



## Women Community and Relations: A Comparative Study in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Rebecca* (1938)

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**Abstract:** With the steady decline of women as characters and authors in recent literature, this article targets the revaluation of the role of women in aesthetics, in general, and, particularly, in gender issues. Therefore, in the comparative analysis of one-century-distant novels, this article hypothesizes that woman represented the core of Victorian narratives and social representations and underwent the constraints of society through relationships designed for female characters within a smaller or larger community of women. To corroborate it, the analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Rebecca* shall, at first, reflect a narrative that revolve around women's central involvement in the society defined by patriarchy through a substratum rendering rules and relationships which characterized their community. Secondly, with a gendered analysis, this work must highlight women's reactions witnessing female authors' conceptions in terms of conformism and non-conformism.

**Keywords:** accomplishment – patriarchy – gossip – stereotypes – marriage.

**Résumé :** Avec le déclin constant des femmes en tant que personnages et auteurs dans la littérature récente, cet article cible la revalorisation du rôle des femmes dans l'esthétique, en général, et, en particulier, dans les questions de genre. Par conséquent, dans l'analyse comparative de romans écrits à plus d'un siècle d'intervalle, cet article postule que la femme représente, d'une part, le noyau des récits victoriens et des représentations sociales et subit, d'autre part, les contraintes de la société à travers des relations prescrites pour les personnages féminins au sein d'une communauté de femmes plus ou moins grande. Pour confirmer ses hypothèses, l'analyse de *Pride and Prejudice* et *Rebecca* reflétera, dans un premier temps, un récit qui tourne autour de la place centrale des femmes dans la société définie par le patriarcat à travers un substrat miroitant des règles et des relations qui caractérisent leur communauté. Deuxièmement, avec une analyse sur le genre, ce travail devra mettre en évidence les réactions des femmes reflétant les conceptions des auteurs féminins en termes de conformisme et de non-conformisme.

**Mots-clés :** accomplissement – patriarcat – commérage – stéréotypes – mariage.

### Introduction

In English literature, in general, and British literature, in particular, woman has always had a special place in male or female writings. Therefore, this description of women has been the subject of a societal, political or even ideological discourse. But her role in fiction has for a very long time been the subject of little study. However, the situation becomes even alarming since in a paper untitled "The Transformation of Gender in English-language Fiction"

(2018), the authors discovered that the number of female characters and writers are steadily declining in modern writings, thus, making Victorian novels a better site for representation. “The academics expected to see an increase in the prominence of female characters in literature across the two centuries. Instead, “from the 19th century through the early 1960s we see a story of steady decline” (FLOOD, 2018). This lack may be due to a certain overshadowed role especially in the epic writings in which man becomes again the main character.

Moreover, with the resurgences of feminism corresponding to waves of certain political or literary movements that claim to be feminist, we perceive a recurrent reevaluation of women. Thus, through literature and even through other media, we are witnessing an in-depth exploration of the discourse on women and also a multiform denunciation of the moral or physical prejudices caused by a so-called patriarchal society.

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Rebecca* (1938), in which there are a large number of women, the authors, Jane Austen and Daphne Du Maurier, depict their lives in society, their feelings but also their perceptions of the world in which they lived. Many of the books’ studies often focused on other themes that were rather male-centred in general, thus, ignoring the analysis of the female characters. With stark similarities in both narratives in terms of social organization and characterization, this article will explore woman as a character with, in particular, a background of a Victorian society and analyse their reactions.

Given the importance of such a subject concerning women, a double approach is necessary. We will try to approach this theme with a more or less feminist approach by focusing on the patriarchal society. Also, the influence of Jane Austen on Daphne Du Maurier’s writings, will lead us to choose a comparative approach of the two stories. Hypotheses that this work posits are: firstly, women were at the centre of Victorian novels’ plot and social organization; secondly, the social milieu determines female characters’ relations and also shapes their reactions towards rules. The solutions will hopefully confirm these novels as sites for female representation and highlight impacts of patriarchy on women in such novels.

Thus, through this study, we will, in the first place, show the relationships between women by studying them at the level of the society. Secondly, a narrower scope will be chosen with the familial environment. Thirdly, it will be determined, in a feminist perspective, the modes of rejection of certain values first, and finally, the conformism of certain female characters.

## 1. Female Characters and Victorian Social Dynamics

The analysis of social dynamics in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Rebecca* imposes an exploration of women's relational world set in a Victorian society. Therefore, the evolution of woman in a patriarchal society implies certain rules that will condition associations between women. However, besides these rules, their interactions revolve essentially around the central theme of marriage. This theme will seep out in the intrigues and, by the way, impact the motivations of characters.

In the relationships between members of the same community, there was a principle called "*civility*". It defined the relations that women had to maintain and that revolved around politeness or courtesy, whether in their speeches or in their behaviours. It represented a means of control that patriarchal society exercised over women in order to prevent disputes or misbehaviours through the means of etiquette as Joseph Wiesenfarth defined it in his essay "The Invention of Civility in Northanger Abbey": "And '*civility*' is '*behaviour proper to the intercourse of civilized people*'; it signifies '*ordinary courtesy or politeness, as opposed to rudeness of behaviour*'. *Civility suppresses individual differences in favor of social harmony. But social harmony is impossible without individual fulfillment.*" (WIESENFARTH, 1999). Indeed, in *Pride and Prejudice*, this civility forbids Caroline Bingley to be rude and to bear Mrs Bennet's lack of decency. Its apparent goodness is dictated by the courtesy rules. "By Jane, this attention was received with the greatest pleasure, but Elizabeth still saw superciliousness in their treatment of everybody, hardly excepting even her sister, and could not like them; though their kindness to Jane, such as it was, had a value as arising in all probability from the influence of their brother's admiration." (27). In *Rebecca*, the heroine avows that "*convention was too strong*" (16) and prevented her as companion to alert Maxim about Mrs Van Hopper tactless seductive attempts. Also, Mrs Van Hopper, curious in nature and full of prejudices, ignored the principles of courtesy forcing friendship with distinguished visitors to the hotel and indulging in gossips.

*Rebecca* and *Pride and Prejudice* depict the lives of ladies and young women who aspires to become married. This aspiration is in itself a quest for what Victorian society considered as social "*Accomplishments*" for a woman. Mothers had the heavy task of educating their daughters according to the principle of accomplishment. In the case the young lady was an orphan, this achievement was based on what was commonly called "*companionship*". Thus, the companion employed, for an annual salary, by an older and upper-class lady, is placed under the tutelage of the latter who is responsible for improving her social education. Therefore, Mrs Van Hopper liked to remind *Rebecca's* heroine: "*I am responsible for your behaviour here*" (21). Miss Darcy obeys to the etiquette which required that

a single girl who has lost her father, the authority of the family, lives with an older lady. "Since her father's death, her home has been London, where a lady lives with her, and superintends her education." (105).

We note a certain rivalry between mothers in *Pride and Prejudice*. In their fear of seeing their daughters unmarried, mothers live a situation of competition in which each mother shows all the assets of her daughter for the conquest of the perfect gentleman. This relationship can be perceived between Mrs Bennet and Lady Lucas. One of the weapons on which Mrs Bennet relies to establish a dominance of her daughters over those of the Lucas is this Victorian conception of beauty. Thus, she even boasts of the beauty of her daughters by comparing them to Lucas girls: "Oh! dear, yes; but you must own she is very plain. Lady Lucas herself has often said so, and envied me Jane's beauty. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, Jane--one does not often see anybody better looking. It is what everybody says. I do not trust my own partiality." (57). She also tolerates Mrs Long's nieces because she knows they are not pretty and, therefore, pose no danger to Jane. "I do think Mrs. Long is as good a creature as ever lived – and her nieces are very pretty behaved girls, and not at all handsome: I like them prodigiously." (420). In *Rebecca*, when Mrs Van Hopper saw Mr De Winter's interest in her companion, she plays both the role of a harridan and a rival. She uses accomplishment's skills to dominate her.

The relationships between women could even deteriorate when one of them became the *Household general* through marriage. Both Austen and Du Maurier describe the reactions of the characters who previously suffered the superiority of others but who, by a reversal of situation, rose to the top of the social hierarchy. Having knowledge of the threat that Charlotte might pose when she married Mr Collins, to whom Longbourn would return at the death of Mr Bennet, Mrs Bennet changed her attitude towards the latter. "The sight of Miss Lucas was odious to her. As her successor in that house, she regarded her with jealous abhorrence." (166-167). At the announcement of Charlotte's marriage, we see the harsh words she spoke to Lady Lucas and her daughter. This similarity is present in *Rebecca* in which Mrs Van Hopper, surprised by the proposal to the future Mrs de Winter, reminds the new Mrs de Winter of her young age, her immaturity. In addition, on page 43, Du Maurier's heroine reveals her feelings: "Mrs Van Hopper and the afternoon did not matter a flip of the finger. It would pass so quickly, and there would be tonight and another day tomorrow. I was cocksure, jubilant; at that moment I almost had the courage to claim equality." With the coming of her marriage, the future Mrs de Winter aware of her change of status and class sees herself as Mrs Van Hopper's equal.

Victim of this Victorian notion of 'plain' or 'handsome', other women like Mary Bennet or Mrs Van Hopper find accomplishment as a mode of competition. At another level in *Pride and Prejudice*, there is another atmosphere of conflict and competition. This time it is between single women in search of a husband. Etiquette, the set of qualities defined on page 56 and which an "accomplished" woman should possess, constitutes the last resort for women like Mary Bennet to attract a potential husband because of their lack of beauty. Mary shows her know-how at ceremonies: "she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display." (32). However, this demonstration of accomplishment is seen by others as a way of reminding other characters of their inferiority as seen with Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

In Du Maurier's novel, this perception of the young woman as accomplished or educated led some men to focus their discussions on subjects related to teaching: "Her men-friends would assume a sort of forced heartiness and ask me jocular questions about history or painting, guessing I had not left long school and that this would be my only form of conversation." (22) This reflects the male perception of the young girl at the age of marriage or at the door of high society. Indeed, the narrator summarizes her skills as follows:

*We were saved a retreat into the past, and I had learnt my lesson. Read English news, yes, and English sport, politics, and pomposity, but in future keep the things that hurt to myself alone. They can be my secret indulgence. My hobby is less tedious, if as strange. I am a mine of information on the English countryside. I know the name of every owner of every British moor, yes - and their tenants too. I know how many grouse are killed, how many partridge, how many head of deer. (10-11)*

Despite her college education aimed at acquiring a certain knowledge in history, culture, geography, etc., she lacks social skills in the various social events and meetings that rhythm aristocratic life. The heroin is victim of her lack of accomplishment and her ignorance of conventions.

In this rivalry, we also have a relation of dominance related to their economic situation. Thus, the relationships between characters can be analysed in the context of class consciousness. Caroline Bingley, aware of Georgiana Darcy's superior status compared to that of Jane Bennet, interfered in the relationship between her and her brother, Mr Bingley, so as not to have Jane as her sister-in-law. Mrs Bennet shows that her daughters are superior to the Lucas girls about the domestic tasks they do while the former have maids.

Mrs Van Hopper, feeling the competition between her and heroine, tends to belittle her by reminding her of her social status and the suitors with whom she can evolve socially. *"What an odd, unsatisfactory child you are. I can't make you out. Don't you realize that at home girls in your position without any money can have the great fun? Plenty of boys and excitement. All in your own class. You can have your own little set of friends, and needn't be at my beck and call as much as you are here. I thought you didn't care for Monte?"* (47). Besides class difference, the relationships between women are sometimes reflected through the precariousness of women in a capitalist society. The author recalls on page 29 the lot of women in distress and without qualifications, sometimes placed in boarding houses or exposed to capitalists like Blaize.

In *Rebecca* even the servants or the hotels staff integrate this notion of class. In terms of treatments, Manderley's governess, until the end of the novel, did not accept the status of Manderley's new mistress, considering her as an *"interloper"* (110), and did not fail to let her know through the apartments she described as *"second-rate"* (76), her scorn and her frequent comparisons with Maxim's first wife. The conception of class inferiority is transferred to the hotel servers that distinguish the rich client from the poor client. It is translated on page 13 through a *"resentment"*, an *"obvious impatience"* and an *"indifference turned to familiarity, smirking and offensive"* when the heroine is with Mrs Van Hopper. This situation changed when the heroine sat down with the rich aristocrat, Maxim. They treated her with respect.

There are situations in which prejudice and gossip rage. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we note the strong prevalence of gossip that could be explained by the fact that it is often attributed to the orality that marks the female discourse as illustrated by Giselle Bastin in her article *"From Grand Récit to Petit Histoire: Exploring Historical Cleavage in Kate Grenville's Joan Makes History"*:

Spacks has argued convincingly, as have many other social and literary historians, that the word 'gossip' is now firmly established as a term that relates to female social linguistic behaviour. As a form of verbal exchange associated with women, gossip, and its close cousin 'anecdote', is defined as the type of talk that concerns itself with the trivialities of the domestic sphere... The notion of gossip as a feminised discourse is relevant, too, when considering it together with the concept of 'history', which has itself been attributed with feminine characteristics. (BASTIN, 2005)

Thus, women engage in gossip often motivated by a desire to attribute a certain superiority to others or by mere jealousy. With the abundance of gossip, the author seems to denounce certain vices more or less specific to the woman. Motivated by jealousy, some characters do it to denigrate others. This is how

Caroline tries to give Darcy a bad image of Elizabeth. “‘Elizabeth Bennet,’ said Miss Bingley, when the door was closed on her, ‘is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds; but, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art.’” (52).

In *Rebecca*, gossip boils down to what the narrator calls “a melting-pot of scandal and insinuation” (22). With the bridge sessions Mrs Van Hopper organizes with her friends, they engage in gossip and, sometimes, do not hesitate to initiate it with men. This is the case with Maxim when Mrs Van Hopper asks him about the success of marriage of a couple: “Tell me, is it true the Caxton-Hyslop marriage is not a success?’ She ran on, through a tangled fringe of gossip, never seeing that these names were alien to him, they meant nothing, and that as she prattled unaware he grew colder and more silent.” (20). As the narrator says on the page 14, gossip is her source of life: “gossip was the breath of life to her”.

We notice a certain snobbery in Mrs Bennet, who, believing Jane’s marriage imminent, tries to mock Lady Lucas by false wishes, thus finding a certain triumph. “She concluded with many good wishes that Lady Lucas might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it.” (126). Hence, Lady Lucas’ desire to triumph, to take revenge on Mrs Bennet by visiting her more than she usually did at the announcement of Charlotte’s marriage to Mr Collins. “Lady Lucas could not be insensible of triumph on being able to retort on Mrs. Bennet the comfort of having a daughter well married;” (163). In *Rebecca*, snobbery is embodied by Mrs Van Hopper. Like Mrs Bennet, she tries to dissuade Manderley’s future mistress by playing the card of honesty. Through a satirical description, the narrator exposes her vanity and shows how Mrs Van Hopper tries to discourage the future bride by reminding her of her “extremely sheltered life” (61), her shortcomings in accomplishment with her deficit in communication, her lack of experience and immersion in the aristocratic milieu such as the frequent parties at Manderley.

Despite personal motivations in the relationships between members of the same community, we can see that society intervenes in these relationships through certain rules. Jane Austen and Daphne Du Maurier highlighted Victorian spheres and skills that were promoted and which gangrened woman community. Besides this social study of women, a much narrower perspective of analysis that is the family setting could also contribute to a better understanding of their relationships.

## **2. Of Family Relationship and Companionship**

At a smaller dimension, women evolved in an environment ruled by family and more specific rules. The study of the familial relationship and companionship in the two novels can be analysed differently. Indeed, besides the

presence of family ties that exist in *Pride and Prejudice*, it prevails in *Rebecca* a situation in which the orphan heroine is under a tutelage through «companionship» and is also considered as an intruder in the high society.

The Bennet family is essentially a line of girls and represents an important framework in the study of family relationships between women. However, each woman has her own perception and character. Thus, the relationship between women changes according to their interactions and aspirations. Therefore, the role of the mother remains a very important element. Mrs Bennet's desire to marry her daughters and her concern for Longbourn's substitution for Mr Collins if Mr Bennet were to die are the dynamics of her relationship with her daughters. Under this influence of parental desire or miseducation, each child develops and identifies positively or negatively with regard to this institution which is parental authority.

We note in Austen's novel that it is the youngest who are most marked by their mother. Mary has, until the end of the novel, undergone a comparison between her and her sisters in terms of physical appearance. And as she was no longer impacted by comparisons between her sisters' beauty and her own, it was suspected by her father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance. Being less beautiful than her sisters, this constitutes a source of inferiority complex which she will necessarily want to overcome. On page 381, the author uses the word "*mortified*" to show the degree of impact of this comparison. This is what drives her to always demonstrate her 'accomplishment' to try to find a certain superiority. Thus, at the end of the novel, finding no one to compete with, as there was only Mrs Bennet at home, she ended up changing to reconnect with ordinary life.

With an unfortunate childhood, with the death of her father, shortly followed by her mother, the heroine chose to become a companion to win money and also get accomplished under the wings of Mrs Van Hopper. Du Maurier's main character is marked by the desire to escape the domination of the mother figure played by Mrs Van Hopper. She is trying to overcome the attempt to be relegated to a lower class. With an unexpected marriage with an older man and the break of the companionship, she was left to herself in a society prejudiced by a patriarchal conception of woman. She is also frequently reminded by the governess of her lack of accomplishment and her new status an interloper.

Between Elizabeth and Jane, we note a certain complicity. They have a confidence and a mutual respect that differentiates them from other sisters whose relations are dominated by jealousy – the pair formed by Lydia and Kitty – or by competition – Mary and the others. They will always be imbued with their frivolous minds. This fact is certainly due to Mrs Bennet's encouragement, which



reinforces their attitude. Rebecca represents the accomplished, manoeuvring and libertine woman. She is not submissive to any patriarchal marriage rules. The complicity in *Rebecca* only appears in the rapports between Rebecca and her governess who, even after the death of her boss, gives her an unfailing fidelity.

An opposition between mother and daughter prevails in *Pride and Prejudice*. Thus, in the relationship between Mrs Bennet and Elizabeth, the latter seems to represent quite the opposite of the first. This contrast could be confirmed by an analysis of the heroines that Adli Odeh made in Jane Austen's novels in his article entitled "Father Figures in the Novels of Jane Austen": "*Given the range of parenting styles, the heroines in Jane Austen's novels mature differently under their parents' tutelage.*" (ODEH, 2011). Elizabeth has forged a character different from parental authority. They even become an obstacle to the development of their children not only morally but also socially. This could be explained by Darcy's avowal to Elizabeth that her objection to the marriage of Mr Bingley and Jane was also due to the behaviour of the other members of the Bennet family.

The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father. Pardon me. It pains me to offend you. But amidst your concern for the defects of your nearest relations, and your displeasure at this representation of them, let it give you consolation to consider that, to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of the like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your elder sister, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both. (247)

In the same way Elisabeth's mother plagues her daughter through her behaviour and total want of propriety, Mrs Van Hopper equally inspires such a displeasure to her companion. She always devalues or humiliates her companion when she receives someone:

It meant I was a youthful thing and unimportant, and that there was no need to include me in the conversation. She always spoke in that tone when she wished to be impressive, and her method of introduction was a form of self-protection, for once I had been taken for her daughter, an acute embarrassment for us both. This abruptness showed that I could safely be ignored, and women would give me a brief nod which served as a greeting and a dismissal in one, while men, with large relief, would realize they could sink back into a comfortable chair without offending courtesy. » (16).

This relegation to something "*unimportant*" and what the heroine calls "*frequent agonies of youth*" (19) inspires the companion shame and even the need

to hide so that she is not associated with her indecent or uncivil behaviour or even to be subjected to the humiliation she feels every time her tutor receives someone.

Another differentiation created by society was called the rule of precedence. In the family as in the assemblies, the older sister had priority over the others. Thus, this priority was distinguished by the presentation of the family at the beginning of a ball in which she was introduced first and danced first and also on other occasions. The eldest was named after Miss like Jane who, in most of the novel, is called Miss Bennet. However, the marriage of a little sister could attribute to her this superiority. Lydia nourished in her this desire to marry before others so as to chaperone them in events such as balls or other social ceremonies. *"Lord! how I should like to be married before any of you; and then I would chaperone you about to all the balls."* (275). Thus, after marrying Wickham, she claimed this 'superiority' with a certain vanity. *'Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman.'* (388).

As in the analysis of the society, we see that there are also family rules. This denotes the presence of society from the smallest to the largest social unit with in particular the influence of patriarchy. Authors raised key issues such as woman conditions within the family with all the rivalries and injustice which prevailed. It is therefore under this domination of man that the characters as women will react.

### 3. A Feminist Vision of Characters

Authors of the novels address the feminist discourse around the theme of passion and reason. However, this idea of reason is considered in this Victorian society as a stereotype dedicated only to men, while women are described as marked by passion. Thus, each author, with different approaches, creates a plot that tries to deconstruct this patriarchal conception.

#### 3.1. *Modes of Rejection of Certain Values*

Faced with the stereotypes that patriarchal writing attributes to woman and through which she is described as a human being marked or even guided by emotions, Daphne Du Maurier and Jane Austen endow their female characters with different personalities with which they evolve in their milieu. Thus, they tend to either reject or conform to certain patriarchal conceptions.

Eliza has a certain intelligence that allows her to stand out from this masculine description of the woman as characterized by passion. However, in the discussion born from Mr Collins' marriage proposal, the stereotype that is most conveyed is this conception that the woman, sexually attractive, is

considered very dangerous and, therefore, represents a threat to man. Thus, when Mr Collins insists that she marries him, Elizabeth clearly edifies him that she would like him to consider her as a rational being. *'Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart.'* (138). She aspires to moral autonomy. Such a claim was advocated by a famous feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, who formulated it in her work entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*:

But I still insist, that not only the virtue, but the KNOWLEDGE of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the SAME means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of HALF being, one of Rousseau's wild chimeras. (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2002)

The non-conformist attitude of Eliza also manifests itself through her carelessness about accomplishments. From the first chapters, Elizabeth expresses reservations about the observance of this accomplishment which is described by Caroline and Mr Hurst as always present in many women. She said, *"I am no longer surprised at you knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any."* (51). She embodies the woman who is not 'accomplished' and sometimes shows a lack of perfection as in her performance on the piano, which is one of the valued skills of accomplishment. She admits not to practice the piano as other women do. *"But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault – because I will not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."* (220).

Du Maurier creates the character of Rebecca who displays all the qualities of an accomplished woman that society promotes, that is to say, the one that embodies the three qualities that Beatrice recalls on page 269: *"breeding, brains, and beauty"*. However, she embodies the beautiful and dangerous woman with a disproportionate intelligence. She is portrayed as the perfect woman in the eyes of society but deceives her husband. The author shows the artificial character of the image of the *"social butterfly"* (99), the perfect woman who clearly shows accomplishment but who, inwardly, is *"incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency"* (269). Rebecca is guided by her intelligence and manages to deceive the society that sees in her the model woman.

Indeed, aware of the role of the woman in aristocratic marriage and of the weight of social prejudices on her husband, she considers marriage as a *"farce"* (269) and, thus, sums up the role of the wife as follows: *"Come to Manderley, open the place, have fun, make our marriage look like a success of the century."* (271). She was free to lead a life of adultery after understanding, on the one hand, Maxim's fear

of the “shame and degradation” that divorce would cause him and, on the other hand, his aristocratic attachment to his property, as Maxim admits: “*I put Manderley first, anything before else. And it does not prosper, this kind of love.*” (271). Rebecca precociously develops skills such as “*the courage and spirit of a boy*” (241) and is “*as clever and full of tricks as someone of eighteen*” (241) early on to assert herself. Like Jack, her cousin, she has always cultivated within herself this refusal to submit to someone’s orders, as her governess confirms: “*He had too much spirit to obey orders, like my lady.*” (242). This predestined her to become a woman who did not follow the rules of marriage.

The heroine of Austen’s novel, characterized by certain elements of non-conformism, has built its own conception of marriage. Elizabeth does not understand the conception of matrimony that other women have. She doesn’t think marriage is the only purpose of a woman. Despite threats from her mother that she could not support him after Mr Bennet’s death, she continues to act with reason. She does so without sinking into a depression like other women in the novel who, afraid of ending up single, “*would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage*” (160). Sometimes, they would offer “*a most humiliating picture*” (160), degrading themselves as is the case with Charlotte. Elizabeth does not want marriage to be a means of acquiring the benefits that it can offer. She highlights the importance of love and reason in marriage.

The deconstruction of the deprivation of woman property rights is depicted in both novels. Mrs Bennet represents this female voice protesting against certain rules of inheritance that do not benefit women. She repeatedly deplored the fact that Longbourn must return to Mr Collins at the death of her husband and not to her daughters. “*I do think it is the hardest thing in the world, that your estate should be entailed away from your own children; and I am sure, if I had been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it.*” (79). And the paroxysm of her indignation can be felt through this commentary of the author. “*Jane and Elizabeth tried to explain to her the nature of an entail. They had often attempted to do it before, but it was a subject on which Mrs. Bennet was beyond the reach of reason, and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about.*” (79). Lady Catherine was saved from this law of male primogeniture succession. This notion of inheritance recurs in *Rebecca*. “*Vicious*” (269), Rebecca even insinuates a pregnancy and arouses in Maxim the idea of a possible inheritance of Manderley by a son born of a relationship out of marriage and impossible to prosecute.

Non-conformism is expressed through a capitalist Victorian society. It is embodied by the young companion who refuses commissions. The narrator describes a bribe situation in which Blaize gives a commission to the heroine for the purpose of encouraging her to lead her employer to Blaize's shop. Through the revulsion and refusal of the heroine about this proposal, Maxim reminds her of two possible choices: "*You will either have to give in, and become a sort of Blaize yourself, or stay as you are and be broken.*" (29). The work she chose was subject to this kind of corruption and that, once inside, the employee had to either indulge in or remain in poverty.

Not having taken advantage of their honeymoon to buy dresses for the new Mrs de Winter, Maxim criticizes women: '*Most women think of nothing but clothes,*' he said absently (64). Now married, Manderley's new mistress rejects this label etiquette about the constant renewal of clothing: "*It doesn't matter to me, as long as you don't mind,*' I said. (64). However, when undergoing class inferiority, she wished to have beautiful dresses.

### 3.2. Some Elements of Conformism

Besides characters showing non-conformism in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Rebecca*, some women choose a certain observance of patriarchal rules. In fact, women who do not have the qualities required in this aristocratic society display a certain conformism. Accomplishment, thus, becomes a quest for the young woman and represents a means of domination for those accomplished.

With an incomplete training on the rules of the upper class and being an orphan, Du Maurian heroine tries to conform to these standards and to surpass herself to meet the criteria of accomplishment and get rid of the treatment as a child. Manderley has the final role of achieving the heroine's quest. It ensures the new Mrs De Winter with the different codes and value necessary for her evolution in her new community. Therefore, communication through writing and language represent important tools for convention. Mrs De Winter had to depart from "*schoolgirls' phrases*" (122) and difficulties about how to "*frame my sentence*" (16). Her way of writing also impacted her as she remarked: "*I noticed for the first time how cramped and unformed was my own handwriting; without individuality, without style, uneducated even, the writing of an indifferent pupil taught in a second-rate school.*" (89). Women in *Pride and Prejudice* also had to excel in the art of writing letters. Caroline Bingley tries to show her mastery in letter writing to make impression on Mr Darcy.

Caroline Bingley and Mrs Hurst defend the existence of many accomplished women in their society. They are ready to denigrate anyone who does not conform to this etiquette. Eliza underwent their severe criticism when

she doubted about the existence of many women who live according to this 'accomplishment' or when she entered the house of the Bingley all soiled. However, Lady Catherine, Mrs Van Hopper and Mrs Danvers seem to be the most marked by this conformism. They always display their talents as judges and allow themselves to give advice or reproach to anyone who has not been educated in this respect or who does not practice any activity that an accomplished woman would exercise. Lizzy experienced it when she finished playing the piano in front of the assembly. Lady Catherine reproached her and denounced the fact that Mrs Bennet did not hire a governess or a person to teach them certain rules or activities related to accomplishment such as the piano. Mrs Van Hopper, the tutor, minimizes the heroine through her lack of accomplishment. As for Mrs Danvers, she maintained the rivalries between the ghost of Rebecca and the new Mrs de Winter. Her comparisons encompass the latter's level of accomplishment, behaviours with her lack of poise, grace and assurance, tastes and even her apartments.

The image of the angel as the submissive woman or her docility was an essential criterion in the Victorian marriage. However, it was perceived as a symbol of inferiority by feminists. Contrarily to Rebecca who epitomizes the rebel woman, the unnamed heroine reflected some docility. Therefore, this could result in a state of inferiority symbolizing in her eyes a child treatment. As a result, the new lady of Manderley tried to react against her husband's high society and paternal actions. Therefore, her wish to become a woman is described as follows: "*I wish I was a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls.*" (39). Her perception that she would not be mocked if she was "thirty-six" and was dressed differently shows her conception that she would gain respect if she had these social criteria.

On the other hand, a community that considers her as too young to be married and the treatment of an older husband suggesting her an assimilation to a child boosts her will to assert herself as an adult woman. In fact, Maxim sometimes uses paternal gestures that exasperate his wife. He patted Mrs De Winter on the shoulders, what she resented since she felt as being treated "*as a child*" (194). But that treatment peaked when she said, "*The smile was my reward. Like a pat on the head in Jasper. Good dog then, lie down, don't worry me any more. I was still Jasper. I was back where I was before. I took a piece of crumpet and split it between the two dogs.*" (118). It's like being docile like a dog. The female maturity in the character remains a perpetual quest of the *Household general* of the house and pushes her to develop a certain duality on the psychological level.

Indeed, through the metafictional device and through an analysis of the *states of the Self* as coined by Eric Berne (1961), she becomes aware of two types of

personality. She tries to get rid of her *Self* as the Child and to embody the *self* as the Adult: "And then I open the door and go to the dining room, where he is sitting waiting for me at a table, and I think how in that moment I have aged, passed on, how I have advanced one step towards an unknown destiny. We smile, we choose our lunch, we speak of this and that, but -I say to myself -I am not she who left him five minutes ago. She stayed behind. I am another woman, older, more mature..." (46). This representation of the *Self* shows, on the temporal scale, a rapid change between the nomadic girl staying from hotel to hotel and the mature woman, the mistress of Manderley.

In the portrayal of the inferiority complex, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Caroline Bingley embodies what she reproaches Eliza in a gossip with Mrs Hurst. "Elizabeth Bennet," said Miss Bingley, when the door was closed on her, "is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art." (52). She devalues her sex by giving herself a status of woman inferior to that of men, represented here by Darcy, just to gain male approval; what Gilbert and Gubar (1996) theorized about Austen's critique of female cult of weakness and dependence.

In the Bennet family, Mary seems to be the most accomplished. But this observance of accomplishment is perhaps due to the fact that she is not very pretty. She obeys the value which promotes that a woman must be intelligent and perfect herself through reading. "And to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading." (56). And she tries, in every discussion, to illustrate her words through her readings to be sensible. As with the piano, which is an activity specific to this spirit of accomplishment, she never ceases to show her talent especially in front of an audience.

In woman characterization, authors depicted female characters' attitudes towards a patriarchal society reflecting, consequently, either conformism or non-conformism. It is an opportunity for woman writers to deconstruct perceptions and, above all, rules that men exerted on women in the Victorian period. Marriage, property rights, accomplishments, class consciousness, among others, represented the burden of those female characters.

## Conclusion

The study of this novel, which focused on the women community and relationships in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Rebecca* has somehow revealed the place of women in Victorian writings. It confirmed our hypotheses regarding, firstly, the place of women as being at the core of Victorian novels' plot and social

organization, secondly, the determination of female characters' relations by their social milieu and also the shaping of their reactions towards rules or values.

This comparative study of these novels, in a way, revealed the conditions of the Victorian woman that Jane Austen and Daphne Du Maurier did not fail to show. It allowed to determine, to a certain extent, the specificity of this community of women. It was also an opportunity to analyse their particular family and societal relationships. Moreover, this makes it possible to study their problems especially in the light of rivalry, but also their perceptions, which are aroused by the patriarchal society. This allows us to better understand their different reactions to their situations with, on the one hand, a non-conformism rejecting mannish social prejudices and, on the other hand, a conformism pertaining to psychological or submissive attitudes.

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