

## **Degree Project**

Level: Bachelor's

### **Passive and Active Romantic Heroines and their Patriarchs**

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#### **A Comparative Feminist Study of Gender Portrayal with a Focus on Romantic Love in *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary***

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Beauvoirian Theory, the Phallus and the Patriarchate .....	8
The Meeting .....	11
The Attraction .....	15
The Declaration of Love .....	20
Conclusion.....	24
Works Cited.....	28

## Introduction

The Woman “will prefer to serve a god rather than obey tyrants...” (de Beauvoir 718). Simone de Beauvoir makes this statement when she discusses the female gender role in relation to love in *The Second Sex*. Her theory is based on the notion that, from childhood, the Woman has been fostered into a gender role which is inferior to that of men. When the Woman has repressed the idea of achieving equality with men, she instead strives to become an integrated part of a man’s life (717-718).

A literary genre that portrays romantic gender relations is the romance novel, which has often been claimed to reinforce these unequal gender roles. Teresa L. Ebert, for example, states:

Contemporary popular romance narratives are...primary sites for the ideological construction of individuals as gendered subjects, especially female ones, in male-dominated heterosexual couples. By producing the female subject as complemented and completed by her relation to a male partner, patriarchy *naturalizes* sexual identity, masking the cultural construction of the feminine, thereby continually reproducing women in a subordinate position. (19)

In other words, the depiction of gender roles in romance narratives affects the construction of gender outside the fictional world, and according to Ebert, such narratives reproduce romantic literary heroines in an inferior position to the heroes.

Two such influential romantic heroines of British and Western literature, who will be examined in this thesis, are the eponymous heroines Jane Eyre and Bridget Jones. *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847 and written by Charlotte Brontë, is the story of an orphan girl trying to find her place in the world in Victorian Britain. There she finds the love of her life in her employer Mr. Rochester. Over a century later, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, published in 1995 and written by Helene Fielding, tells the story about how Bridget Jones yearns and searches for love, and how she finally finds it in the shape of Mark Darcy.

*Jane Eyre* is perhaps most often labelled as a Bildungsroman, and *Bridget Jones's Diary* is often categorized as a chick lit-novel. However, the focus in this thesis will be romantic love and the love story-plots. Therefore, these two novels will be studied in the light of the romance novel. Pamela Regis uses *Jane Eyre* as an example of a romantic novel in her examination of the genre. Her definition is based on selected works that, according to her, are valid representatives of the romance novel (Regis 7). At its very core Regis defines the romance novel as “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (27). This wide definition can be applied to both novels. However, the betrothal does not have to be included in modern romance novels, but the heroine and hero must end up together (Regis 37 – 38), as in *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Other attempts to define the genre have been made. For example, in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, Janice A. Radway describes a model that is based on what dedicated female romance novel readers from the community of Smithton, USA appreciate in terms of key elements in the narrative structure. Her list consists of thirteen rather specific narrative stages that the ideal romance novel should include (46, 120). Pamela Regis claims that Radway only focuses on one specific type of romance novel from the twentieth century. Further she defines Radway's model more as a “formula” (23) rather than a description of the genre, and a formula “is narrower than a genre” (6, 23).

Pamela Regis' framework for an expanded definition of the romance novel consists of eight narrative elements. These are:

[T]he initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between the heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. (Regis 30)

This analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* will be made using the elements “the meeting between heroine and hero”, “the attraction between the heroine and hero” and “the declaration of love between heroine and hero” (Regis 30) as a basis. These three elements are most clearly connected to the subject of romantic love, and they can be considered to be most interesting to examine from a gender perspective, because the hero and the heroine interact with each other in the context of these elements.

The romance novel has evolved between the time when *Jane Eyre* was written to the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff have examined how the romance genre has developed in the latter half of the twentieth century by comparing romance novels from the sixties and the seventies with chick lit-novels, and they conclude that chick lit is an evolution of the romance novel (500). The most noticeable features of this newer form of romance novels are that they stress the importance of the female body's attractiveness and that the heroines are in no need of financial support. They do, however, still rely on male heroes to rescue them in other ways (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 498, 500).

The genre, regarding Pamela Regis' eight narrative elements, remains intact from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century. There are, however, three areas where there has been development, according to Regis (205). Firstly, there is the aspect of “affective individualism” (Regis 110), which means that there is a change regarding how the heroines act in pursuing personal happiness. Affective individualism was a trend that started to evolve in the nineteenth century romance novel. The emphasis then was on the importance of the individual's self-fulfilling emotions in connection to the courtship, whereas in the twentieth century novel emotional needs could also be satisfied outside the romantic relationship (Regis 56, 110). Secondly, the heroines of the twentieth century did not usually have issues concerning personal property in the same way as their predecessors (Regis 110). During parts of the nineteenth century, married women could not own property under English law, which often was an issue for

the nineteenth century romance novel heroine (Regis 58). Thirdly, love was the main reason for the betrothal in the twentieth century romance novel (Regis 110). Love was also important in the nineteenth century romance novel, but another reoccurring subject, however, was the “companionate marriage“, which means that both partners are satisfied with the relationship and that they mutually support each other (Regis 57). Due to the progression of women’s rights, the twentieth century heroine was close to guaranteed a companionate marriage (Regis 110-111). However, this new, more gender equal societal context does not guarantee that gender roles are more equal in the relationship between the heroine and the hero concerning the romantic love-plots, which will be examined subsequently in this analysis.

Romance narratives, as stated, influence the construction of gender in society, but they also reflect ideas and notions from the societal context in which they were written. The view of romantic love when *Jane Eyre* was written was influenced by Victorian values. The choice of partner was to be based on love and on free will (Karandashev 118-119), and “romantic love was considered to be a delicate, spiritual feeling—the antithesis of crude, animal lust” (Karandashev 118). Further, expressions of female and male sexuality were suppressed, and women’s sexual purity was cherished (Karandashev 119).

In the late twentieth century, when *Bridget Jones’s Diary* was written, attitudes toward romantic love had changed in many respects. Perhaps most prominent was the disconnection of sex from love. There was a shift towards a sexuality that was meant to stimulate individual needs rather than being an act of intimacy. In the American context, love has also been idealized by the means of popular culture and a media driven by consumerism; commercials project images of romantic love that have influenced people’s perception of what romantic love is. This could, for example, include dates at restaurants or travelling to romantic places (Karandashev 170-172). This idealized image of romantic love can be extrapolated to the Western European context.

There is no previous scholarly research that compares *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. However, previous research on *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* separately shows two main stances regarding the portrayal of gender. One is that the heroine is a positive feminist symbol, and the other is that the portrayal of gender roles reinforces women as inferior to men. Jean Wyatt, for example, who has approached the romantic love-plot of *Jane Eyre* from a Freudian perspective, claims that Rochester's and Jane's gender roles correspond with the roles of father and daughter. Wyatt states that these gender roles function as a basis for Jane's attraction to Rochester. This "patriarchal love fantasy" (200) is potentially problematic from a feminist perspective, because it recreates gender patterns in which the woman is subordinate to the man (200-201).

As an inferior, Jane represents the Victorian woman's struggle against the patriarchal oppression, according to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. These critics interpret Jane, Rochester and other characters as symbols. Jane is forced to repress her sexuality, but more importantly she represses her anger, states Gilbert and Gubar (338-339). Rochester is gendered as "the very essence of patriarchal energy" (351), and his secret wife, Bertha Mason, is a representation of Jane's repressed rage. For example, Bertha burns down Thornfield hall, which symbolizes "Jane's profound desire to destroy Thornfield, the symbol of Rochester's mastery and her own servitude" (360). Furthermore, Gilbert and Grubar state that in the beginning of Jane's and Rochester's relationship they are portrayed as "master and servant", but judging by their conversations they appear to be equals (352). Regarding the ending, Gilbert and Grubar raise the question of whether Jane's return to the crippled Rochester subverts the novel's "rebellious feminism" or not (369). Their romantic relationship is made possible because they reunite at Ferndean, symbolically located in nature, where the restrictive society cannot control them. Nevertheless, Gilbert and Grubar consider the ending to be hopeful, because Jane's and Rochester's love is true (369, 371).

As romantic heroines, neither Jane nor Bridget is described as beautiful. Joanne Spiegel has examined the construction of the romantic love story-theme in *Jane Eyre* in relation to other novels from the Victorian era. She argues that Jane Eyre is an unusual romantic heroine, because she is not physically attractive. As a result, Spiegel argues that Brontë has created a “Victorian heroine” who is subversive (2). The focus in the romance between Jane and Rochester is on intellect rather than on physical attraction, which according to Spiegel, articulates a representation of romantic love that is constituted on equal terms (3). In similarity with Jane Eyre, Bridget Jones’ physical appearance is not associated with beauty either. Kelly A. Marsh has analysed the character Bridget Jones and the main themes in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. She concludes that “Fielding...rejects the myth of the perfected self, and favors instead the expression of the self in all its imperfection”, which as a consequence, challenges “traditional gender roles” (69, 71).

Being a woman of the late twentieth century, Bridget Jones has many expectations of herself. Both Megan Behrent and Leah Guenther claim that Bridget’s gender role is ambiguous. Behrent states that Bridget strives for independence, but at the same time she tries to find a life partner (196); Guenther claims, in comparison with Jane Austen’s heroines, that “Austen’s characters are given one cultural directive, to marry, while Fielding’s struggle with conflicting social messages that compel them simultaneously to find a man, be independent, build a career [and] start a family...” (86). Thus, the novel conveys a “subversion of gender and genre expectations” (97), according to Guenther. Behrent, on the other hand, claims that a romantic love story-plot inspired by fiction from the nineteenth century, such as Jane Austen’s, is a “literary backlash” (199) from a feminist perspective (198-199). Consequently, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* has been criticized by feminists because of the archaic depiction of gender roles, according to Guenther (84).

The focus of this study is gender roles in connection to romantic love-narratives. Similar studies have been made on *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. What differentiates this study from previous research is that the focus is explicitly on romantic love and elements of the romance novel. Studies concerning *Bridget Jones's Diary* have discussed gender roles. However, the emphasis is on Bridget's role as a woman in the contemporary society as a whole rather than in detail relating to gender roles and the subject of romantic love. Regarding *Jane Eyre*, the subject of romantic love has, for example, been explored from the perspective of father/daughter-based gender roles. However, an analysis based on elements of the romance novel with a focus on romantic love is missing in the area of research concerning gender roles. This focus provides a perspective on gender roles, which is a subject related to, but distinct from, the gender roles of the characters in society as a whole.

The relevance of this study is additionally found in the comparative analysis of a mid-nineteenth- and a late twentieth century romantic love-story. The intent is to analyse, from a feminist perspective, the differences and functions of the main characters' gender roles in relation to romantic love, and how they have changed over time. The characters who will be examined from *Jane Eyre* are Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester, and the characters from *Bridget Jones's Diary* who will be discussed are Bridget Jones, Mark Darcy and Daniel Cleaver. These are the characters who are primarily involved in the romantic love narratives.

Specifically, this thesis will examine how the gender roles of these main characters are portrayed in relation to romantic love by using feminist theory, which will be further described in the following chapter. Secondly, a comparative analysis will be made with the intent of outlining how gender roles in romance narratives, in this regard, have changed over time. The argument will be that while Jane Eyre is portrayed as an active romantic heroine, Bridget Jones is depicted as passive, and the male characters are, in similarity to each other, stereotypically portrayed as authoritative patriarchal symbols.

### **Beauvoirian theory, the Phallus and the Patriarchate**

When examining how female and male gender roles are portrayed, and in an attempt to distinguish potential developments in the portrayal of gender roles in connection to romantic love narratives, it is necessary to apply the concept of socially constructed gender. Feminist theory emphasises the difference between sex and gender; sex is connected to biology whereas gender is socially constructed.

Simone de Beauvoir states that childhood plays an essential role in the construction of gender identity. Young boys are encouraged by society to actively and physically explore the world and test their own limits, as “[i]t is by *doing* that he creates his existence...” (de Beauvoir 316). Young girls, on the other hand, are encouraged to play games that do not involve physical activity. Their games therefore tend to be connected to fantasy and the imaginary world. These early steps in the formation of active and passive gender roles thus lead to the creation of one “essential characteristic of the ‘feminine’ woman” (de Beauvoir 315), which is passivity (315-316).

In Beauvoirian theory women are inferior to men, because society forces the sexes into hierarchal gender roles – it is essentially men who orchestrate this scheme (de Beauvoir 800). This overarching mechanism is, in feminist terms, known as the patriarchy, which can be defined as “the organization and division of all practices and signification in culture in terms of gender and the privileging of one gender over the other, giving males control over female sexuality, fertility, and labor” (Ebert 19). The man is satisfied with being superior and will deny the woman true equality; the woman, on the other hand, will in different ways try to subvert this gender paradigm (de Beauvoir 800-801). De Beauvoir states:

The ‘feminine’ woman in making herself prey tries to reduce man, also, to her carnal passivity; she occupies herself in catching him in her trap, in enchaining him by means

of the desire she arouses in him in submissively making herself a thing. The emancipated woman, on the contrary, wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The 'modern' woman accepts masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men; instead of seeking to disparage them, she declares herself their equal. (801)

De Beauvoir, thus, divides the female gender into two rough categories. The feminine woman, who is passive and makes herself into an object, and the modern woman who is active and possesses agency.

The phallus is another aspect that explains the hierarchical gender paradigm. For the small boy the penis becomes his alter ego. The penis acts as an object the boy can project himself into, which is something that the small girl lacks. Thus, "she is led to make an object of her whole self" instead, which consequently turns her into "the Other" (de Beauvoir 54). According to de Beauvoir, the phallus is more than merely a representation of the male reproductive organ, because it also "symbolizes a dominance that is exercised in other domains" (55).

Teresa L. Ebert discusses stereotypical gender roles in romance novels from a feminist perspective, and she claims that the phallus plays an important role in the stereotypical romantic love-narrative. Ebert states that there are basically two types of female heroines. The first is the child-woman who can be of any age. She is, however, sexually inexperienced, and she acts childishly in her interactions with the hero. The second is "the working heroine" (41), who does not need the hero's wealth. She is thus more independent than the child-woman. They both have in common that they act in defiance towards the hero's attempts to treat them as non-equals, but the child-woman is more childish in doing this. The male hero is hard and strong - an embodiment of the phallus, and in relation to the child-woman, he is also described as "masterful, dominating, privileged, wealthy, and propertied, and usually in a position of authority with economic control over the heroine" (34, 41). Ebert further states that the male hero represents

the phallus and the patriarchy, in other words, he has something that the heroine lacks. Ebert's theory is that since the heroine is the subject of the romance novel, her desire for the hero and his privilege puts her in a "secondary subject position of gendered other - the not-male, the one lacking the phallus, power, and privilege" (44). In this manner, the heroine's pursuit for the hero's love reinforces the woman's position as subordinate to man (39-42).

The Beauvoirian theory that is used in this thesis is from the influential *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949, and sometimes claimed to be "the 'bible' of modern Western feminism" (Tidd 7). Many of de Beauvoir's ideas, as seen above, have been incorporated into Ebert's theory, as she has extrapolated these fundamental feminist theories by connecting them to the romance narrative. Thus, the combination of these two theories provides a solid framework for analysing gender roles of characters in romance novels from two, in many respects, different centuries, because in theorizing about the binary of the passive feminine woman and the active modern woman, de Beauvoir discusses the woman in relation to potential partners, which is an issue that the romance narrative revolves around, regardless of the year of publication. It could, however, be asserted that de Beauvoir's description of gender traits seems archaic, particularly when it is used to analyse a contemporary novel such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Conversely, this thesis claims that Beauvoirian theory can be fruitfully applied, and this prototypical theory does not appear to be out of date when it is used to analyse the characters and the subject of romantic love in either of the novels. In fact, this thesis argues that the character of Bridget Jones rather fits the description of the feminine woman (passive) than the modern woman (active), which *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, shares qualities with.

In short, in analysing the selected characters, this thesis will draw on Simone de Beauvoir's concept of socially constructed active and passive gender roles, especially regarding the female characters. The characters will further be analysed in the light of the theories of the phallus and patriarchy, with an emphasis on the male characters.

## The Meeting

In connection to Pamela Regis's narrative element "the meeting", in where "the heroine and the hero meet for the first time" (31), Bridget Jones is portrayed in a passive "secondary subject position" (Ebert 44) in relation to Mark Darcy, who is introduced as a confident, wealthy, sophisticated man of high social status. Their meeting is set at a New Year's party, and Bridget is concerned about what her potential partner Darcy and other people think about her ability to attract and interact with men. Bridget's mother finds Darcy to be a suitable partner for Bridget because "[h]e's one of those top-notch barristers. Masses of money" (Fielding 16). Thus, Darcy, as a symbol for the patriarchy, matches the description of a "wealthy" and "privileged" (Ebert 41) male. Bridget, on the other hand, is portrayed in a subordinate position, and as "the one lacking the phallus" (Ebert 44) that Darcy possesses. After a few moments of awkward conversation between them, Darcy suddenly decides to leave her and walks over to the buffet. At this point Bridget feels like everybody is watching her, and she imagines that people think, "[s]o that's why Bridget isn't married. She repulses men" (Fielding 21). This indicates that she believes that she must be pleasing in order to attract a potential partner. This anxiousness about what other people and men think of her and her romantic love relations arguably stems from gender ideals she has been subjected to. Simone de Beauvoir states that society encourages the woman "to make herself an erotic object" and "offer herself as prey to male desires" (590), but a man, on the other hand, does not objectify himself as "he does not normally consider his appearance as a reflection of his ego" (590). An example of the latter is that Darcy jokingly wears a goofy diamond pattern jumper to the party.

During their meeting Bridget also wants to appear intelligent to make an impression on Darcy, but ironically, her effort only reinforces Darcy's patriarchal superiority. He asks her about literature, and she answers with a lie, saying that she has recently read *Backlash*, which

is written by the feminist author Susan Faludi. This ironic use of intertextuality contributes to the construction of the ambiguous character of Bridget. The fact that she chooses to say that she has read *Backlash* implies that she is aware of feminist ideas in general. However, she appears to be bound to the role of de Beauvoir's the feminine woman, as she seems to lack the energy and confidence to fully take on the active role of the modern woman, which feminist texts like *Backlash* often encourage women to do. Unfortunately for Bridget, Darcy has, as opposed to Bridget, actually read *Backlash*, but Bridget manages to steer the conversation into another direction. Nevertheless, this makes her feel like a failure for not being able to have a functional conversation with a man, and she is worried that her mother will think that she is "useless with men" (Fielding 20). Bridget thinks that being intellectual will attract men. The result of the portrayal of their interactions is instead that Darcy appears to be intellectually superior to her, which consequently reinforces his patriarchal advantage.

Further, Darcy's maleness is active, while Bridget becomes the passive object in relation to his actions. Firstly, Darcy turns down Una's (the party hostess) offer to get Bridget's phone number. Bridget thinks, "It's not that I wanted him to take my phone number or anything, but I didn't want him to make it obvious to everyone that he didn't want to" (Fielding 21). The example again shows that Bridget finds it important that other people believe that she is wanted by men. Secondly, Darcy starts their conversation about literature and he makes the decision to suddenly leave their conversation, as described above. Thirdly, he is expected to take Bridget's phone number, and not the other way around. As a result, Bridget nervously speculates about whether people believe that she has the ability to attract men, despite the fact that Darcy controls the situation. Thus, Bridget displays the passivity of "the 'feminine' woman" (de Beauvoir 315), because she seems to believe that superficial male desire is the key to a romantic relationship.

Jane takes on an active role in the scene that corresponds with the narrative element 'the meeting', which is set outside Rochester's home Thornfield Hall. It should be noted that at this

stage of the plot her subordinate position as his employee is not yet established. Jane sees Rochester fall from his horse and he gets mildly injured. She asks if he needs any help, and Rochester indicates that she should leave. Jane is, however, persistent and withholds that she will help him, and he finally accepts her assistance. Jane states:

It *was* an incident of...no romance, no interest in a sense; yet it marked with change one hour of a monotonous life. My help had been needed and claimed; I had given it: I was pleased to have done something; trivial, transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive. (Brontë 136)

Jane's sense of agency is empowering, and the fact that she takes action in her meeting with Rochester is an important step in her development towards womanhood and a less passive gender role than the one that has been imposed on her during her childhood. It might, however, be claimed that she takes on a subordinate role by establishing herself as helper to the man, but her actions can, on the other hand, be considered as a subversion of gender roles in the sense that she is saving him. In fact, Jane acts as a saviour for Rochester more than once. For example, when Rochester's room is set on fire while he is sleeping, Jane puts out the fire. Thus, the portrayal of Jane's and Rochester's meeting indicates that there is an element of agency in her gender role, which correlates with de Beauvoir's description of "the 'modern' woman", who "prides herself on...taking action" (801).

Moreover, in their meeting, Jane is also portrayed in an inferior position in relation to Rochester. Firstly, Rochester is described as "past youth" with a "dark face, with stern features" and he has a "considerable breadth of chest" (Brontë 134). His hard and strong features make him an embodiment of the phallus, in the manner that Ebert describes (34). Jane, on the other hand, is described by Rochester as "childish and slender" (Brontë 360). Jane, who has little experience with men, is fascinated by Rochester's masculine and stern appearance, and by the confident manner in which he controls the horse. However, Jane does not find Rochester to be

handsome or “heroic looking” (Brontë 134), which can be related to the Victorian attitude towards romantic love as something that should be based on “spiritual feelings” rather than sexual attraction (Karandashev 118). Secondly, his physical superiority is further emphasised when Jane describes how heavy Rochester’s hand feels on her shoulder when she helps him, and he describes her shoulder as “frail” (Brontë 360). Thirdly, Rochester is placed on horseback, and Jane is on foot, which also marks that Rochester, as a symbol for the patriarchy, is superior regarding social status. In terms of physical attributes and social status, Jane is portrayed as inferior during Jane’s and Rochester’s meeting.

Jane’s role as Rochester’s subordinate employee might affect the romantic love narrative, but it is also important to try to make a distinction between the two roles. When Rochester is established as her superior in the form of an employer, their meeting and acquaintance takes a new turn, and gender dynamics are thus affected. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, claim that Bertha Mason’s destruction of Thornfield symbolizes Jane’s repressed wish to break free from her master Rochester (360). Indeed, the fact that Jane uses words such as ‘master’ and ‘obey’ does emphasize that she is subordinated in her role as a governess in Rochester’s staff, but it does not mean that she is a subordinate in the romantic love plot. However, in the role of her master, Rochester wants to make their meeting into a conversation about Jane since he is curious about her. Thus, it is Rochester who takes action during, what could be considered as, their second meeting. Jane, on the other hand, becomes the passive object of Rochester’s interview.

The most prominent similarities and differences between Bridget’s and Jane’s meetings with their potential romantic love-partners are: firstly, they do not appear to find the men physically attractive. Bridget, however, wants to be perceived as both attractive and intelligent, both in the eyes of Darcy and other people at the party. Jane, on the other hand, does not seem to be concerned about how she is perceived by Rochester; she is rather interested in being helpful,

with an emphasis on her own individual empowerment. Secondly, both Rochester and Darcy are portrayed as not particularly handsome men of high status in control over their situations. Further, Darcy does not seem to be genuinely interested in Bridget on any level, whereas Rochester is anxious to get to know Jane. Thirdly, Bridget becomes a passive object in relation to Darcy's actions. On the contrary, Jane adapts an active role in her initial meeting with Rochester, but she is more passive when she knows that she is Rochester's subordinate employee, the second time they meet.

### **The Attraction**

Daniel Cleaver is Bridget's superior both in the role of her boss and as her lover, and she turns herself into an object in order to attract his attention. Bridget describes that she is attracted to Daniel because she "[l]ove[s] his wicked dissolute air, while being v. successful and clever" (Fielding 23), and that he has an "enormously well-read brain" (Fielding 48). This initial attraction is, thus, based on both sexual vibes and an admiration for Daniel's successful career – the portrayal of him signals his possession of the phallus, both on a sexual and on a social plane. The fact that Bridget admires him in this manner corresponds with the Beauvoirian gender role of "the 'feminine' woman" (801), since one aspect that drives her is the desire to become one with a partner of a higher social status (de Beauvoir 718). Furthermore, Bridget wants to trigger Daniel's attraction by presenting herself as a sexual object by the means of wearing revealing clothes to work. An explanation as to why she chooses this strategy to attract Daniel could be found in a statement where she says, "Wise people will say he should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices" (Fielding 48). These ideas can be related to late twentieth century perceptions of gender roles,

because romantic love has been idealized by the means of commercials and media (Karandashev 170); the woman is objectified and must aim for physical flawlessness to match the image that media projects.

Bridget is, further, submissive when she and Daniel indulge in flirtatious text messaging during work hours, and Daniel protects his patriarchal position by the means of sexist remarks. Daniel comments on Bridget's short skirt, whereupon she writes a response in which she jokingly points out that comments about her skirt are inappropriate, considering that he represents the management. Then she thinks, "Think will cross last bit out as contains mild accusation of sexual harassment whereas v. much enjoying being sexually harassed by Daniel Cleaver" (Fielding 27). She has presented herself as a sexual object and, at this point, she seems satisfied with the fact that she is treated as such. In the light of de Beauvoir's definition of the passive female gender role, Bridget, thus, tries to gain the privileges of the patriarchy by objectifying herself. Daniel's attraction to Bridget is accordingly primarily sexual and their romantic relationship shows few signs of intimacy, which, according to Victor Karandashev, was one characteristic of romantic love in the late twentieth century (172). Consequently, Daniel shows his interest in the form of sexist remarks. For example, during work hours when Daniel starts to text Bridget, she answers that she is busy. Daniel answers, "Sorry to interrupt, Jones, pressure must be hellish...I like your tits in that top" (30). Simone de Beauvoir claims that the privileged man will deny the woman equality (800-801), and in this manner Daniel firstly uses his superior position to diminish Bridget's work with ironic remarks, and secondly, he objectifies her using sexist comments. However, Bridget is aware of what is going on. She thinks to herself that she is "a woman of substance and do[es] not need men in order to be complete, especially not [Daniel]" (Fielding 38). Thus, she seems to be aware of a gender trait that de Beauvoir discusses - the woman is trying to compensate her subordinate position through the act of becoming one with her superior (717-718), but Bridget's actions contradict her thoughts.

The attraction between Bridget and Mark Darcy is more subtle in terms of sexual aspects, but the portrayal of Darcy nevertheless puts him in a superior position as a symbol for the patriarchy. The second time Bridget meets Darcy, she is struck by how much more attractive he is in a black suit than in the ugly sweater he wore at the New Year's party. He is transformed in Bridget's eyes. Towards the end of the novel she says, "He was sweating, dirty, his hair was unkempt, his shirt unbuttoned. *Ding-dong!*" and further Darcy was "so thrillingly authoritative" (Fielding 205). She also describes him "as being rocky smart" (Fielding 206). Moreover, she finds him sexy when he starts to ask questions about Bridget's mother's shady boyfriend Julio "like a top barrister" (Fielding 186). As with Daniel, Bridget seems to be attracted to Darcy's looks, social status, and his intellect – on all three points Darcy could be considered as her superior in the light of gender dynamics, as he has "the phallus, power and privilege" (Ebert 44) that Bridget lacks.

Darcy's attraction to Bridget is less obvious – her physical attractiveness is not emphasised in the romance with Darcy, but he is, however, drawn to act heroically in their relationship, which highlights her passivity. When Darcy openly declares that he is somehow interested in engaging in romantic activities with Bridget he says that "all the other girls I know are so lacquered over" (Fielding 164), which could be interpreted as an attraction based on the fact that Bridget is not as posh as the women he usually dates. However, Darcy takes on a protective role towards Bridget. There are at least four times when Darcy acts heroically. The most prominent act of heroism is that he goes to Portugal on a manhunt to bring Julio, Bridget's mother's boyfriend, to the police, since Julio has scammed Bridget's family and other people they know of money. He also saves Bridget at two different parties when she finds herself being socially embarrassed. As a contemporary romance heroine Bridget's happiness does not depend on Darcy's wealth, but as Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff state regarding new forms of romance narratives, the hero saves the heroine in other ways instead (498). Thus, the heroine's

need for a savior puts her in a passive position, and the masculine hero is portrayed as “masterful” (Ebert 41).

As mentioned before, Jane’s attraction is based on Rochester’s patriarchal features, such as sternness and physical strength rather than handsomeness. Jane further states that there are other aspects of his character that she is attracted to:

[T]here was so much unconscious pride in his port; so much ease in his demeanour; such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance; so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities...to atone for the lack of mere personal attractiveness, that in looking at him, one inevitably shared the indifference, and...put faith in the confidence. (Brontë 155)

Thus, it could be claimed that Jane is attracted by Rochester’s confidence, and that his demeanour also enables them both to put physical appearances aside in their romance. The matter is, however, slightly more complicated than that.

Rochester’s attraction to Jane cannot be claimed to be based on her beauty either. In fact, he says, “you are not pretty...” (Brontë 155) to her. In that sense, he does not objectify her. In one passage, however, when they are about to marry for the first time, he wants to dress her up in jewelery and fancy dresses, because he “will make the world acknowledge [her] a beauty...” (Brontë 299). Rochester’s attempt to objectify Jane is an example of how he, in the light of the patriarchate, “refuses to accept his companion as an equal...” (de Beauvoir 801). Jane, however, refuses to be objectified. She states that if she lets him dress her up in this way she would “not be Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin’s jacket” (Brontë 299). Thus, Jane “refuses the passivity man means to impose on her” (de Beauvoir 801), which describes the modern woman in Beauvoirian theory. Her active refusal of being objectified by Rochester, in terms of their romantic love-story, is also an example of an aspect of Jane’s character that attracts Rochester.

Rochester is attracted by Jane's intelligence and the manner in which Jane actively contributes to their discussions, which exemplifies her agency in their relationship. In one discussion Rochester claims superiority and the right to command Jane because he is older than she is. She cleverly answers, "Your claim of superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience" (Brontë 157), which Rochester finds to be a fair point. The result of these intellectual discussions is that Jane and Rochester find themselves to be equals on this plane, which is supported by Joanne Spiegel's claim that their romance is based on intellect (3), and Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's observation that they appear to be equals judging by their conversations (352). Jane points to the core of their attraction when she states that "though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (203). This also corresponds with the spiritual bond that romantic love preferably was to be based on during the Victorian era, as explained by Victor Karandashev (118). In all, the fact that Jane's gender role is active, rather than passive, is an important aspect in Rochester's attraction to her.

When comparing the portrayal of gender in connection to the narrative element of the attraction in *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* the most prominent difference is that Bridget lets herself become a sexual object in order to attract Daniel, whereas Jane refuses to be objectified by Rochester. Further, Jane is not attracted by Rochester's looks. In contrast, Bridget is sexually attracted to Daniel, and Darcy's physical appearance grows on her, and in the end, she seems to find him sexually attractive too. Bridget is also attracted to both Daniel and Darcy because she perceives them as intelligent, successful in their careers and because they are authoritative. Jane could, similarly, be claimed to be attracted to the authoritative side of Rochester. However, Jane is not attracted to Rochester because of his superior social status. In fact, she only seems to regard him as her superior in the role of an employer. Lastly, Rochester is

attracted to Jane because of her intellect and her active and honest discussions with him. Bridget, on the other hand, is exposed to patronizing jokes by Daniel at work, and she needs to rely on Darcy to save her in different contexts, which reinforces her gender role as subordinate and passive.

### **The Declaration of Love**

The narrative element “The declaration of love” (Regis 33) is placed in the very end of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, and the denouement emphasizes Bridget’s gender role as passive and submissive and Darcy’s as active and superior. The setting where Darcy declares his love for Bridget is a romantic high-class hotel in the countryside. When Darcy is bringing her there, he takes Bridget’s arm in a firm grip, and tells Bridget’s mother that he is “taking Bridget away” (Fielding 206). This scene, together with the setting, shows that Darcy’s male superiority takes the form of a mixture of archaic brutality, in which the male takes what he wants, but also a more sophisticated side where his superior economic wealth provides for the romantic setting. In relation to Darcy, Bridget’s role, thus, corresponds with Teresa L. Ebert’s description of “the child-woman”, whose hero is “wealthy” and “dominating” (Ebert 41). Without Bridget’s knowledge Darcy has booked a suite where he tells her that he loves her. Bridget’s declaration of love highlights her submissiveness as she does not mention the word love about her feelings for Darcy. Instead she writes notes in her diary such as, “minutes spent thinking about Mr Darcy 245” (Fielding 170). The focus is on Darcy, since, according to Ebert’s theory, he represents the phallus (44). In other words, Bridget hopes to become a part of Darcy’s privileged position by securing his love. Additionally, Bridget is passive in the final scene when Darcy declares his love, Darcy does not seem interested in Bridget’s feelings for him and the scene ends when Darcy carries her off to the bedroom. Again, it is Darcy in his patriarchal role who sets the agenda, and Bridget follows obediently.

Jane is portrayed as slightly more active in the corresponding scene, and Rochester does not appear to be protective of his patriarchal position. It is clear that Jane loves Rochester, but Rochester is more active – in accordance with Ebert’s theory about the fact that the romance novel puts the heroine in a secondary position, because she pursues the privileged hero (44) - the emphasis is on his declaration of love. Rochester’s declaration of love is set near the orchards under a chestnut tree outside of Thornfield Hall. In this scene, Jane does not openly proclaim her love, which could be interpreted as passivity. However, during an emotionally painful discussion, Jane open-heartedly reveals that she does not believe that Rochester is truly in love with Miss Ingram, who Rochester is engaged with. Rochester agrees with her and exclaims, “I love you as my own flesh. You – poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are – I entreat to accept me as a husband” (Brontë 294). Even in this emotional stage of their romance, Rochester says that Jane is plain, which emphasizes that physical appearance has little to do with romantic love for Rochester. Further he says, “I ask you to pass through life by my side – to my second self, and best earthly companion” (Brontë 293). Thus, Rochester’s view on Jane’s gender role as his wife seems to be that she will be his equal. This quote also exemplifies the “companionate marriage“ in which partners actively support each other, which was a typical feature of the nineteenth-century romance novel (Regis 57). Moreover, Rochester presents his proposal as an offer; he says, “I offer you my hand [and] my heart...” (Brontë 293), which indicates that Jane certainly has agency in this decision and that he gives himself to her. On the other hand, he also says, “I must have you for my own...” (Brontë 294), which suggests that he sees her as an object. However, despite his, at times, ambiguous stance, Rochester appears to be a weak protector of the patriarchate, because his declaration of love emphasizes equality with Jane.

Jane adapts a more active role when she declares her love for Rochester in the final chapter of the novel, at Rochester’s forest estate Ferndean. Rochester’s mad wife Bertha Mason

has burnt down Thornfield Hall and committed suicide, and Rochester lost a hand and became blind when he attempted to save her. Jane has found out that she has living relatives, and, additionally, she has inherited a small fortune. These circumstances indicate that Jane's love for Rochester is not based on his worldly possessions, his wealth nor his status. Her gender role, thus, switches from the typical "child-woman" to the more independent "the working heroine" (Ebert 41), in the sense that she no longer needs to pursue Rochester for the sake of his privileges. She proclaims that she loves him if he is willing to accept her love and says, "All my heart is yours, sir: it belongs to you and with you it would remain..." (Brontë 512). She gives herself to Rochester in the same manner as he did when he offered his heart to her. Further she says, "I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector" (Brontë 513). The fact that Jane wants to be useful to Rochester could be interpreted as subordination. However, the latter part of the quote indicates that she regards them both as more equal now considering the new circumstances of their romance. Simone de Beauvoir claims that the woman will try to marry a man in order to compensate for her subordinate position to men (717-718), but Jane challenges this gender feature. Jane's active, less subordinate, female gender role is reinforced by the fact that she decides to go back to Rochester, and her love for him is strengthened by the new conditions for their romance. These circumstances level out traditional hierarchal gender differences between them such as status and economic wealth.

There are several similarities and differences in gender roles in *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* regarding the narrative element of the declaration of love. Firstly, the setting emphasises the power relations between the lovers. Mark Darcy declares his love for Bridget in a high-class hotel, a setting that corresponds with his social class rather than hers. He provides for this setting by the means of his economic superiority and he puts her in this context without

asking for her approval. Bridget's gender role is thus portrayed as passive. The setting for Rochester's declaration of love is set in nature outside Thornfield Hall, which could be interpreted as a neutral ground where the hierarchal roles of employer and employee are more balanced. Consequently, the setting itself for Jane and Rochester does not reinforce gender roles, rather the opposite. That is also the case for Jane's more powerful second declaration of love. Rochester's simple forest estate reflects their newfound equality. Secondly, it could be claimed that Darcy sweeps Bridget away considering her passivity, whereas Rochester offers himself to Jane. Thirdly, both Bridget and Jane can be considered to be fairly passive in the scenes in where their romantic respective love-partners declare their love. However, Jane's agency is emphasised when she declares her love in the final scene, as she makes the active choice to go back to him. Lastly, regarding Jane and Rochester, the scenes connected to the declaration of love are very emotional and the two lovers reveal passionate feelings for each other; they explain the reasons behind their love. Bridget's and Darcy's corresponding scenes lack this element; their emotions do not seem to be important. However, the fact that Bridget finally finds a man that truly loves her is important, because it means that she has begun to, according to Simone de Beauvoir's theory, become an integrated part of a man's life (717-718), and thus she gains access to his patriarchal privilege.

## **Conclusion**

While the portrayal of Jane Eyre shows that she is a romantic heroine who takes action, Bridget Jones is portrayed as passive in relation to the male main characters, and Darcy, Daniel and Rochester are all generally depicted as patriarchal stereotypes. For example, both Jane and Rochester accept Jane's appearance. Bridget, on the other hand, is worried that men will not find her attractive, since she has been indoctrinated by fashion magazines with the belief that

she, for example, needs to consume beauty products in order to gain the interest of men. However, Darcy seems to appreciate that Bridget is not as posh as women he usually dates. Indeed, that could mean that physical attractiveness is not a priority for Darcy. On the other hand, it could be argued that Darcy's approval of Bridget still emphasises Bridget's concerns about her appearance and her need to perceive herself as wanted by men, which highlights her passive gender role. She is, further, fully aware of the fact that beauty ideals affect her self-image. Nevertheless, superficiality is one factor that leads Bridget to willingly turn herself into an object in order to attract men, which also is a contributing factor to why she can be viewed as the passive "the 'feminine' woman" who "[makes] herself a thing" in Beauvoirian terms (de Beauvoir 315, 801). Jane, on the other hand, refuses to be objectified, and thus she can be viewed as a representation of the more active "[t]he 'modern' woman" who "declares herself equal" (de Beauvoir 801) to men. There are more examples of how these heroines exemplify de Beauvoir's active and passive versions of gender roles. For instance, Bridget is saved by Darcy in several scenes, and Jane, on the contrary, saves Rochester more than once. The same structure can be found in social interactions between the characters. Bridget is a bystander in the light of Darcy's actions, whereas Jane actively contributes to hers and Rochester's discussions. Moreover, in relation to the narrative element of the declaration of love, Jane and Rochester are portrayed as equals, for example, because they both offer their hearts to each other, while Bridget passively accepts Darcy's love. In fact, Jane's agency is emphasized when she makes the active decision of going back to Rochester.

There are, further, some prominent similarities between the characterization of the male main characters, which this study has found using both de Beauvoir's and Ebert's theories about the patriarchy, the phallus and the implication these aspects have for the representation of gender roles in romance narratives. For example, two features that the heroes have in common, which attract the heroines, are that they are authoritative and intelligent. All three men, Darcy,

Daniel and Rochester, are further, in the beginning of both novels, perceived by the female characters as men of high social status, but the heroines do not find them physically attractive, at least not regarding Darcy and Rochester. As stated, there is, however, a development in Bridget's narrative, and in the end, she finds Darcy both physically and sexually attractive. Thus, the male characters fit Teresa L. Ebert's description of the hero's gender traits and the theory that the hero is a representation of the phallus and the patriarchy. In this respect, this study supports Ebert's claims, which further indicates that the male gender role is more static in romance narratives than the female gender role. Notably, the genre's development from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, according to Pamela Regis, can mostly be seen in connection to aspects such as "affective individualism" (110) and the "companionate marriage" (57), which arguably are mostly related to societal and individual progression for the heroines. Thus, as seen in this thesis and argued by Ebert, the hero's role seems to a large extent to be patriarchal and stereotypical, because, as Ebert claims, the hero's privilege is something that the heroine lacks and pursues (44). Also connected to this theory is the fact that both Bridget and Jane can be perceived as passive when Darcy and Rochester declare their love for them. As a consequence of the fact that the heroes are in possession of the phallus and personify patriarchy, the heroines are placed in a position where they need to choose whether they will turn to passivity and objectify themselves or actively claim their place beside the hero. In other words, will they act as Simone de Beauvoir's the feminine woman or the modern woman? Consequently, this essay has shown that the female gender role in *Jane Eyre* is portrayed as more active than the corresponding counterpart in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and thus less subordinate in relation to the male gender role.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis indicates how gender roles in the romance narrative with a focus on romantic love have changed over time. Bridget Jones fits Rosalind Gill's and Elena Herdieckerhoff's description of a late twentieth-century romance novel heroine, since

her physical and sexual attractiveness is a prominent concern, and she repeatedly gets rescued by her hero, as discussed above. These aspects are quite the opposite in Jane Eyre's romantic love-narrative. The former can possibly be explained by the fact that Victorians were very restrictive regarding sexuality, as explained by Karandashev (119). Nevertheless, a gender role that emphasises the importance of physical female attractiveness tends to objectify women. Regarding the aspect of affective individualism, both Bridget's and Jane's respective personal happiness seems to hinge on finding a partner. As a result, Pamela Regis's conclusion about the twentieth-century heroine's possibility of finding personal happiness outside the realm of romantic love (110) is not supported by this essay. Furthermore, the romantic love-narrative of *Jane Eyre* focuses more on the protagonist's emotions than the same in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which also contradicts the development that Regis describes. Regis claims that less societal obstacles enable an emphasis on the heroine's emotions in the twentieth-century romance novel (111). Lastly, the female gender role is less subordinate in relation to the male gender role in the nineteenth-century romance novel than in the twentieth-century counterpart, judging from *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* from the perspective of Beauvoirian active and passive gender roles and within the limits of this essay. Additionally, it should be mentioned that this thesis only examines two novels, which means that no conclusive answers about the development of romance narratives can be drawn using this study only. However, a focus on romantic love has provided a perspective that is worth exploring more in depth in more extensive studies.

Finally, previous research on these two works, as mentioned, often discusses whether Jane and Bridget can be regarded as positive feminist symbols or not. A focus on the subject of romantic love in these two novels has enabled a perspective where the heroines are partly separated from other hierarchical structures, such as employer and employee. As a result, this essay indicates that Jane Eyre, a romantic heroine from the nineteenth century, can be regarded as a

positive feminist symbol, while Bridget Jones appears to be a reproduction of the woman who “prefer[s] to serve a god rather than obey tyrants...” (de Beauvoir 718).

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