of development is that the main character(s) has to journey to the big city. Elinor and Marianne go to London with Mrs. Jennings on the older woman's invitation, spending their time partaking in the social event that was the London season. Jo tries her own wings and lives in New York for six months, working as a governess to the children of a family friend while she attempts to become a full-fledged writer. Jane spends her entire life outside of the big cities, even going further away from the larger cities – only fictional towns are mentioned, and no other geographical point is truly made. Neither West's Marianne nor Brontë's Jane visit the big city (though both take journeys of a different sort), but all four protagonists grow up on the countryside, fulfilling at least one of the conditions to be called a *Bildungsroman*.

The four literary women this essay investigates have a number of common denominators, most of all being outcasts, in one way or another, in their respective novels. Both Mariannes are too impulsive and emotional to be taken seriously by their fellow characters; Jane is plain, poor and orphaned, while Jo has to adapt to the idea of being feminine before she can face the struggles of being a woman.

The Absent Father

The absence of fathers allows for two things in 19th century literature: the presence of mothers in which they take part in the protagonists' lives in various but defined ways; and the potentiality of the lover to begin as or become a father-figure for the heroine. This section will

dissect the relationships between the heroines and their parental figures, and how their relationship might influence their choice of partner.

Gordon and Nair argue that the conceptions we – modern readers - have of the 19th century fathers underestimate the real picture of middle-class fathers. The absent father, is according to them, an overused trope in literature and not necessarily true as Victorian fathers, of the middle-class particularly, were anxious to be involved in all of their children's lives (554). Olsen writes of the Evangelical father as a guide to his children's moral well-being (766), whilst commenting briefly that outside of this specific religious context, it was mothers who had the role of educating on moral within the family (765), something that Gordon and Nair also acknowledge (551). It is worth noting that Mr. March, from *Little Women*, is heavily influenced by Alcott's own supportive father – and seeing as the book is semi-autobiographical, Jo's upbringing as a whole is a reflection of the ideals and values that were taught in the Alcott household (Rioux 5).

Out of the four protagonists, only Jane is entirely fatherless. The other protagonists each have a different relationship with their fathers: Marianne Dudley grows up with only her grandmother from a young age and though her father is alive, when he returns into her life, it is hard to reverse the moral teachings Marianne has already learned. While Marianne Dashwood grows up with her father alive and well, it is clear to the reader that she shares a much deeper connection to her mother, with whom she shares a “striking resemblance” (SS 6). Mr. Dashwood's death is the catalyst for *Sense and Sensibility*, and as such his influence over Marianne's marital matters is null. Alcott's Mr. March is absent from the household when we are introduced to Jo and her sisters, and instead Jo looks to her mother, Marmee.

Mrs. Dudley's death while Marianne was a young teenager causes an irreparable rift between her and her father. She is adopted by her grandmother, Mrs. Alderson, who indulges her whims and who “never permitted her to know a sorrow which could either be alleviated or removed” (GS 17). Marianne was spoiled rotten by her grandmother who felt she had a second chance with the daughter she lost too soon (GS 16). An attentive, loving grandmother is hardly the worst thing that could have befallen Marianne, but it is evident already in these introductory pages what difference it has made for the two sisters to be raised by two very different individuals. Mrs. Alderson is a stark contrast to Mr. Dudley, who though a loving father is stricter than his mother-in-law (GS 16). Louisa embodies the virtues he has tried to instill in her as “politeness and attention were so habitual to her” (GS 44) and from a young age she strives towards “moral and mental excellence” (GS 15). All this is visible to Marianne when her father

and sister rejoin her life in England, when she is certain that Mr. Dudley favors his eldest child, whereas Louisa disagrees:

‘You certainly mistake my father’, returned Louisa, ‘he leaves you absolutely free: He does not even influence you by giving his opinion.’
 ‘And can you imagine me ignorant what that opinion is?’ said Marianne. ‘.../ I might even ask you, why he should be so solicitous to see you married, and yet indifferent how I am disposed of?’

(GS 48)

Marianne proclaims that she wishes her father would give her advice and attention like he does Louisa, but when he does, most notably regarding her suitors (GS 54), she disregards it. It does not matter that he is alive and present in her life at this moment, for he was not present when she grew into womanhood. His efforts to steer her away from her follies and romantic fantasies come too late, for she is already at nineteen a financially independent woman. Though she wants to hear his advice, she does not need to adhere to it and that is something she certainly does not.

Just like for Marianne Dudley, the absence of a father enhances the presence of the mother in Marianne Dashwood’s life. Not only is Austen’s Marianne written as a contrast to her older sister, their mother too is a contrast to Elinor. Where Elinor sees Mariannes “excess of sensibility” (SS 7) as a concern, Mrs. Dashwood shares Marianne’s unwillingness to put a damper on either of their feelings. Austen writes that Elinor has learned to govern her feelings, a lesson not yet learned for Mrs. Dashwood nor an encouraged lesson for Marianne from her mother (SS 6). This indulgence mirrors Mrs. Alderson’s, with the exception that the only voice trying to heed Austen’s Marianne is her sister’s, rather than her father. When Willoughby announces his departure for London, Mrs. Dashwood is at first shocked and saddened for the sake of her daughter, but quickly changes her tune, for as Mrs. Dashwood says herself, she has “explained it to myself in the most satisfactory way” (SS 78). In a short moment of time, Mrs. Dashwood has concocted a story about Willoughby’s departure so vividly that she is certain that it is true – so true that she does not need Marianne to confirm it. Within a week of meeting Willoughby, Mrs. Dashwood is congratulating herself on having found such a nice son-in-law as he (SS 49), which goes to show how very similar Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood are.

In Brontë’s novel we can see how Jane thinks of Mr. Reed, her uncle, and muses that he would have been good to her, had he lived (JE 12). Little is initially known of Jane’s actual father, other than that his wife, Jane’s mother, married below her rank when she became Mrs.

Eyre and that the two of them died because of an illness when Jane was still a baby. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that Jane would think more of Mr. Reed as a fatherly figure as she seems to have some recollection of him, and since he took a fatherly approach to her as well: “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 that age” (Mrs. Reed to Jane, JE 277). This would enforce the idea of a good, dead father, but Jane’s Aunt Reed can also be said to enforce the bad, alive father. Buckley writes only of fathers as good or bad guardians (19), whereas Maier has a broader perspective and talks about the patriarchal structure as a whole – which can be enforced by both men and women. Such is the case with Mrs. Reed, who favors her own children over the girl who she was forced to take in because of her husband’s sentiment towards his dead sister. Mrs. Reed even goes as far as having wished Jane would die when the fever broke out at Lowood during Jane’s time there (276).

Before Jane meets Mr. Rochester, there are a very limited number of men present in her life. Her uncle, Mr. Reed, she remembers to some extent, most notably that he died in the red-room. Miss Temple can be said to resemble a mother figure – a least the very first one Jane ever had. Miss Temple wields a good influence on Jane, who teaches her patience and to curb her anger, as well as generosity (JE 82). Jane has had no other parental figures to talk of, as she rejects Mrs. Reed as one (JE 144), so it is no wonder that Jane takes to listening to Mr. Rochester as much as she does. Not only because he has the upper hand as a man, but he is educated, older and experienced. He is also used to getting his way, and Jane’s decision to not become his mistress baffles him (JE 383). Even Mrs. Fairfax exclaims that Rochester could be Jane’s father (though Jane vehemently disagrees) (JE 316), and that she felt uneasy at the preference Rochester showed Jane, which goes to show that even though the “older man marries younger girl”-trope is familiar to readers, it was sometimes uncomfortable to the other characters within the story.

St. John Rivers does not wield the same influence – though he too dominates Jane’s life – but that has to do with Jane’s intention with her relationship with him. For her, St. John is viewed as a brother (JE 389) and though that has a clear power dynamic (brothers stepping in as guardians over their unmarried sisters once their father dies, as St. John does with Mary and Diana, and technically as Jane’s as her only male living relative) as well, she is now older and wiser, as well as independent since her inheritance – and she does not deter from telling St. John as much.

Jo listens very much to her parents, both of whom take an active part in raising her and her sisters. While her father, Mr. March, is on the front of the Civil War, he often writes home to

remind his daughters of the virtues he would like to see in them when they are grown up, something that Mrs. March, or Marmee as she is also called, tries to instill in them at home with them. What is notable here is that while Marmee is a good mother-figure and revered by Jo, she herself is second to her husband by her own admission; when Jo and Marmee discusses anger, both of them declare that they are angry much of the time, though Jo has never thought of Marmee as angry before. Mrs. March credits her own mother for teaching her to curb her anger and her husband, Mr. March, for continuing to teach her, just like she now teaches her daughters (LW 84ff). Despite being good and caring and on her own, Mrs. March is still not deemed to be *enough*, purely by being female. She must still lean on her husband and teaches her girls that they must do the same; “to be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman, and I sincerely hope that my girls can may know this beautiful experience” (LW 103). While wishing love on one’s children is an inherently good thing, this is a two-edged sword: the best thing that can happen to a woman is that a man chooses her to be his wife.

The Suitors

Marianne Dudley is an unusual female protagonist when considering how many suitors she has during the course of the novel. Despite her dramatic flair that had her appearing “more like the weeping April than the smiling May” an entire evening after having finished a book (GS 45), a total of four suitors are presumed to be in love with her. Only two are serious love interests, Mr. Pelham and Mr. Clermont, while Captain Target and Mr. Alsop’s adventures of misconstrued love act as comic relief through Prudentia Homespun’s narration. Marianne’s first suitor is Mr. Pelham, her father’s friend, who comes to stay at Stannadine. After a dinner party, West remarks that all guests left with the feeling that “next themselves, Mr. Pelham was the most amiable and best-informed person of the party” (GS 45). Marianne, however, is not one of his fervent admirers. When asked by her father to divulge her reasons for dismissing Pelham’s further pursuit, Marianne says that they are ultimately too different in soul and spirit. Mr. Dudley counters with Pelham’s merits, having cross-referenced with near all of the latter’s acquaintances, stating that Pelham is revered by his equals and “idolized by his dependents” (GS 52). Marianne’s romantic nature demanding a passionate, whirlwind romance leads to her dismissal of him as a suitor.

Following an accident by horse, Marianne is introduced to her savior, Mr. Clermont. A young man, not yet twenty (GS 115), he is the son of a nobleman, and he is every bit as passionate as Marianne is (GS 117). At a first glance, they are the very same person with all the

interests they share, and just like Marianne is described as a beautiful girl, Mr. Clermont is deemed an “uncommon beauty” (GS 119). Mr. Dudley is the first to remark on Clermont’s young age, in a letter to his eldest daughter where he later speaks of Mr. Pelham’s virtues. It is interesting that the reader’s first impression of Mr. Clermont is interrupted by overwhelming proclamations of Pelham being the superior man, a theme that continues throughout the novel.

Marianne, though apprehensive at first and only considering a friendship with Mr. Clermont (GS 126), is eventually turned coerced into a relationship with him. He is persistent and vows passion and deep love, which makes Marianne accept his proposal. They are married swiftly (GS 147). Marianne’s wedding to Clermont is the only one to take place this early in the story, comparing to Marianne Dashwood, Jane Eyre and Jo March. For the other three, their subsequent weddings are a culmination of their individual stories, a reward for lesson’s well applied. West uses Marianne’s marriage as a cautionary tale, and in order to really cement what a dreadful affair the Clermont marriage is, it needs to happen early enough for the reader to follow Marianne’s misery. A relationship should not be based on passion, is West’s lesson for her readers, according to Wikborg (45), and this is why Marianne’s marriage crumbles.

Colonel Brandon and Willoughby, Marianne Dashwood’s both love interests and suitors, could not be more different from one another. Willoughby is much like Marianne herself – vivacious, energetic, poetic, romantic and with few regards to propriety. They match each other in beauty (SS 42, 46) and interests, for when he declares his deep interest in music and dancing, Marianne keeps him to herself for the rest of the evening (SS 47). During a planned outing together with Marianne’s family and friends, Willoughby and Marianne suddenly steal away for some moments alone, which was highly improper – but for them a spur of the moment, a romantic adventure (SS 67).

Where Willoughby allows and encourages Marianne’s “head-in-the-clouds”-attitude, Colonel Brandon is much more like Ellinor and tries to anchor Marianne - not to weigh her down indefinitely, but to make her touch ground and calm down a little bit. Brandon, though almost twice Marianne’s age (SS 37), falls in love with her almost immediately, but a more steady, rational love than the rash and impulsive romance Marianne has with Willoughby. Brandon sees Willoughby’s treatment of Marianne, and later his way of discarding her for another richer woman and fears the same route for Marianne as Eliza Williams, Brandon’s ward, – both of whom were romanced by John Willoughby (SS 204).

Perhaps not sensational or stormy, like Marianne initially believes that love ought to be, but the friendship and later romantic relationship between Colonel Brandon and Marianne (heavily encouraged by Mrs. Dashwood), helps them both in the end: “In Marianne he was consoled of

every past affliction /.../ and that Marianne found her own happiness in forming his. /.../ Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband as it had once been to Willoughby” (SS 372).

Jane’s first impressions of Mr. Rochester is via Mrs. Fairfax and little Adele, both of whom speak well of their master. Mrs. Fairfax concludes that Rochester is “rather peculiar, perhaps” in that he rarely stays at his country home and prefers to travel the world, and that he is clever, though he rarely speaks to her (JE 123). Jane lives and works at Thornfield Hall for an entire fall before she meets its owner, when she happens to meet him during a riding accident. Edward Rochester is described as being “past youth, but had not reached middle age; perhaps he was thirty-five”, with dark, handsome features despite being rough and not very grateful of Jane’s proposed help with his strained foot (JE 133f). It takes quite a while for Rochester to warm up to Jane, and all the while he is the one who steers the conversations, or their opportunities to speak. It is Rochester that takes command of their relationship, and not only because he is Jane’s employer, but because he so easily steps into the role of a strict guardian for the much younger woman. Despite Jane initially stating that Mr. Rochester is not handsome (as an answer to his question, nonetheless) (JE 155), there is a clear point of change when she suddenly sees him again; “My master’s /.../ strong features /.../ were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me” (JE 207).

Mr. Rochester continues to dominate their relationship – he tries to coerce a confession of Jane’s love for him by dressing up as fortune teller, and once they are engaged, he decides on an entirely new wardrobe for her. When it becomes known that Rochester already has a wife – it is Rochester who does the talking and not Jane. He leaves no room for her feelings in this first instance but rather explodes with justifications and excuses. Despite calling Jane his equal and his likeness (JE 304), Rochester does not treat Jane as such. He is still influenced by their primary relationship – master and dependent, or employer and employee, mentor and mentee.

Jane’s second suitor is sprung upon her, without having reflected on St. John Rivers as a suitor prior to his proposal. St. John becomes Jane’s savior after she has fled Thornfield Hall and takes her in from the cold. He is distant and sometimes cold, but he helps her find a job and a roof over her head and keeps her company when his sisters return to their respective jobs. His proposal is the very opposite of Mr. Rochester’s – there is no passion, only practicality. St. John wishes for Jane to accompany him to India and the most proper way to do so would be as a man and wife (JE 489f). This does not appeal to Jane, as she has not felt like herself during her time with St. John:

I found him a very patient, very forbearing, and yet an exacting master: he expected me to do a great deal /.../ By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: /.../ I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by, because a tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him. /.../ When he said ‘go’, I went; ‘come’ I came; ‘do this’, I did it.

(JE 480f)

This is very different from Jane’s relationship with Rochester, for while his is a driving factor and may feel controlling at times, Jane is at liberty to make her own decisions and she is respected for it. Rochester did not like the idea that Jane would leave him, but he did not try to force her into a role that she did not like nor could portray well. Neither mistress or loveless marriage suits Jane, and the difference is which suitor understands that in the end.

The leveling of the playing field comes when Jane inherits 5,000 pounds from her uncle and Rochester is blinded by the fire at Thornfield Hall. Simultaneously, Rochester is taken down a few pegs and Jane rises – finally making them equals. The subversion of their relationship with Rochester being more dependent, due to his physical ailments, on Jane rather than the other way around is another aspect that make their relationship balanced at last.

Jo's two suitors are vastly different. Laurie Laurence is described as very handsome as well as rich and talented. He is set to go to college in a few years when Jo first meets him at the Gardiner's ball. They are close in age; he has good prospects as the Laurence family is rich and well-educated. It is Jo's boyish manners that puts Laurie at ease (LW 31), and he soon becomes a great friend to all of the March family but most of all to Jo. Mrs. March sees quickly that they both have “quick tempers and strong wills” (LW 393) and mentions this to Jo who agrees. In contrast, Professor Bhaer is older than Jo, and when first introduced by Mrs. Kirke is described as “very good and learned, but poor as a church mouse” (LW 359). Furthermore, Bhaer is compared to the Shakespearian values of honest, brave and strong when Jo “discovers a live hero” (LW 378). Jo acknowledges that Bhaer has his flaws, but he still interests her. Jo and Laurie share the same flaws, and though she acknowledges them, they are reasons for them not to be together, whereas Bhaer's faults does not deter her. Jo even thinks to herself that she usually compares her two suitors, in all manners of their being (LW 486), but the true turning point in her affections is when she forgets to compare them. Unlike the other heroines, Jo settles

for a decidedly poor husband (LW 517) and becomes the main bread winner herself, thanks to inheriting Plumfield.

Wikborg writes that “West views all forms of passionate feelings as a threat to female happiness” (45), and that can easily be seen in her novel as Louisa is very reserved in all manners, no matter the circumstance whereas Marianne is vivacious and more romantically inclined. The passionate tension in *Jane Eyre* between Jane and Mr. Rochester would probably have been deemed horrendous by West, who much would have preferred St. John’s proposal of duty and propriety before love and passion. Another relationship West would have disliked is Marianne Dashwood and Willoughby, whose public display of affection – having whispering conversations just them two and sharing locks of hair with each other, for example – would have been deemed highly inappropriate.

Comparing all of these eight men (Captain Target and Mr. Alsop not included), one can conclude that the steady, reasonable love usually wins in comparison to the passionate lovers. Wikborg writes: “Jane Austen’s ideal lovers, for example, are remarkable for the way they hold back. Compared to the ardor of a Mr. Rochester, their courtships are low-key, indirect, protracted.” (147), and this is true in all instances – except for *Jane Eyre*, of course, who chooses this stormier, more passionate love for herself. Marianne Dudley too chooses insensibly, according to her creator and her consequences, but unlike *Jane Eyre* there is no triumphant “reader, I married him”, but rather the sad unfolding of life next to her sister Louisa’s now perfect (according to West and the eighteenth-century times) marriage.

Each of the four heroines have multiple suitors, and each of them have one debasing (Clermont, Willoughby, St. John and, to some extent, Laurie) and one exalting (Pelham, Colonel Brandon, Rochester and Professor Bhaer). Both Austen’s Marianne and Brontë’s Jane comply with Buckley’s idea of “one debasing, one exalting” love interest (17) without a doubt. Pelham is one of the trickier ones, for he is dismissed so early from Marianne Dudley’s narrative that he barely has an effect on her (but he is continuously presented as the better alternative), whereas Laurie is the very opposite for Jo: to begin with, he is very, very good for her, but in order to grow up she has to let him go.

Fraiman comments that if the protagonist has a male mentor, they will most likely end up married. Both Rochester and Bhaer are obvious mentors to their respective protagonist – Rochester teaches Jane about social life and Bhaer comments on Jo’s writing. Colonel Brandon is less of a mentor to Marianne Dashwood, as he never takes on the lecturing persona with her, but he does share cautionary tales with Elinor in order to protect Marianne from afar. Marianne

Dudley is the only one that does not marry her mentor, as Clermont is very close to her own age and never takes on that role with her.

Lessons Learned

Susan Fraiman writes that the heroine of a female *Bildungsroman* rarely a formal education (6), and this is true for all but one; Jane. Jane goes on to teach and is therefore not included in this specific criterion of the bildungsroman. Jo also goes on to teach, but it is established that she left school as soon as she could to start working, and therefore has little formal education. Little is said in either *A Gossip's Story* or *Sense and Sensibility* regarding their protagonist's education. They know how to read and write as both Marianne's are frequent writers of letters, and both are well-versed in literature and poetry, both of which are highly valued if one should believe Caroline Bingley and Mr. Darcy, two characters from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) (44). This view of Austen's is affirmed to some extent by Brontë; "she is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music' (in those days, reader, this now narrow catalogue of accomplishments would have been held tolerably comprehensive)" (JE 101).

More important than the talents and skills of young women was how they behaved themselves in public and in private. West lets her heroine make one of her biggest mistakes by writing a letter to a friend, complaining about her marriage (GS 175). Mr. Clermont does not want their marital problems out in the world, and by inviting her friend's opinions Marianne opens up in a way she was not expected to. This is the point of no return for the Clermont marriage, as they never recover from this despite half-hearted attempts to make things right. West dooms her Marianne to a bad marriage for minor mistakes without an offer of redemption.

Marianne Dashwood's actions often send her to the gossip-loving Mrs. Jennings and her companions. Her open flirtation and inappropriate behavior with Willoughby convince everyone but Elinor that the two are engaged, even fooling Marianne herself in the process (SS 183). When Elinor finally questions what reasons Mrs. Jennings has to be so sure of an engagement, the older lady cites Marianne and Willoughby's behavior as her main reason (SS 176). Later, when having been betrayed by Willoughby and made a fool of by him, Marianne is distraught with overwhelming emotions. Elinor cautions her to not give Willoughby or others the satisfaction of seeing her so overcome with sadness, but Marianne defies her sister: "I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to all of the world" (SS 184). It is a testament of how different these two sisters are and how very differently they behave in adversity. Elinor's behavior is more appropriate; to keep matters such as this

private and close to the heart. Marianne has not yet learned this and in this instance refuses to do so.

Austen remarks specifically on Marianne in her conclusion of the novel, that “Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favorite maxims” (SS 371), meaning that her Marianne was always meant to learn from her mistakes and be rewarded for it. Given the similarities between West and Austen's both works, it should be clear that Austen wished a much better fate on her heroine than the one that befell West's.

One could say that the lessons Jane learn are about herself, rather than societal ones for though she is like a fish out of water at Thornfield's social occasions in the beginning, she finds her footing in any setting she is placed in. What Jane learns is to stand up for herself, value herself and put herself first – and she does it within the constraints of her gender and her time.

Jo's journey is much more about learning virtues than skills, something that is highly valued by both of her parents, and though she struggles at times, it is clear that she grows and matures through the novel. She becomes less hot-headed, or is better at keeping it at bay, when older and resumes a calmer act all together. Her decision to dismiss Laurie's proposal is a pivotal moment in her character development, affirming her beliefs of a marriage based on equals in spirit – not copies of one another.

Conclusion, or The Moral of the Story

Based on my research, none of the four novels meet the criteria, which I created based on Buckley, Fraiman, Maier and Trites, to the full extent – nor did I expect them to. The clearest example of the four is *Jane Eyre*, despite her lack of big city-experience, for she travels to some extent, she has two suitors with very clear motives, and the reader is allowed to journey with her from childhood to a young woman. The other novels all share elements with the *Bildungsroman*, and indeed *Little Women* is regarded as one of the classic American novels of development. Going against my initial thesis, *A Gossip's Story* and *Sense and Sensibility* fit surprisingly much with the criteria, but not enough that I would categorize them as a *Bildungsroman*.

Do they marry happily ever after, with the suitor the novel has deemed the best one? Turns out that no, they do not. Marianne is the only heroine that does not apply the morals the story teaches, by dreaming too much of great romances and a deteriorating social behavior, and she is punished by West with a young, inexperienced husband whose behavior contributes heavily to Marianne's own unhappiness.

The other literary women, Austen's Marianne, Brontë's Jane and Alcott's Jo, all learn to behave and restrain themselves. Both Jane and Jo combat their anger and Marianne Dashwood realizes that there are other things in relationships other than stormy passion. Marianne Dashwood learns from her mistakes, as she was always meant to do, and gains a gentle, older and very rich husband. They both become happier people by making the other one happy, and Austen concludes that Marianne grows to love Brandon as much, if not more, than Willoughby. With the triumphant "reader, I married him", Jane gets everything she wanted without sacrificing her own morals. With Rochester humbled by the fire and the loss of his sight, as well as a "free" man with his first wife dead, he is indeed a new man. Jane stays true to herself, within the limitations of her gender and her time, and succeeds in a world not set up for her to succeed in. Jo, like Jane, is at the end of the novel financially independent and as such, can get away with choosing a poor husband – though money is a value that is never stressed in *Little Women*. The deep love, emotional connection and intellectual strength that Jo and Friedrich Bhaer share is more important in that context and goes to show how both times and geographical matters for the other may have an influence on their characters.

The moral of the story is that if you behave in society and learn from your mistakes, there may be kind, romantic partners in your near future – or at least, in your next novel.

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