ANALYZING READER RESPONSE TO THE PLOTLINES OF SECONDARY CHARACTERS IN JANE AUSTEN’S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND *NORTHANGER ABBEY* THROUGH WALTER FISHER’S NARRATIVE PARADIGM

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Abstract

Humans communicate lessons and messages through multiple mediums; including the written word. Classic novels transcend time and continue to reach out to generations of people to offer insight into human nature. The best stories can maintain relevance years after they have been created. This has been true for Jane Austen’s novels. Her works have received much criticism and research over the last 200 years with screen and book adaptations, as well as fan clubs and societies. Where much of the research emphasis is on the main characters or themes, there is a lack of information about the effect of secondary characters on the reader. This thesis was a three part study in which literary criticism and Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm were used to analyze reader reactions to Charlotte Lucas in Pride and Prejudice and John Thorpe in Northanger Abbey. Twenty-five articles and books with opinions on the novels were reviewed to learn how the movements and actions of secondary characters influence audience response. The results show that the message and moral of the secondary characters created a passionate and measureable response in a qualitative format. The feedback is explored in depth and offers new insights into Jane Austen’s novels.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Importance of Study

Very few authors can boast the amount of popularity Jane Austen has claimed posthumously. She maintains her relevance in today's society because of the universal themes of her novels: love, marriage, money, betrayal, family, tradition, occupation, and even where to vacation. The idea of motive in a person is also a well-known concept. The secondary characters in Austen's stories are not much different from the readers of the novels and choosing which part a person most relates to shows relevance in understanding the messages the books reveal.

Scholars and fans alike continue to find new ways to view the novels and the author. This thesis will use narrative criticism and Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm (1987) to explore specific secondary characters and the role their motives and plotlines play in the audience's response. Using a methodology that is less popular along with a topic not seen on such a large scale study (though individual studies of a few of these characters have been done) will be important to this group of people. The JASNA website boasts 4,000 members to date in the United States (these are paying members) – though there are also organizations in the UK and Australia, as well.

The narrative analysis and narrative paradigm will highlight the brilliance of Jane Austen as a satirical author who understood human nature and the value of a character – no matter what their part. The importance of the exploration that the subplot affected the reader, along with the story, will create a new area of interest into her works and continue in the long tradition of researching an author who intrigues and entertains around the world. With special attention to how the audience perceives this character, the thesis author hopes to gain new insight and relevance into the story that she tells with a communication based theory which emphasizes
importance on narrative links and rationality, clarifying the importance of secondary motive and audience perception.

Statement of Problem

Jane Austen and her works have received various forms of research and criticism. Investigations into characters, plotlines, her life, feminist theory, satirical inquisitions are well documented over the past 30-50 years. However, communication based theories have not been used to provide insights into Austen’s work. Fisher (1987) writes that “we do arrive at conclusions based on ‘dwelling in’ dramatic and literary works. We come to new beliefs, reaffirmations of old ones, reorient our values, and may even be led to action” (p. 158). This infers that understanding how readers receive the messages in Austen’s novels is a viable avenue to examine.

The purpose of the thesis is to analyze Jane Austen’s secondary characters and subplots and what these particular stories communicate to the reader. Additionally, the thesis will explore the response the message prompted from the audience (i.e., are they cheering for these characters or dismissing them and their actions)? An investigation into the motive that the secondary characters have within two of her novels, Pride and Prejudice (1813) and Northanger Abbey (1817), and the effect this had on themselves and the overall story will be examined. To achieve answers for this study, the use of the narrative criticism will examine the subplots in the stories while the narrative paradigm will examine how their outcomes created appropriate reactions from the audience.

Definition of Terms

Audience: People who have read and reacted to Jane Austen’s novels.
Narrative Analysis/ Narrative Criticism: The term is used interchangeably and is the theory behind analyzing the secondary character.

Narrative Paradigm: Created by Walter Fisher, this is the theory used to explore the message communicated from the stories.

Reader: People who have read and reacted to Jane Austen’s novels.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One has introduced the topic of Jane Austen, her stories, and reviewing the audience reaction with a communication theory. Chapter Two provides an in-depth literary analysis that explores the topic by investigating the author, context in her novels, the characters being explored, and reader responses. Chapter Three reviews the scope and methodology of the thesis. This outlines the theories and process used to analyze the data. Chapter Four provides the data collected and outlines the results in regards to the research questions. Chapter Five concludes with a review of limitations, further areas of study, and a conclusion of the research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction and Theory

The purpose of this study is to review reader/audience reactions to the subplots of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey* using Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm. Investigating the message she was communicating beyond the main storyline is important in understanding the deeper messages the novel had, and still has, to her readership. To achieve this, attention will be paid to the role of specific secondary characters, their storyline, outcome, and the impact this has on the novel. The use of narrative criticism will analyze the characters role by reviewing their actions in the story’s world.

In addition to the secondary character examination, research into Jane Austen’s life and times will be explored. This will be necessary to comprehend the Regency era (late 1700’s to early-mid 1800’s) in relation to the choices these characters made. According to Walter Fischer (1987), a reader can/will determine a book’s authenticity and message by “(a) the reliability of the narrator; (b) the words or actions of other characters; and (c) the descriptions of characters, scenes, and events” (p. 175). Therefore, Jane Austen herself needs to be proven a reliable author/narrator in her novels to aid in using the Narrative Paradigm as a resource.

To understand the audience reaction to the secondary character message, a variety of reviews and criticisms will be explored to assess how the stories were understood. For the thesis, Austen’s work is read as satirical in nature and highly regarded for her ability to create realistic situations and characters. Though there is much work in the feminist criticism (some is reviewed for research), the purpose is to focus more on the feelings and messages taken away from the stories, not the genre the message may be defined by.
Finally, a deeper look at the Narrative Paradigm, as well as narrative analysis is considered for this study. Fisher is the primary theorist for the Narrative Paradigm (1984). However, narrative criticism/analysis has multiple authors that were explored due to the broader scope of the field. Guidance for building the model to better define the character’s role was important in creating a greater understanding that their part played. To answer the question for the thesis – “how do readers react to the motives of secondary characters” (and the effect it has on the heroines and heroes of the novel), defining the character and their role is beneficial in assessing responses from the audience.

2.2 Philosophical Assumption

From the earliest constellations in Greek Mythology to the Tall Tales of American folk writers, humans have used stories to teach lessons. Words are used to communicate history and warn of vices, but often with a sense of entertainment. However, the messages in the stories normally have a purpose and the person or characters who tell the story need to be credible. The Greeks created the term “logos”, which means “word” and “refers to the internal consistency of the message--the clarity of the claim, the logic of its reasons, and the effectiveness of its supporting evidence” (Bean & Ramage, 1998, p.81). “According to Aristotle, our perception of a speaker or writer’s character influences how believable or convincing we find what that person has to say” (Fahnestock, n/d). Fisher (1987), who created the Narrative Paradigm, based much of his work on the idea of logos. He wrote that “we do arrive at conclusions based on ‘dwelling in’ dramatic and literary works. We come to new beliefs, reaffirmations of old ones, reorient our values and may even be led to action” (p. 158). Jane Austen’s novels, along with the works of hundreds of thousands of other literary writers, influence and communicate ideas to readers every day through traditional and non-traditional channels (books, online, radio, television, and
movies). Since human beings are storytellers (Fisher, 1984), finding validity and a connection within the plotlines, real or fictitious, is important in deriving the full meaning of the story.

This study assumes that the actions of the secondary characters in Austen’s novels have an important message to communicate to the audience. This thesis aims to analyze the reactions of the readers to secondary character motives through literary analysis and Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm. Though there may be issues with lack of direct reference to the characters, research will be done to provide an accurate analysis of the character’s role in the novel through historical and contextual sources. The goal of this study is to add new perspective to Austen’s novels in addition to providing information and new insights into her classic works.

2.3 Jane Austen’s Life

To be able to successfully investigate Austen’s novels, background into the author and her life should be first looked at to acquaint the researcher with who Ms. Austen was. Part of the Narrative Paradigm (which will be looked at in greater detail later in this chapter) includes determining whether or not the message of the story is acceptable based on the reliability of the narrator (Fisher, 1987, p. 175). As Austen voiced the characters as well as created their world, background information on the author will help in the analysis of her stories.

Three biographies were reviewed to research Austen. Up until about 1870, not much was known about the author. As Goldwin Smith’s (1890) biography points out, “Twenty years ago it was remarked in the presence of her family that almost as little was known about her as about Shakespeare. Not long afterwards appeared a memoir of her by her nephew, Mr. Austen-Leigh” (p. 12). Fortunately, much has been researched since then with multiple sources available to use. For the purpose of this thesis, however, these three were chosen for their well-researched content and perspective on Austen’s life.
Jane Austen was born in Hampshire, England, on December 16, 1775. She had six siblings – five brothers and one sister. Her father, George, was a clergyman and her mother, Cassandra, the daughter of one. The Austen family was not wealthy. According to Tomalin (1997), “George was heavily in debt, owing money on all sides” (p. 7). He was borrowing money from multiple sources and his income of £210 a year could not sustain his large family. Because of this, George Austen taught young men and used his small house as a boarding school. It can be deduced that a young Jane would have been predominantly surrounded by boys having only a sister and mother at home. Though her lead characters are women, there are plenty of men in her stories, especially in the sub-plots.

Entertainment in the Austen household took the form of plays and books amongst the other outdoor games. The children were encouraged to express themselves in writings and not heavily regulated in their choice of leisure. As Shields (2001) points out,

As a child, Jane Austen would have participated in family readings or, at the very least, would have found the latest novels displayed in her parents’ parlor…Her father was not inclined toward the role of censor, or perhaps he was preoccupied; in any case, he allowed his daughter to read what she liked. (p. 27)

Jane’s oldest brother, James, was considered the writer of the family and even wrote and published a shortly lived weekly paper called *The Loiterer* (Shields, 2001, p.29). The family enjoyed these poems and stories and everyone, including Jane, were encouraged to participate. Her writing started at a young age and continued until she could no longer do so around the time of her death in 1817.

Criticism against Austen occurs mostly against her lack of experience. Some critics feel she led a boring and secluded life which detracts from the novels. However, as Tomalin (1999)
quotes Jane Austen’s great-nephews, “The uneventful nature of the author’s life...has been a
good deal exaggerated” (p. xiii). Jane Austen led a full and busy life. She was surrounded by
family whose professions are noted in her novels (clergymen, landed gentry, navy captains). She
received one marriage proposal (which she accepted and turned down much like her heroine in
*Mansfield Park*) and had her own summer love in the visitor, Tom Lefroy (Shields, 2001;
Tomalin, 1999). She lived in Hampshire, Bath, Chawton and spent time in London. She also
frequently resided at her brothers and cousins homes to help with children.

It cannot be overlooked that Jane Austen was not in some ways limited. The description
of Goldwin Smith’s (1890) Chapter IX reads as follows:

Jane Austen’s novels regarded as a whole: no hidden meaning or philosophy in them; she
only made the familiar and commonplace interesting and amusing; their style the same
throughout; the plots generally well sustained, though unsensational; the heroines more
interesting and better drawn than the heroes, but the secondary characters the best; Jane
Austen’s narrow range of observation cause partial reoccurrences of characters and
incidents, but Lord Macaulay claims each character is distinct; though her subjects were
commonplace and trivial, her genius has made them bright for ever. (p. 9)

While Shields and Tomalin would disagree with some of the assessment, Smith’s description
does allow to consider some fault in her work in the singling out of the narrow scope and similar
storylines. However, these novels, which he does call “genius” in 1890, certainly have
maintained their draw and familiarity with her audience.

The importance in fully knowing the subject material allows for a more thorough
research into the books and characters she created while showing credibility in her writing. The
obvious downside to any of these biographies is there is always assumption involved. Cassandra
Austen, Jane’s sister, burned many of the letters Jane wrote to her and the audience of her writings was left with little information. However, these biographies drew from multiple sources and created resources to examine what information is available about the author. The data about the time period as well as her day to day life provides evidence of her authority on the topics she was writing about. In addition, as the narrative criticism will examine the lives of secondary characters, much can be drawn from what Austen was satirizing about.

2.4 Jane Austen and Her Six Novels

During her lifetime, Jane Austen completed six full length novels – *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and *Persuasion* (1817). Though she has been popular for the last 20-30 years, her rise of fame is somewhat an interesting study in itself. Mazzeno (2011) does a remarkable job of reviewing historical information when it comes to audience perceptions. The earliest reviews for her books being “more along the lines of appreciation rather than critical commentary” (p. 12).

Throughout the next two hundred years, Austen would have her fair share of fans and foes. From the disdain of the Bronte’ sisters to the praise of Rudyard Kipling, she managed to stay in the radar of the literary community long enough to start receiving attention from a general audience. *Pride and Prejudice* was first adapted for film in 1940 (Brownstein, 2001, p.14). Though not necessarily accurate to the book, the names and characters were enough to start bringing Austen to the masses – beyond schools and professors. According to Troost and Sayre’s research (2001), “Andrew Wright…lists more than sixty radio, television, film and stage productions of Austen’s various works between 1900 and 1975” (p. 2). Austen may not have received a lot of attention while she could enjoy it, but her relevancy throughout history and in our culture is strongly apparent.
As for the novels themselves, each of the six stories has comparable themes and tones. With the exception of *Emma*, all the novels include a middle class family with a pretty daughter (if not more) who may or may not be in love with the hero right away, but will eventually by the end of the story. Additionally, there is a bad guy, usually the other suitor, who ends up making quite the point when it comes to judging people. Some of the heroines do the assessment better than others. However, this thesis is not looking at the heroine – but the friend, bad boy, sister, cousin– the secondary characters that don’t make out as well in the end.

Because it is true that each of these novels had a similar happy ending for the heroine in the story by finding and obtaining a hero who could make her eternally happy (i.e., “the marriage plot” – Hinnant, 2006; Morris, 2001), there has been a range of topics investigated. As much dedication as there has been given to biographies (Shields, 2001; Smith, 1890; Tomalin, 1997) feminist criticism (Morrison, 1994; Showalter, 1977), gender roles (Morris, 2001), and historical factors (Le Faye, 2002; Pool, 1993; Todd, 2005), the role that the secondary characters and their importance in the novels are surprisingly less directly written about.

Though it may appear limited, there is an abundance of material that includes an evaluation of a character or situation. Both positive and negative assessments towards the plots of secondary characters are mentioned or highlighted. For example, before breaking into Lockean Ideals for the primary characters, Martin (2008) calls Charlotte Lucas – best friend of the heroine in *Pride and Prejudice* – “a lazy cynic” for her belief on happiness in marriage being a matter of chance. Martin’s critique of Charlotte’s personal choice in marrying her best friend’s rejected suitor is more of a personal reaction. She doesn’t evaluate the entire situation or the whole character in relation to the story. Ascarelli’s 2004 article, on the other hand, reviews the arrangement with a more modern tone. “Charlotte, who had neither Elizabeth’s good looks nor
her charm to trade on, knew an economic life raft when she saw one” (Persuasions Online, 2004, Vol 1). Her review has a deeper look into the feminist side of Charlotte - her personal situation as well as values during that time period. However, gut reactions like Martin’s are as important as evaluations like Ascarelli’s when it comes to Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm Theory.

2.5 Historical Context of Jane Austen’s Novels

With the continued flourish and interest that Jane Austen maintains in this century, some may forget that Austen wrote the majority of her novels between 1795 and 1816. Her themes, “freedom and constraint, fancy versus reason, and love and marriage” (Melani, 2009) have withstood time for many people with little force or defense needed on why she wrote her stories as she did. Nonetheless, for critics who found fault with her plots or characters, much can be discovered in comparing the books to the life she was living at that time.

Pool (1993) and Todd (2005) offer a lot of well researched detail into the lifestyle of those living in England during the 1800’s. Pool’s general overview of this time period offers more common explanations - from the difference between a parlormaid and a housemaid to entailment and protecting the family estate, he explains a great deal of what everyday life was like during Austen’s era. For example, if someone tried to understand the psyche of why Willoughby (in Sense and Sensibility) chose to quickly marry a woman of large fortune instead of the woman he was extremely passionate about, then that person could look no further than page 85 of Pool’s book to gain an understanding in the importance of money and land ownership versus spending beyond your yearly allowance.

Jane Austen in Context edited by Jane Todd (2005) but made up of multiple contributors that range from professors to authors to researchers and lecturers. The focus is specifically on what happens in the novels which covers, like Pool, a broad range of topics. The breakdown of
landownership, for example, is done through specific characters. Understanding why Mr. Bennet has to entail his house away to his less than popular cousin, Mr. Collins, in *Pride and Prejudice* contributes to the more realistic world of her novels. “The Austen fictional economy draws on a real economy in a state of rapid and unsettling transition” (p. 317). Since most of the characters that settle do so for comfort, it is necessary to accept that Austen was writing about the world she knew.

Le Faye (2002) focuses on Austen’s novels, as well as the time that she lived in. Her beautifully illustrated book brings life to Austen characters and their stories, as well as pointing out some of the confusion that critics may draw on. For example, *Northanger Abbey*, with its gothic tones and unromantic heroine, was originally considered a spoof. “*Northanger Abbey*, though still amusing today, would have been amusing in a rather different way to its first readers, because it was written as a deliberate parody of the very popular ‘horrid’ novels of the period – what we would now call ‘thrillers’” (Le Faye, 2002, p. 205). Knowing that this particular novel was written in a style to satirize a popular cultural pleasure helps to put in context some of the character’s motives. The abrasive John Thorpe, for example, fits well into the part of villain (which is reviewed later in this chapter).

Though extremely important, Jane Austen’s treatment of the marriage proposal within her stories is mostly vague. A notable exception came from Mr. Collin’s dramatic proposal to Elizabeth Bennet - which, some can speculate he most likely said verbatim to Charlotte Lucas (Hansen, 2000). Hansen’s (2000) article takes a rhetorical approach to investigating the persuasion behind these different marriages proposals – mostly from the heroes and heroines, but also to the secondary characters. This research goes into rhetoric in the 18th century. A historical
perspective of how writing and persuasion were viewed. Hansen’s work helps explain and defend the method Austen used in writing one of the most significant parts of her novels.

Additionally, articles on professions during Austen’s era (Drum, 2009), a woman’s place in society (Swords, 1988), as well as a man’s place (Morrisan, 1994; Morris, 2001) offered insights from experts and fans of Austen that further detail the time period. To explain the secondary character’s role in moving the plot and understanding that their moves and motivations were realistic allows for Austen’s novels to showcase the satirical, believable and deeper meaning that some of her audience may miss. It is important to understand why a country woman would settle for a man whom she would never be fully happy with. Diving into the roles of men and women and their options explain the messages being communicated. It also further adds proof that Austen was writing acceptable plots during her time period that were recognized and understood. Though current audiences might see the plotlines as peculiar, the universal themes have still withstood the decades and maintain a solid consistency with the human reaction to the stories.

2.6 Secondary Characters

As mentioned earlier in the paper, finding articles that specifically discuss the secondary characters are few and far between. But finding articles and books on broader topics that encompass secondary characters in Jane Austen’s novels are not. In addition to historical and personal information, there are many great resources to help explain and build information on the plotlines and stories their roles had.

As Hinnant (2006) writes, “She has been rightly praised for the way she differentiates between the various characters in her novels, but there is no reason why the same observation cannot be made about the various plots and sub-plots within the novels” (p. 295). His article
discusses “seven different models of courtship and romance” (p. 295) in defense of Austen’s often criticized marriage plot. He additionally discusses the “movement from illusion to reality” (p. 299). This is important when understanding negative reactions from readers when Charlotte Lucas (best friend of the heroine in *Pride and Prejudice*) chooses to marry Mr. Collins (cousin/hopeful suitor of heroine in *Pride and Prejudice*) or the contempt for the selfish and loud John Thorpe (friend and hopeful suitor in *Northanger Abbey*).

If the point of the heroines and heroes is to end the novel being happy and extremely content emotionally, intellectually and monetarily, than the point of the secondary character is to help make that happen. As Martin (2008) points out in *Austen’s Assimilation of Lockean Ideals: The Appeal of Pursuing Happiness*, “Happiness not only pervades the “very texture” of Austen’s novels (Gross 203), but it is situated as a potential prize for all her protagonist”. Showalter (1977) described a feminist article she read titled “Marriage as a Trade”. “Hamilton…explored the theory that women writers viewed romance from an economic perspective, so that their love stories were not frivolous fantasies, but accounts of female survival” (p. 225). Such is the case for Charlotte Lucas – Martin’s “lazy cynic”. Charlotte was past her prime when it came to finding a husband (around 28) and Mr. Collins, as disagreeable a character as he is, was her shot at a comfortable home. Some characters were not made to find complete happiness – and that’s what helps make the story believable.

As Rodi (2012) points out, “Jane Austen was – is – a sly subversive, a clear-eyed Darwinist, and the most unsparing satirist of her century” (p.1). This paper will research the reactions of the audience to the motives of secondary characters, accepting Austen as a satirist and not specifically a feminist author, again allows for the subtle use of her secondary characters misfortunate matches to take shape within the story.
Marriage is in every Austen novel and the route of settling for most of the secondary characters. Willoughby settled for Ms. Grey (*Sense and Sensibility*), Charlotte settled for Mr. Collins (*Pride and Prejudice*), Maria Bertram settled for Mr. Rushworth (*Mansfield Park*), Mr. Elton settled for Augusta Hawkins (*Emma*), Charles Musgrove settled for Mary Musgrove (*Persuasion*). The only novel without an obvious relationship/marriage between secondary characters is *Northanger Abbey* (though marriage still comes at the conclusion for the heroine).

Exploring this through White’s (1995) defense of the marriage proposal plot against critics who question Austen’s “cultural values” (p. 71) helps define the importance behind these connections in the story. Though the defense is mainly in the use of marriage as the ultimate reward, White points out key arguments against those who deem Austen’s novels as unsatisfactory. For some, marriage was a necessity. For others, it was expected. And, as Austen’s satirist side showcased, it can also be ultimate happiness.

### 2.7 Theories: Narrative Criticism and the Narrative Paradigm

Simply assessing reader reaction to Jane Austen’s novels would not provide a complete analysis for the overall message being communicated. Though reader interpretation is subject to opinion, Austen created her characters to provide a relatable story for her audience. The plotline of the secondary character has a motive. Though they may not make it to the final page, obviously they have substance enough to include their own explanations and endings. To evaluate these characters, a study of narrative criticism/analysis is approached to assess the character, their impact in the story, and their own ending (which is always less happy than the main characters).

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) discuss the critical impulse to doing a criticism – “people engage in criticism so that they better understand and appreciate rhetorical activity. The critic’s
desire for greater understanding and appreciation emerges from a fascination with human communication, born on the impulse to react to it and the curiosity to know more about how it works” (p. 8). There is a “quest for meaning” (p.9) and a need to learn new information. Exploring characters as actual humans who existed, though her works were non-fiction, can be possible. Austen created characters and relationships that are comparable to real life. Her works were not criticized for being far-fetched, only too close to the truth. Understanding that a criticism is “not like solving a mathematical problem: There is no single right answer or correct conclusion” (Rybacki and Rybacki, 1991, p. 12) helps to produce a realistic and more grounded study from the thesis author’s perspective. Using the information the thesis author found on the Regency period, on Jane Austen herself and reviewing past criticisms helps to put perspective on the characters and their motives, though it does leave room for future, deeper study in the criticism area.

According to Pedriana (2005), “Narratives are analytic stories. They present and analyze historical data as temporally lined sequences of action” (p. 351). The actions of the characters happen in a sequence that once taken into account and reviewed, they can be chronologically ordered into a “meaningful analytic whole” (Pedriana, 2005, p. 351). Fisher (1984) recognizes that narrative (narration) can be used in both historical and fictitious works.

By ‘narration’, I refer to a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination. (p. 2)

Pedriana (2005) and Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) hold much of their research in the non-literary format. However, their information and theories, as shown by Fisher, can transcribe into
the fictional world of Jane Austen. Additionally, Peter Abell’s work (2004) combined with Pedriana’s research will create the criticism used to analyze the secondary characters. Abell (2004) agrees with Pedriana that “narratives can be a form of explanation” (p. 288) and that “narratives (i.e., stories) concern chains of events or actions…leading to a conclusion (i.e., outcome) that is not predictable as a consequence of the interposition of a multitude of contingent events” (p. 289). Or, that the means of analyzing specific actions is necessary to help critique the character, his actions and endings in the story.

Pedriana (2005) states (and Abell alludes to) “when things happen…affects how they happen” (p. 352). Where meetings and plot twists and misdeeds arise continues to shape the story and the characters themselves. This is important for two reasons: 1. Austen was using this sub-plot for a specific message and 2. The importance in the decisions characters made and the motives behind it will directly lead to the audience’s interpretation of their story which creates a measureable criticism. However, this also gives the opportunity to evaluate the secondary characters through the use of Abell’s research and the di-graph method.


1. A finite set of descriptive states of the world ($W$). The set will include an outcome (or final state).
2. A weak order in time on set $W$ (the chronology of the states)
3. A finite set of actors ($A$).
4. A binary causal relation between some pairs of set $W$. The relations will run from earlier to later states of chronology on $W$. These ordered pairs may be referred to as events.
5. A finite set of actions \((a)\) that transform some elements of \(W\). The actions transform earlier to later states in the chronology of \(W\).

6. A map of set \(A\) onto set \(a\), showing which actor performs which action.

7. The structure of the narrative can then be represented by a di-graph, where the nodes are the set \(W\), and where there are two types of arcs on the exclusive subsets of \((W \times W)\) representing, respectively, causal events and action relations/transformations.

8. The narrative (di-graph) is an and graph, is acyclic, and may exhibit parallel processing.

Illustration of a Di-graph

![Di-graph Illustration](image)

**Figure 1 - Abell, 2004, p. 290**

What can be taken from this definition is that by following the secondary character and their actions, assessment can be done not only on their motive, but the effect it creates in the story. Recognizing the scenario that unfolds because of the sub-plot – i.e., marrying your best friend’s sort-of ex-suitor, or having an affair with a man in hopes of marrying into his fortune – turns the story in a different direction and creates multiple feelings for the audience/reader.
Outlining the story’s evolution for the secondary character creates an understanding of their role and the important part they play in making the story.

According to Fisher (1985), “the narrative paradigm is meant to reflect an existing set of ideas shared in whole or in part by scholars from diverse disciplines, particularly those whose work is informed or centers on narrativity” (p. 347). The thesis author restates this to coincide with the narrative criticism from Abell and Pedriana. It is important to understand that research on the story and characters needs to be done to properly assess the audience reactions and criticisms. “The narrative paradigm is a philosophical statement that is meant to offer an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication—assuming that all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories, as interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture and character” (Fisher, 1989, p. 57). By assessing the character’s actions and/through the descriptions of the narrator, a strong case can be examined for this study.

In order to use Fisher’s theory (1987), one must consider four things:

First is determining the message, the overall conclusions fostered by the work. Second is deciding whether one’s determination of the message is justified by (a) the reliability of the narrator(s); (b) the words or actions of other characters; and (c) the descriptions of characters, scenes, and events – which are verbal in literature…Third is noting the outcomes of the various conflicts that make up the story…up to this point, one’s primary concern is whether or not the story rings true as a story in itself and what “truth” makes known. Fourth is weighing this “truth”, the set of the conclusions advanced by the story, against one’s own perceptions of the world to determine their fidelity. The questions are
(a) Does the message accurately portray the world we live in? and (b) Does it provide a reliable guide to our beliefs, attitudes, values and actions. (p. 175)

The purpose is to use the Narrative Paradigm theory and guidelines to take it one step beyond simply analyzing the entire book, but to evaluate the secondary characters and whether or not they qualify as “good” by Fisher’s standards. Fisher (1984) views narratives as “moral structures” (p. 10). People want to be able to read the story and see truth in it (fidelity), as well as probability. “Any story, any form of rhetorical communication, not only says something about the world, it also implies an audience, persons who conceive of themselves in very specific ways” (Fisher, 1984, p. 14). Austen was writing about these characters, as well as the heroes and heroines, to invoke feelings and ideas. These created reactions just as much as the happy endings did (though, as stated, in many cases indirectly).

2.8 Audience Reaction and Criticism: *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*

Once Austen’s characters have been assessed through narrative analysis and her novels reviewed through the Narrative Paradigm, the final research into reader reaction can be analyzed, as well. The novels of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey* are examined for this project. As mentioned earlier, *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the most well-known novels in her collection. On the other hand, *Northanger Abbey* is probably the least known of her six books. However, both provide ample material and criticism from a variety of sources.

*Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was Jane Austen’s second published novel. For the thesis, Charlotte Lucas is explored. She is the heroine’s best friend in the beginning of the novel who marries the less than favorable character, Mr. Collins. Perry (2000) reflected on the match with a great understanding of the marriage state during the Regency era. She points out that though we are shown Elizabeth’s reaction initially being very hard on her friend, as the story progresses and
we see Charlotte in her new home, an understanding and reaction to her friend’s acceptance is prominent.

Although the reader is told that Charlotte deliberately chooses not to hear Mr. Collins’s longwinded and embarrassingly self-congratulatory speeches, Elizabeth’s appraisal of their marital situation is that her friend is tolerably happy. She remarks to Darcy that Charlotte is “one of the very few sensible women” that could have carried off a marriage to Mr. Collins with success. ‘My friend has an excellent understanding—although I am not certain that I consider her marrying Mr. Collins as the wisest thing she ever did. She seems perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for her’.

In a contest held by Persuasions, the scholarly publication for the Jane Austen Society of North America, the question of whether or not Charlotte Lucas deserved criticism for her actions were met with a resounding no. The winning response, Schieldel (1989) pointed out the basic facts behind the character’s reasoning. “Charlotte accepts the traditional view of marriage – an arrangement between families on a basis of birth and income without consideration of personal feelings”. Pride and Prejudice was written during a time of great change in the early 1800’s where both the concept of planned marriages and love matches were being explored. Charlotte’s character maintained, as Schieldel pointed out, the more customary approach at that time.

Of course, Charlotte is met with big critics (beyond Elizabeth). In Knuth’s (1989) article, she reviews quite a few negative remarks towards Charlotte’s decision – from making a mockery of the marriage state to being completely “immoral”. Knuth (1989) points out that Charlotte’s motive may lead her to an unhappy existence: “One touchstone for true happiness in Jane Austen’s world – one Charlotte fails to remain in contact with – is close friendship with other
women”. Elizabeth substitutes her ex-best friend with her eldest sister and favorite aunt. Charlotte will have no one except her husband and the Lady Catherine De Bourg (who is not the nicest character). The importance of reflecting on Charlotte’s situation and her options make her extremely important in audience reaction. It seems one group understands the move to marry without love and the other feels it is the biggest failure she could have done. Assessing this with the criticism and paradigm, along with these reactions should produce a well-researched understanding of the situation as a whole.

In *Northanger Abbey*, John and Isabella Thorpe are the antagonists in the novel who have over-estimated their friend’s (Catherine the heroine, and her brother) wealth. Because of this, they are both trying to court the siblings and have various degrees of success. Isabella has wooed Catherine Moorland’s brother. But John does not have the right attitude or temperament for Catherine. As Thaler (2010) points out in her research on the villain template in Austen’s novel, “he should…be viewed as a creator of mayhem, causing not only emotional disturbances, but disorder and confusion in general, along with embodying a powerful tendency toward destruction”. She points out that, “Austen uses the young, fresh-from-Oxford Thorpe to show readers that even the most seemingly ridiculous person should not be underestimated in his ability to cause destruction”.

Bell’s (2010) article defends the young heroine, Catherine Mooreland, from much criticism she receives for being one of the weaker lead characters. As he writes,

Catherine is easy to underestimate because she seems to lack many of the qualities Austen requires of a heroine. From the Dashwood sisters to Anne Elliot, all of Austen’s later heroines, even those who make serious errors in judgment, are unusually intelligent. Most possess other gifts as well (Marianne is a talented musician, for
instance; Elinor, a talented artist). Catherine, on the other hand, “never could learn or understand anything before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid.

He also reviews the evils and sinister moves of the Thorpe siblings. In one particular scene, Catherine is convinced that her prior plans had canceled because of John Thorpe told her so:

Thinking she has been stood up, Catherine agrees to go with the Thorpes, only to pass the Tilneys walking slowly down the street as she and Thorpe are heading out of town. Catherine’s reaction is immediate: “Stop, stop, I will get out this moment and go to them. . . . Pray, pray stop, Mr. Thorpe.—I cannot go on.—I will not go on.—I must go back to Miss Tilney.” But Catherine, now a prisoner in Thorpe’s carriage, is powerless to escape, and her pleas go unheeded: “Mr. Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on”. (p.87)

Both he and Isabella are guilty of lying to Catherine on multiple occasions - even going so far as to changing plans for her. When Catherine refuses to go on an outing, they physically try to hold her back. Fuller (2009) points out:

Catherine, showing complete autonomy, proclaims that she will act upon her intentions and not allow others to control her: “I cannot submit to this. I must run after Miss Tilney directly and set her right” (100). Catherine’s growing sense of self and her refusal to “submit” to others both frees and entraps her, for, immediately upon her declaration, “Isabella . . . caught hold of one hand; Thorpe of the other”.

Fuller’s (2009) article researches Northanger Abbey to Gothic Novels with much of John Thorpe’s relationship to Catherine reviewed as very aggressive in nature. “Austen deliberately
strips her villain of any charm, thus stripping away the veneer of romanticism disguising the sordidness of abduction”. She states that “Austen, like her more sensational predecessors, uses Northanger Abbey to warn young women—and men—not about the dangers of reading too many novels, but about the dangers to their amorous and socio-economic security from powerful and opportunistic members of society”. Isabella and John Thorpe were those personified and the reader reaction of these characters show that response.

The central question of the thesis “how do readers respond to the motives of the secondary characters” shows a wide berth of response from the audience. The majority of articles are well informed, well researched with multiple opinions, insights, and criticisms. The methodology for creating an order will be extremely important for evaluating this thesis. The result is to get the best understanding on audience reaction to secondary characters with a measured qualitative study.

2.9 Discussion

A great deal of research has gone into the topic for this thesis. To answer the question, “How do readers react to secondary character motives,” specifically in Pride and Prejudice and Northanger Abbey, attention needed to be paid to Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm and the consideration he uses to evaluate literature. Knowing the author and her life to determine her credibility and validity was part of his theory. Because of this, three biographies were referred to, as well as information about the Regency period, to understand the context of her novels.

Once the background information was complete, a look at the specific secondary characters and research that has been done was examined. It was noted that there is a lack of articles that focus directly on the character. However, this should not be interpreted that there is little to no opinion on the secondary characters. On the contrary, much information has been
found but is it intertwined with specific topics such as a look at the gothic novel or an exploration of themes in the specific books. People definitely have feelings towards John Thorpe of Northanger Abbey and Charlotte Lucas of Pride and Prejudice. It was a matter of finding it and assessing the messages they received from their plotlines.

A great tool for this research was the narrative analysis and the digraph. The effect the secondary character has on the novel is central to the discussion which leads to “what is the message they communicate to the audience”. The visualization will show the importance of their role within the novel with a step by step breakdown of the character’s plotline. Once this is completed, the Narrative Paradigm will be used to evaluate the storyline and message communicated to the audience.

The present research will provide new insights into the importance of the secondary character and the role they play in communicating a message/invoking a reaction from the audience. Jane Austen created a purpose for all of her characters. Though these specific subplots may not have made it to the last page like the heroes and heroines do, their storyline has a meaning. The literary criticism will outline the subplot of the secondary characters. The Narrative Paradigm will be used to evaluate the validity of the message. The reactions from readers will be assessed to offer new feedback for these classic stories.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

For over 200 years, Jane Austen has been a source of study and criticism to fans and scholars alike. From biographies to literary critiques to in-depth character analysis of all her writings, there is no shortage of information and continued research. However, the lack of examination into secondary characters and the role they play in the reader’s reaction to her novels is quite noticeable. Though not the heroines and heroes of the story, the message their plotline tells has an impact on what the reader observes. In addition, there are very few communication based studies done on her books. According to Mazzenno (2011), “…narratology and other poststructuralist theories have never gained prominence as methods for examining Austen’s work. Nonetheless, a number of studies employing these methodologies have provided important insights into the novels” (p. 192). Therefore, the goal of the study is to combine the narrative analysis with the Narrative Paradigm to create new angles to investigate her works while providing new information on a very popular topic.

3.2 Instrumentation

The narrative analysis is a tool used in the literary world to analyze stories and characters. According to Neuman (2006), it is a “type of qualitative data analysis that presents a chronologically linked chain of events in which individual or collective social actors have an important role” (p. 464). As this study is researching reader reaction to secondary characters and subplots, examining the events within the specific character’s lives will aid in the pursuit of understanding the audience response to these stories.

As discussed in the literature review, Abell (2004) analyzes character roles through the use of a digraph. This representation of the character’s movements helps showcase actions within
their plotline that may influence directly or indirectly the movement of the story. Key terms for this graph include: $W =$ World State; $t =$ time; $a =$ actions; $G|$ and $B =$ Actors (Abell, 2004, p. 290).

Once the digraph is completed, Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm will be used to evaluate the storyline and reader reactions to these subplots. The Narrative Paradigm can be used to “test one’s interpretation of a dramatic or literary work…through four considerations - (the message, justification of the message, the outcomes of conflicts equaling a truth, and analysis of the truth)” (Fisher, 1987, p. 175). These were discussed in the literature review, as well, but lead to answering the questions of “Does the message accurately portray the world we live in? and Does it provide a reliable guide to our beliefs, attitudes, values, actions?” (p. 175). Once the storyline is evaluated, reader’s reactions can be better examined based off of Fisher’s assessments.

### 3.3 Scope of Study

This study thoroughly read and examined two of Jane Austen’s six finished novels published from 1811 – 1817, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Northanger Abbey* (1817). In evaluating the credibility of the author/narrator (per Fisher’s theory), multiple sources were consulted: biographies, books and scholarly articles on historical data and literary critique of that time. Additionally, articles and books on the stories themselves which encompassed the specific secondary characters were reviewed for audience reactions. These were chosen for their ability to have opinions on the characters, as well as knowledge of the book (attention was paid to avoid reactions to movies that may not accurately adapt the novel to the screenplay).
3.4 Methodology

This thesis will be a three part qualitative study which will use the narrative analysis/criticism and the Narrative Paradigm. The first step required choosing a secondary character to analyze within Austen’s works whose role was important enough and large enough to create drama within the story. From here, a breakdown of the role and the path the character takes during the story – based on Abell’s Narrative Digraph (2004) – will be done to assess the characters overall goals, motives, and actions. Their movements coincide with the heroines/heroes of the story and will create reactions in the audience.

Once the digraph and narrative analysis is completed, Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm will be used to assess the story. It is a requirement of Fisher’s theory to define the novel or literary works as good. “Dramatic and literary works display value-laden conflicts between or among characters, events, and external forces” (Fisher, 1987, p. 176). This means that the “messages” are value-laden – or not – based on the assessment. For the reactions of the audience to be analyzed fairly, understanding the evaluation of the character’s story will be assessed.

Part three and in conjunction with the Narrative Paradigm, an undertaking of reader responses to the subplots will be evaluated. The direct reactions of the characters and themes in the subplots, articles and books on specific scenes, reactions to criticisms of characters will be assessed and compared to each other and to the character’s subplots. A short overview of each criticism will be provided in a table to highlight a quick assessment of individual responses to her characters (table 1). In the sixth column, positive, negative, and neutral will be used to describe the overall reaction. Positive means they have a favorable view of the character and their actions. Negative means they feel unfavorably towards the character and their actions. While neutral means that they feel either favorable or unfavorable towards this character.
The table will be followed by an in-depth review of how the various writer reactions coincide with the theory of Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm – analyzing them through the four areas of consideration – and discussing whether or not the messages that the characters were communicating were received.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Name of Article</th>
<th>Quick Synopsis</th>
<th>Reaction to Character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Reader reactions were taken from sources that were noted in the literature review. The three biographies on Austen contained theories and insights into all of the novels. The JASNA scholarly journal, *Persuasions*, had multiple articles that were used in addition to books that were written on the novels (Le Faye, 2002; Looser, 1995; Rodi, 2012). As mentioned, this is an area that has not been heavily written on, at least not that the thesis author was able to find. For this study, 25 responses were used (articles, books, and biographies) between the two novels. The criteria for assessing these particular works was that opinions of the secondary character were mentioned with some depth and reasoning. A direct reflection on the subplot or character’s actions needed to be reviewed to assess how the message of the subplot was received by the audience.

3.5 Limitations

The intention of the study was to analyze reader reactions of secondary character plotlines in all six of the novels. Unfortunately, due to time restrictions and study length, only two novels could be chosen. In addition, there is an enormous amount of credible information to pursue for the study. Narrowing the amount of articles and books on Jane Austen, her novels,
specific characters, and particular themes was very intensive and difficult. Because of this, scholarly works were focused on due to credibility of writers and accessibility to their research and opinions. Though this offers informative feedback to the novels, it does limit reader response from a less scholarly community. Future research could be done with a more general study in which feedback could be conducted to include a wider reach of audience reaction. However, for this study the focus is solely on a more scholarly response.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

For this thesis, multiple resources were read to better understand Jane Austen and her materials before reviewing reader reactions to the subplots. Part of the process is to review the specific secondary character and plot their movement in a digraph for the literary analysis. To do this, rereading the novels, as well as listening to them via cd, was done as to accurately assess character movements in the story. To maintain accuracy, page numbers from the novel will be listed for verification.

Once the digraph and literary analysis is completed, assessment of the storyline through the Narrative Paradigm can be evaluated. The thesis author will use resources listed from the literature review under 2.4 Jane Austen and Her Six Novels, 2.5 Historical Context of Jane Austen’s Novels, and 2.6 Secondary Characters. The research done for these sections was very intensive in the historical aspect of the time period and the underlining context of the novel. The thesis author made every step possible to remove personal bias and opinion from this section and base the evaluation specifically on the criteria given by Fisher (1987).

The final step is the assessment of reader reactions to the subplots and motives of the secondary characters. The use of the table is to show transparency of the analysis by providing author information and their opinion. Personal bias and opinions from the thesis author is
removed to avoid a tainted assessment. The goal of the thesis is to observe the reader reaction to secondary characters and their motives and analyze that response with the interpretation of the Narrative Paradigm. Neutrality from the thesis author is important for the overall study and steps were taken to provide an accurate study.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH STUDY

4.1 Introduction

The study was separated into three parts to successfully answer the question, “how do readers react to the secondary character’s subplot (motives) in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*?” Part one uses a narrative criticism to review the specific character and their plotline. This is featured on a di-graph and also uses a table to show more specific story involvement. The second part uses Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm to analyze this character’s specific story and what the message is communicating. The final section reviews audience reactions and feedback that was taken from books and scholarly journals and compares it to the Narrative Paradigm. The results will show a close connection to the moral of the story and how readers understand the message.

4.2 Data Analysis

The data collected for the study was qualitative. Though there is a variety of feedback and research completed, audience opinion is subjective. The thesis author used page numbers and generic overviews during part one of the study. This is on the di-graph to maintain an objective approach, as well as on the table to describe more in depth the secondary character’s role. This method was also used when a brief description was created to describe the audience reaction from the articles and book sources for part three (featured in a table). For part two, assessment with the Narrative Paradigm, sources from the literature review are used to compare Fisher’s theory to the subplots which reference research to defend the stories.
4.3 Results

Part One- Northanger Abbey

The first secondary character reviewed was John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*. His character plays a competing love interest for the heroine, Catherine Morland. Unfortunately, he does not have much success winning her heart nor is he a very noble character. The chart below is a di-graph of his chain of events and actions (as described by Abell, 2004).

Table 1: John Thorpe’s Di-graph

![Diagram of John Thorpe's events and actions]

The di-graph helps to show the chain of events that occur through the story that lead to a conclusion (Abell, 2004, p. 289). The actions of Thorpe help push the heroine into the arms of the hero, whether he realizes it or not. To help better understand the character’s movements and
the message he tells to the readers, a table was created along with the di-graph. In addition to Thorpe’s actions, it also highlights scenes in which he was mentioned, though not present. Important communication occurs within the story at these points, as well.

Table 2: John Thorpe’s Story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page(s)</th>
<th>Quick description</th>
<th>Main Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 39 - 44 | Introduced to John Thorpe - Bath - Late 1700’s | • Oldest in the family  
• Described: stout young man, middle height, plain face, ungraceful form  
• Swears a lot, boasts about himself, and constantly talks about his horses  
• Does not read novels |
| 49 - 51 | Dancing with Catherine Morland - Assembly Rooms | • Asked for the first dance – is not there for first set  
• This makes Catherine turn down Mr. Tilney out of decorum  
• When he arrives, his apologies are vain  
• He talked of himself the whole time they danced |
| p. 56 | A drive to Claverton Down - Day after dance | • John Thorpe, Isabella Thorpe and James Morland convince Catherine to go for a ride  
• John asks about the Allen’s (who Catherine is staying with) and implies she is the heir to their fortune  
• Talks rudely about her brother’s carriage, implies it’ll crash and then ignores Catherine’s pleas to tell him  
• Catherine thinks, even with her brother and Isabella’s good opinion of John, she doesn’t trust him |
| p. 61 | A lovely night for a dance - Assembly rooms | • John tries to tell Catherine she promised him the first dance at the ball – though she has no memory of that and is ready to dance with Mr. Tilney  
• He is unsuccessful |
| p. 77 | John deceives Catherine - Bath / Blaize Castle | • John, James and Isabella persuade Catherine that her friends, the Tilney’s, have ditched Catherine for other plans and that she should go with them to Blaize Castle  
• John says specifically that he believes he saw them going somewhere else  
• John and Catherine pass the Tilney’s as they’re walking to her apartment. When Catherine cries for him to stop, he makes and excuse and goes faster and tries to justify his lie  
• They do not make it to Blaize Castle – they left too late in the day |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 88   | John talks to General Tilney - Assembly Rooms | • Catherine was unaware of his acquaintance with the Tilney’s father  
• He says he knows him from a London shop and boasts about how rich he is (rudely)  
• The reader is not aware of what Mr. Tilney and John Thorpe spoke of completely. He tells Catherine that the General thinks she is the prettiest girl in Bath |
| 90 - 93 | John betrays Catherine for a second time - Bath | • To make up for her first missed outing, Catherine schedules a second meeting with the Tilney’s.  
• John, James and Isabella try to make plans for the same day. When she maintains her stance on not moving the day, her friends guilt trip her  
• John then leaves the group to talk to Ms. Tilney and lies to her about Catherine already having plans for that specific day and changes it to the following  
• Catherine is so mortified, she runs past John and Isabella, who physically restrained her, to maintain the original date.  
• John says something rude to her brother about how Catherine is being obstinate |
| 96   | Mr. Allen against Mr. Thorpe | • Mr. Allen, who invited Catherine to Bath with his wife, heard about the plans that he and her friends had  
• He feels it is improper for her to ride about in an open carriage  
• He advises her not to go out with John anymore on her own  
• Catherine happily obliges |
| 114  | John sort of proposes to Catherine - Bath | • Upon finding his best friend and sister are getting married, John off-handedly remarks to Catherine that marriage seems like fun and maybe they should try it  
• Catherine does not interpret his remarks that way  
• He believes they are courting and set to be married |
| 134  | Isabella fills in Catherine | • Isabella, John’s sister and Catherine’s soon to be sister in law, has received a letter from John letting her know about he and Catherine and the proposal  
• Catherine has no idea what he’s talking about. She is astonished and begs Isabella to write her brother and fix it  
• Isabella comments about how people make mistakes sometimes |
| 229 | John Thorpe tells General Tilney the truth | • Catherine was invited to Northanger Abbey with the Tilney’s under the false information that she was an heiress  
• He received this information from John Thorpe the night at the assembly room  
• John, once rejected, saw General Tilney when he was in town and told him he completely over exaggerated Catherine’s wealth  
• This led to Catherine getting kicked out of the General’s house and eventually leads to Henry Tilney proposing and marrying her |

**Part two – Northanger Abbey**

Fisher (1987) believes that, “narratives enable us to understand the actions of others ‘because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives as narratives’” (p.66). Assessing the sub-plot of John Thorpe is interesting because the Narrative Paradigm looks at the value in the story. However, how it is interpreted directly affects audience reactions to the message.
As discussed in the literature review, there are four areas to analyze (Fisher, 1987, p. 175):

Table 3 – Narrative Paradigm Assessment for *Northanger Abbey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the overall messages/conclusion of the work?</td>
<td>For John Thorpe, it was being deceitful does not get you power. Assuming you know everything does not make you an expert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the determination of the message justified by:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The reliability of the narrator</td>
<td>a. As researched in the lit review, the narrator is reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The words or actions of the other characters</td>
<td>b. John Thorpe’s sister also helps to prove his message that being false will only lead to disaster. The characters who are honest and true have better endings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Descriptions of characters, scenes, events</td>
<td>c. The overall story was very descriptive of the towns and events. The author had been to the places and describes character’s very honestly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the other outcomes in the story – whose values were the most powerful/worthy – does the story ring true?</td>
<td>John Thorpe’s story was more of a warning. His boastfulness and aggression is not well received by the heroine. Her growth of self-awareness and ability to learn from mistakes makes her storyline the most memorable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Does the story accurately portray the world we live in?</td>
<td>a. The story was written in the late 1790’s when etiquette and decorum were still very important. However, having deceitful and selfish friends, having a love interest in someone new, not being approved by their parents – these storylines still hold true in today’s society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Does it provide a reliable guide to our beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions?</td>
<td>b. In the case of John Thorpe, reader reaction was unanimous to his role in the story. His deception and actions are very believable in today’s world and his motives are the opposite of what most people value.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part three – Reader Reaction to Northanger Abbey**

With the literary criticism and Narrative Paradigm complete, an analysis of reader reactions to John Thorpe is presented. Thirteen authors were reviewed from books and scholarly journals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Name of Article</th>
<th>Quick Synopsis</th>
<th>Reaction to Character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diedre Le Faye</td>
<td>Book, 2002</td>
<td><em>Jane Austen: The World of her Novels</em></td>
<td>Le Faye refers to John as the villain and does not think highly of his character – p. 211 / p. 221</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldwin Smith</td>
<td>Book, 1890</td>
<td><em>Life of Jane Austen</em></td>
<td>Reviews Thorpe as “a specimen of a class not yet distinct” p. 106. He reviews the character with lots of adjectives that all negatively describe him – p. 106, 116</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Wiesenfarth</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 1999</em></td>
<td>The invention of civility in <em>Northanger Abbey</em></td>
<td>Describes John as vain and promoting himself as something he’s not</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna Thaler</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2010</em></td>
<td>“Oh! D—it”: The Mayhem of John Thorpe and the Villain Template</td>
<td>Reviews the vulgarity of John Thorpe and his actions throughout the novel</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah J. Knuth Klenck</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2009</em></td>
<td>“You Must be a Great Comfort to Your Sister, Sir”: Why Good Brothers Make Good Husbands</td>
<td>Reviews John’s relationship with his sisters and how that reflects on him as a man</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Bell</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2010</em></td>
<td>Is Catherine a Lightweight? In Defense of Austen’s “Ignorant and Uninformed” Seventeen-Year-Old Heroine</td>
<td>Reviews a specific passage in which Thorpe lies to Catherine to get her to go on an outing with him – defends Catherine’s nativity because of Thorpe’s deceit</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam Rheingold Fuller</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2010</em></td>
<td>“Let me go, Mr. Thorpe; Isabella, do not hold me!”: <em>Northanger Abbey</em> and the Domestic Gothic</td>
<td>Reviews John Thorpe as much more abrasive and threatening in his role with Catherine</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivor Morris</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2001</em></td>
<td>Jane Austen and her Men</td>
<td>Investigates the different roles of men in Austen’s novels: sees Thorpe as rake</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From reviewing the literary analysis and following John Thorpe’s movement and actions in the story, readers can see that Thorpe’s intentions throughout the novel are not respectable.

John Thorpe is the eldest son in a family of at least four siblings. John’s mother is a widow, whose husband was a lawyer. Though the reader is unaware of how much John Thorpe is set to inherit, his attentions to Catherine on believing that she is an heiress is obvious. On page 58 in *Northanger Abbey*, John and Catherine have the following conversation:

“A silence of several minutes succeeded their first short dialogue; -- it was broken by Thorpe’s saying very abruptly, “Old Allen is as rich as a Jew – is he not?” Catherine did not understand him – and he repeated his question, adding in explanation, “Old Allen, the man you are with.”
“Oh! Mr. Allen, you mean. Yes, I believe he is very rich.”

“And no children at all?”

“No—not any.”

“A famous thing for his next heirs. He is your godfather, is he not?”

“My godfather!—no.”

“But you are always very much with them?”

“Yes, very much.”

“Aye, that is what I meant.”

This section implies that Thorpe is trying to court Catherine under the belief that she is an heiress. Because of this folly, his exaggeration of Catherine’s wealth to General Tilney, who invited Catherine to his home under the same idea that she was rich and the motive of having her marry his son Henry, have him retracting his statements to the General while on a visit to London. The reader is informed that because he feels jilted, he exaggerates her poverty to the General, as well (p. 231).

John Thorpe is not a well-liked character. Smith (1890) describes him as “a fast man, or a would-be fast man, and a blackguard, always talking horse, always swearing, a braggart withal and a liar” (p. 106). Bander (2010) views John Thorpe as someone the heroine needs to “read” more clearly. “Thorpe believes that he knows everything whether he has been taught it or not. Ignorance does not prevent him from pronouncing unequivocally upon books he has not read, journeys he has not taken, fortunes he has not verified, or hearts he has not won” (p. 214).

Wiesenfarth (1999) perceives Thorpe as the opposite of the heroine. “He is completely defined by his equestrian feats, which are saddled with "the effusions of his endless conceit" (p. 66). His brain is equinity itself".
A more sinister take on John Thorpe is explored by Fuller (2010). She examines the more gothic aspects of the novel, as well as a deeper look at John Thorpe’s character.

Even more sinister than John’s seduction of Catherine is his abduction of her, since it includes restraint and violence. When Catherine sees Eleanor, whom the bungling John points out to her, she realizes she’s been tricked, and, furious at John, “impatiently crie[s]” for him to release her: “‘Stop, stop, I will get out this moment and go to them’” (87). John not only refuses, but “lashe[s] his horse into a brisker trot,” taking Catherine from Laura Place “into the Market-place” (87). Austen deliberately employs Bath cartology here: Laura Place, the location of some of Bath’s most elegant residences, symbolizes the Tilney siblings’ gentility and aversion to greed; the vulgar, mercenary John conveys Catherine, whom he desires for her fortune and body, into the marketplace, turning her into a commodity. Catherine’s increasing lack of power over her abductor and her own person manifests itself in the less assertive manner in which she speaks to John, and John’s increasingly controlling behavior. (p. 96).

Le Faye (2002), on noting that Austen did not write her family about the fates of the other characters, makes a personal hope that seems to resonate with the majority of opinions from the audience, “Jane did not tell her family any little scraps of sequel information about the characters; which leaves us room to hope that the unpleasant John Thorpe overturns his gig and breaks his neck” (p. 221). It is not hard to see why John Thorpe has a 100% negative review. As noted in the Narrative Paradigm, his message is that of deceit and aggression. The audience reaction from multiple sources is that there was no excuse for his primarily bad intentions for the heroine. His lies went so far as to get her kicked out of the home she was invited into under the
false pretense she was an heiress. The upside to this error of judgment on his part is that it makes the hero realize he loves the heroine and thus leads to a happy ending.

The thesis author chose John Thorpe due to the amount of information that was written and available on his storyline. He was introduced as an unlikeable character and exits the story as an unlikeable character. Austen’s later works show more variety in her villains and their deceptions – being of a more charming nature. But John Thorpe truly has no merit to his name besides being a friend of the heroine’s brother. However, as that is the only redeeming quality throughout the entire story, it was easy to understand the extreme prejudice against him by readers. Most mentioned his vulgarity and bad language or use of force against the heroine. The analysis with the Narrative Paradigm can explain why his character was good for the story as the moral of his plotline was “what not to do”. In the end, he winds up with nothing and not one reader reaction felt sorry for him.
Part One – Pride and Prejudice

The second character analyzed is Charlotte Lucas. Her character starts off as the best friend to the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet. Unfortunately, a choice she makes significantly alters her life and her relationship with the main character.

Table 5 – Charlotte Lucas’s Di-graph

Charlotte plays a pivotal role throughout the novel to help move Elizabeth into the path of Mr. Darcy – both directly and indirectly. More can be seen in Table 6 of Charlotte’s movements and actions:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page(s)</th>
<th>Quick description</th>
<th>Main Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 – 16</td>
<td>Introduced to Charlotte - Longbourn (home of the Bennets - Autumn, early 1800’s</td>
<td>• Oldest in a large family, 27 yrs, intelligent • Close friend to Elizabeth Bennet • Doesn’t mind hero’s pride (where others are offended) • Gives advice to Elizabeth for Jane to flirt harder with Mr. Bingley – first look at Charlotte’s view on marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 61</td>
<td>The Netherfield Ball - Home of the Bingley’s - Late November</td>
<td>• Elizabeth searches for Charlotte to share news about Mr. Collins. Her cousin who is paying a lot of attention to her • Charlotte consoles Elizabeth for agreeing to dance with Mr. Darcy (who has a lot of pride) • Charlotte listens to Mr. Collins when no one else will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 62</td>
<td>Miss Lucas Entertains Mr. Collins - Longbourn - Day after ball</td>
<td>• Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth who refuses. After much commotion, Charlotte comes to visit and spends time listening to Mr. Collins • Mrs. Bennet begs Charlotte to speak some sense into Elizabeth – but nothing is said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Scheming Ms. Lucas - Lucas Lodge (home of the Lucas’s) - 2-3 days after proposal</td>
<td>• Charlotte continues to entertain Mr. Collins. But her motive has changed from helping her friend to obtaining Mr. Collins for herself • Mr. Collins proposes and she says yes • Her family is excited. Her parents see it as a respectable match, her sisters will be allowed out in society sooner and her brothers won’t have to take care of her when she’s old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84 – 85</td>
<td>Elizabeth does not approve - Longbourn - 3 days of rejection of first proposal</td>
<td>• Charlotte tells her best friend as nicely as possible • Elizabeth thinks it’s impossible • Charlotte explains that she’s not romantic and doesn’t expect much out of marriage anyway • Elizabeth loses respect for her friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Tension between friends - A few days after Charlotte’s acceptance</td>
<td>• Elizabeth doesn’t think she can trust Charlotte’s judgment which strains the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Jane Bennet defends Charlotte to Elizabeth - Longbourn - A few days after Charlotte’s acceptance</td>
<td>• Elizabeth is still very upset and vents to her sister, Jane, about the awful choice Charlotte has made with their terrible cousin. • Jane points out that Elizabeth’s strong language is rather insulting and a little too vulgar for the situation. In a different light, it is a good match for her. • Elizabeth is not persuaded completely, but plans to withhold judgment for a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Charlotte says good-bye</td>
<td>- Longbourn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Day before her wedding</td>
<td>• Charlotte pays one last visit to her friend to ask her to</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>keep up correspondence</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She also asks for her to accompany her father and sister for a visit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth accepts both but is still very reserved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Eliza sets to visit Charlotte</td>
<td>- Longbourn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth misses Charlotte and though still upset with her</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>does look forward to her trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106-</td>
<td>Charlotte welcomes Elizabeth and family to her home</td>
<td>- Hunsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
<td>- March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Charlotte is excited to welcome friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She shows the house without her husband – which is pleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth observes Charlotte making it work in her own way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Charlotte’s sensibilities</td>
<td>- Hunsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth notes an inconvenient room they’re sitting in but sees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>that it removes the possibility of Mr. Collins coming to visit –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>she approves of Charlotte’s methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>Elizabeth slightly changes her mind</td>
<td>- Hunsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- March/April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth acknowledges to Mr. Darcy that though the match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>between her friend and Mr. Collins may not be perfect, it is a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>good match for her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Charlotte’s observations</td>
<td>- Hunsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- March/April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth, having just received a visit from Mr. Darcy, gets a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>comment/observation from Charlotte that he must be in love with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>her, because he would never call on her like that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132</td>
<td>Elizabeth hides from Charlotte</td>
<td>- Hunsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- April/May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth, just rejecting Mr. Darcy’s proposal, knows that</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charlotte would take one look at her and know something is wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>She runs to her bedroom instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>Elizabeth and Charlotte say goodbye</td>
<td>- Hunsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Charlotte says goodbye to her friends. She would rather have them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stay longer, but remains silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth feels sorry for her, but acknowledges she went into this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>situation with her eyes open and knew how ridiculous he could be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>198</td>
<td>Mr. Collins’ Letter</td>
<td>- Longbourn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• When the youngest Bennet daughter elopes, Mr. Collins sends a letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>expressing his deepest condolences. He writes that Charlotte told</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>him that the daughter was wild and indulgent – which Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>warned her father against.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>258</td>
<td>The Collins’ Visit Lucas Lodge</td>
<td>- Lucas Lodge/Longbourn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Upon hearing her best friend was getting married and her husband’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>boss hating the match, Charlotte decides to visit her dear friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Elizabeth is pleased to see her</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charlotte’s plotline is consistent throughout the story, though her message is a little bit harder to interpret. A deeper look will be conducted in part two with the Narrative Paradigm.
Part two – Pride and Prejudice

Charlotte Lucas is an interesting character. On one side, she is described as sensible and intelligent. She offers sound advice to Elizabeth and her sister and Austen writes that she is observant to what’s going on. On the other side, she agrees to marry a man with little sense simply to obtain a comfortable home.

Table 7 – Narrative Paradigm Assessment for Pride and Prejudice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the overall messages/conclusion of the work?</td>
<td>For Charlotte Lucas, her message is that the traditional view of marriage in which a woman marries a man simply to survive is becoming outdated. Though she may be secure with a home, she will never have true happiness with a man she does not respect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Is the determination of the message justified by:                             | a. As researched in the lit review, the narrator/author is reliable  
   a. The reliability of the narrator  
   b. The words or actions of the other characters  
   c. Descriptions of characters, scenes, events  
   b. Charlotte’s story is intertwined with three additional marriage plot stories amongst other subplots – the actions of the other characters are believable as everyone is staying within the realm of the class system in England  
   c. Considered the best in the collection of six novels, Jane’s description of additional characters, places and events is in line with that time period. It also helps to create the overall story |
| What were the other outcomes in the story – whose values were the most powerful/worthy – does the story ring true? | Charlotte’s best friend Elizabeth marries for love and wealth. Elizabeth’s sister does the same. The youngest Bennet elopes and becomes destitute with a rake for a husband. The value/worthy story is that one should marry for respect and love and should not be deceived by personal pride/prejudice.  
   a. Does the story accurately portray the world we live in?  
   b. Does it provide a reliable guide to our beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions?  
   a. Pride and Prejudice continues to be remade for the current generation because the themes and the story itself still resonate with readers. For its time it was well received as an accurate portrayal.  
   b. Jane Austen was writing about the shift in marriage in which people could marry for more than money or class. Though not as big of an issue, women continue to search for their Mr. Darcy (the hero) today and movies like Bridget Jones’s Diary or Bride and Prejudice continue this story’s message. |
Charlotte Lucas’s character goes through a big transformation. From best friend to disrespected and back to best friend, Austen writes this character with multiple facets. The way the audience reacts shows the complexity Austen gave the character as there is a difference of opinion between the readers.

Part three – *Pride and Prejudice*

As noted, the sub-plot of Charlotte Lucas has received a diverse mix of opinions on how readers react to the message of her motives:

**Table 8 – Audience Reaction to Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Name of Article</th>
<th>Quick Synopsis</th>
<th>Reaction to Character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claire Tomalin</td>
<td>Book, 1999</td>
<td><em>Jane Austen: A Life</em></td>
<td>Tomalin reviews Charlotte’s marriage to Mr. Collins and feels Austen was showing the positive and negative of this choice – p. 163</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Rodi</td>
<td>Book, 2012</td>
<td><em>Bitch in a Bonnet</em></td>
<td>Rodi showcases Elizabeth’s negative treatment of Charlotte, even before she marries in addition to how this fits in the story. His reactions are humor-filled – p.80, 110, 122</td>
<td>Positive/neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Shields</td>
<td>Book, 2001</td>
<td><em>Jane Austen: A Life</em></td>
<td>Ponders Charlotte’s marriage with reference to the time period – p.85</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldwin Smith</td>
<td>Book, 1890</td>
<td><em>Life of Jane Austen</em></td>
<td>Calls Charlotte practical p.70, and references the time period she lived in for her choice – p. 87</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther Schieldel</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 1989</em></td>
<td>A response to Charlotte Lucas</td>
<td>Defends Charlotte’s marriage and choice she makes</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Perry</td>
<td><em>Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2000</em></td>
<td>Sleeping with Mr. Collins</td>
<td>Evaluates the lack of sexual revulsion with Charlotte’s choice and defends her plotline</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dwight McCawley  *Persuasions – scholarly journal, 1989*  
Assertion and Aggression in the Novels of Jane Austen  
Briefly looks at Charlotte and her situation in context to the time period  
Neutral

Deborah J. Knuth Klenck  *Persuasions – scholarly journal, 1989*  
Sisterhood and Friendship in *Pride and Prejudice*: Need Happiness Be "Entirely a Matter of Chance"?  
Klenck uses a lot of negative reviews of Charlotte before comparing her marriage to Elizabeth’s  
Negative

Miriam Ascarelli  *Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2004*  
A Feminist Connection: Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft  
Ascarelli notes that not all of Austen’s marriages are good and that Charlotte’s approach to it is a “clear-eyed assessment of the economic underpinnings of marriage”  
Neutral

Claudia Martin  *Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2008*  
Austen’s Assimilation of Lockean Ideals: The Ideal of Pursuing Happiness  
She sees Austen’s romantic relationship as a process and as Charlotte settles, she will most likely end up miserable  
Negative

Ivor Morris  *Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2001*  
Jane Austen and her Men  
He investigates the different roles men play in Austen’s novels and their relationship to the women. He refers to Charlotte as mercenary  
Negative

Serena Hansen  *Persuasions – scholarly journal, 2000*  
Rhetorical Dynamics in Jane Austen’s Treatment of Marriage Proposals  
In her discussion of persuasion in marriage proposals, she views Charlotte’s as being criticized  
Negative

The varying degrees of opinions from readers reaffirm the complexity of Charlotte’s character. Tomalin (2002) writes on Charlotte’s situation:

Austen allows that Charlotte, ten years older than Lizzy, is making what is for her a reasonable decision in buying herself a social position as a married woman, escaping the
Tomalin goes on to write that Austen found it revolting to choose that lifestyle, but gave Charlotte a fair account through her adaption of the situation and ability to make some things bearable.

Schieldel (1989) had a defensive response to criticism on Charlotte’s choice, breaking down some of the qualities of Charlotte’s character:

Mr. Collins offered what to Charlotte was a reasonable chance for a satisfying life. And since she did not expect to find a lover or a kindred spirit in a husband, it would be hard to expect her to wait for someone who, as far as she was concerned, did not exist.

In contrast, Martín (2008) does not see any sort of long term happiness for Charlotte. “While some form of lesser contentment may come to those who settle for more immediate satisfactions, only those willing to persevere can achieve their happiness”.

Rodi (2012) offers a different insight into the Charlotte /heroine (Elizabeth) relationship. “One aspect of the novel no one ever seems to comment on, is the invariably crappy way Lizzy treats Charlotte pretty much throughout. She airily dismisses her advice, not even pausing to consider that advice is pretty much all Charlotte’s got to offer” (p. 80). Rodi then reviews the entire subplot in a very thought provoking paragraph:

This is one of the bleaker storylines in the Austen canon, made all the more so by occurring in the author’s most sparklingly bright novel. But it serves a purpose: Charlotte, with eyes wide open, has made the rational choice – the choice Lizzy disdained. If we’re to feel the full measure of Lizzy’s ultimate triumph, we have to
understand the fate she escapes: that of choosing dependent spinsterhood, or selling herself for security. (p. 110).

Charlotte received four negatives, six neutrals and two positives. For those that were negative, Charlotte’s “scheming” (Austen, 1995, p. 84) and her position on marriage (she was not romantic – she had told Elizabeth that) have the readers disappointed in her philosophy. But the majority felt that due to the time period where a woman would be highly dependent on her family if she does not marry, that Charlotte was making a choice of self-preservation. The message received was that Charlotte would never achieve true happiness. In the story, she makes many alterations within her daily routine to spend as little time with her husband as possible. Elizabeth notices that and though she feels it is still terrible for her friend to sink so low with her less than charming cousin, she recognized that Charlotte may have made a decent choice for herself (Austen, 1995, p. 121).

Reviewing these responses in respect to the information analyzed by Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm, the different assessments by readers to Charlotte Lucas can be better examined and understood. Charlotte’s character does not start off as sinister. She is the heroine’s best friend and confidant. When Elizabeth and her family were tired of conversations with Mr. Collins, it was Charlotte who occupied his time (p. 71). Charlotte was seen as rational and what she planned on doing was irrational (Fisher, 1984, p. 4). The language Jane Austen would use as Charlotte plots to win Mr. Collins’s heart, “to scheme”, has the negative effect felt by many of her readers. It is not until later in the novel when Austen used terms that show redemption for her character. Though Charlotte will not have the same happiness that Elizabeth will have, the decision she chose was most likely her best option. This is the reason why there are positive, negative and neutral reactions – Austen vilifies the best friend and then slowly brings her back as
worthy. Reader opinion of whether she deserves this forgiveness can be seen as a main focus for the contradictions.

A reason why the story continues to resonate 200 years after Jane Austen published it is because Charlotte’s subplot is still valid and reader’s respond to her decisions based on their own personal views. Taken out of the time period, Charlotte could be seen as a modern day “gold digger”. She used Mr. Collins’s recent rejection to her advantage and secured herself a husband. Many of the readers with negative reactions felt she betrayed the heroine. Others felt she prostituted herself out. For those with positive reactions, they viewed Charlotte as a survivor or a realist. The time period she lived in gave her few options and she chose the best one she could. However, the thesis author believes the more interesting reactions are those that are neutral. There is a sympathy for Charlotte that can be read from these readers. They don’t attack the character for her choices or condone her methods. As Ascarelli (2004) pointed out, Charlotte’s plot point showed a “clear-eyed assessment of the economic underpinnings of marriage”. When put back into her time period, the choices Charlotte made are not unrealistic. Neutral response readers could understand that perspective. Charlotte’s subplot was truthful, believable and created a “social argument” (Fisher, 1984, p. 5). It was meant to be a good and thought provoking story.

4.4 Discussion

According to Fisher (1987), “the narrative paradigm is meant to be a philosophy of reason, value and action. That is, it is a conception that recognizes the interplay of all three of these features of human communication” (p. 59). As people interpret and react to Austen’s characters, the evaluation of the reason, value and actions of these specific friends and villains
take on an active state of their own. People can be very passionate about these stories. A deeper analysis into the characters provides new insights into the messages their story communicates.

As Pedriana (2005) writes, “social actors try to achieve optimal results within an incentive structure of costs, benefits, and available alternatives for action” (p. 354). John Thorpe and Charlotte Lucas tried to obtain the best possible conclusion for themselves with varying degrees of success. Reviewing the subplots and the movement the secondary characters take with this idea in mind (as shown by their actions on the di-graph) showcases how their personal actions affect the entire storyline and the perception they give to the reader. Assessing their actions and messages with the Narrative Paradigm, whose goal is to review the validity and rationality of a story, provides the needed interpretation of value from the story. Reader analysis of their reactions, how they viewed John Thorpe and Charlotte Lucas, creates an interesting comparison between the assessments of the story to the reactions of the subplots from the audience.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Limitations of the Study

For the thesis, articles were taken from scholarly journals dedicated to Jane Austen and her works, biographies, and resource books on the regency time period. While this does offer great insight with well thought out and researched information and reactions, there is a more general audience that is not represented in this study. The character of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, had such a varying result from the more scholarly works, reactions from additional readers could have been helpful in assessing how her message was received.

Further Recommendations

Further look into additional characters is recommended using the theory of narrative criticism with the Narrative Paradigm. The use of materials that have been produced in regards to analyzing plots and characters already provides quite a bit of information and resources to pull from. *Persuasions On-Line*, which is located on the Jane Austen Society of North America’s website, has issues that date back to 1982, in addition to books and biographies that have been written. Analyzing reader reaction beyond a general scope is important in understanding how Austen’s work is interpreted today.

Additionally, a general review could be achieved with a quantitative study. Providing a questionnaire to high school English teachers, college professors, and even book clubs that ask questions regarding specific characters and their plotlines could provide great information into how Austen’s secondary characters are perceived and whether or not the message is being interpreted positively or negatively. Continued insights into the communication aspect of the story will provide validity to Jane Austen’s novels and help maintain their status in today’s literary world.
Conclusion

Jane Austen and her novels continue to excite and entertain 200 years past their original creation date. As many people wonder why her works have lasted so long and create such a sense of devotion, studies into her stories help to understand why her books have achieved such success. Though few have used a communication theory to investigate, this thesis proves that additional study can be done in this area. The Narrative Paradigm can be used to assess the validity and rationality in a story, as well as determine the strength of the messages being communicated to the reader.

As Walter Fisher (1987) wrote, “Humans are storytellers” (p. 5). We learn from sharing experiences with each other and sometimes these experiences come out like a well written novel. By exploring the messages each character has to tell and understanding the motives behind their actions, a fuller understanding of the story can be had. The narrative criticism provides a way to explore the movements of the secondary character in an analytical manner. The Narrative Paradigm provides a step by step way to explore the story and its contents, which help to deduce whether or not the story is credible.

*Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*, two classic novels, offered stories worth analyzing. Charlotte Lucas and John Thorpe, though not the heroine or the hero, had reader reactions that were passionate. Through researching the context of the time period and understanding the situations they were in provided the thesis author with a better understanding of their motives, the responses that were reviewed didn’t necessarily take that into consideration and what resulted was honest feedback the way Jane Austen most likely intended her characters to receive.
The goal of the thesis was to analyze reader responses to the secondary character through the less used theories of the narrative criticism and the Narrative Paradigm. A secondary goal was to offer new insights into a topic that has been heavily researched. Both goals were achieved as reader responses were analyzed with a communication theory and new information on how the secondary characters are perceived was successful.
References


