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Austen and Music: A World Colored Through Sound

Although Jane Austen is most famous for her collection of six novels that follow various families and romances, something less known about her is her work as a musician. Laura Klein delves into Austen's practices and her life as a musician in her article "*Pride and Prejudice and the Piano: Pianofortes and Music in Jane Austen's Life and Work*" stating how Austen learned the piano at a young age and lessons throughout much of her life. She played regularly before her breakfasts, creating music as a part of her daily routine. While in a different medium, Austen continued that passion for music by instilling it through her novels. Snobby characters have their attitudes reinforced by music while others exemplify humility through the lens of performing music. What does Jane Austen convey with the pairings of music and wealth in her novels? Does that pairing mitigate the impact of her message?

Austen's pairing of music and wealth gives insight into the quality of characters that have or lack wealth. Music supports character attitudes to hint at the idea that music is a reflection of privilege. To best show what music conveys when paired with her writing, I chose to study three of her novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*. I also chose to follow these novels chronologically to best understand how music develops as her writing progresses as well.

Pride and Prejudice explores music as the Bennet family struggles with their relationship with the world. Mary and Elizabeth differ musically but both share the same class status and the desire to be more respected. Other characters in the novel like Caroline Bingley come from a wealthy background in the ability to play music as a viable option, but not a true passion of hers.

Pride and Prejudice proposes a dichotomy between music and class, where the lower classes have more passion to play music but less ability to follow through on that desire and the inverse of the higher classes.

Emma continues this dichotomy of music meaning more to the lower classes through Jane Fairfax, an extremely talented musician who also comes from a lower class background. She is contrasted by Emma Woodhouse, who has the wealth and background to where she could pursue music, but doesn't stick with an instrument long enough to become substantial. Her jealousy of Jane's musical prowess reflects the conflicting attitudes towards music and how that ultimately connects to their worldview. When paired alongside other more performative characters like Frank Churchill, he contradicts Jane's authenticity by using music as a means of flirting. Austen uses music to add depth to her character's social status, a practice also seen in *Persuasion*, where she depicts music as both intertwined and at odds with one's privilege. Anne Elliot demonstrates how one's quality of life dictates their musical ability, even when that musician is already musical capable.

Starting with Austen's seminal work *Pride and Prejudice*, Mary Bennet reflects music as privilege through her class limitations. Austen introduces a musical side to both Elizabeth and Mary Bennet in Chapter 6 of Volume One. Austen gives insight into Mary's character in her comparison to Elizabeth:

“Her performance was pleasing, although by no means capital. After a song or two, and before she could reply to the entreaties of several that she would sing again, she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who having consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Mary had neither genius nor taste and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached” (Austen 223).

Austen is blunt with the fact that Mary is culturally unrefined, leading her to have to work much harder than Elizabeth to achieve the same results. Austen’s comment that Mary was impatient to show her talents shows that music is an answer to Mary’s desires. Whether it’s to communicate her value or to show off to appear more refined, music gives Mary a voice and sense of notoriety in the room. Although it’s shown that the Bennets have a considerable amount of wealth, they lack the long term security most others have with their kind of income. Samina Ashfaq and Nasir Jamal Khattak’s article for *Putaj Humanities & Social Sciences* titled “Dilemma of Class Classification in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*” reaffirms their social standing through focusing on Austen’s reactions to the world of her time through her writing. They write, “Though Bennets are the wealthiest family of the community at Meryton, with an income of two thousand pounds a year, they are unable to save anything, for the dowry of five daughters.” (Ashfaq and Khattak 34). Ashfaq and Khattak highlight the Bennet family’s lifestyle to solidify the strain financial instability brings on individuals. Mary exhibits this tension through behavior like her passion for music. Music gives Mary social capital that she’d otherwise not have due to her family’s financial fragility. While their upper middle class standing gives Mary the opportunity to try music, their lack of long term financial security leaves her without the chance to learn and refine her musical ability. In return any musical ability Mary carries is due to her passion and self discipline with the instrument.

Chapter 18 of Volume One further emphasizes how this financial tension impacts Mary in her performance at the Netherfield Ball. Austen describes how Mary, “By many significant looks

and entreaties, did she endeavour to prevent such a proof of complaisance, – but in vain; Mary would not understand them; such an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to her, and she began her song... Mary's powers were by no means fitted for such a display; her voice was weak, and her manner affected" (Austen 266). Mary's passion for performance turns more toward desperation in a public setting, horrifying Elizabeth who thinks about it negatively impacting their image. Mary reflects the limitations of pursuing music without aid, although she can progress and learn in solitude, she still lacks the access to improve exponentially due to the lack of an instructor. . While she tries to compensate for her lack of experience Mary ultimately falls short in this public setting and displays the Bennets family's struggle to display a wealthy lifestyle they can't maintain. The narration of this passage is read in the third person omniscient, however it's also filtered through Elizabeth's perspective. Details like her playing being in vain show Mary's performance as more an act of desperation to be seen rather than that of pure performance. Especially in modern times, music is remembered for the emotions the artist carries, but in Austen's time and the setting of the Netherfield Ball, Mary contrasts the tone of the room to her detriment. The music performed wasn't for enjoyment or entertainment, Mary played to present herself; Mary's intention behind playing music shows her desires at odds with everyone else in the room. The subtle tonal clash in the room reveals that Mary's passion for music is at odds against the privilege of everyone else at the ball. Unfortunately, like many other women mentioned in Austen's novels, Mary's efforts are seen, but aren't truly heard or appreciated leaving her at a social disadvantage. Compared to Elizabeth Mary is more passionate towards music but is less adept socially.

Although Elizabeth shares the same financial background as Mary, Elizabeth distinguishes herself in her response to this stress. Laura Klein discusses Elizabeth's relationship

with music in her article “*Pride and Prejudice* and the Piano: Pianofortes and Music in Jane Austen’s Life and Work”. Klein highlights how Elizabeth doesn’t take the time to practice her instrument like Mary does and how music becomes a tool to characterize them:

“Jane Austen’s fiction establishes the function of the piano as a stationary character of sorts as well as its connection to different levels of accomplishment. Her characters are frequently seated at the instrument in a variety of settings, revealing its significance as a representation of accomplishment, gentility, luxury, and class. The pianoforte plays a subtle yet fundamental role in *Pride and Prejudice*. The instrument itself becomes the subject of discussion, most prominently in Lady Catherine’s condescending invitation to Elizabeth to practice the instrument in Mrs. Jenkinson’s room, where ‘[s]he would be in nobody’s way’ (195), and her posturing about Rosings’s capital instrument. Levels of accomplishment are evaluated, from Mary’s vanity, though having ‘neither genius nor taste’ (27), to Elizabeth’s pleasing performance to Georgiana’s proficiency. Music is a source of pleasure and agony, arrogance and embarrassment, attraction and annoyance” (Klein 5).

Klein’s comments on the piano as its own stationary character add insight into Elizabeth’s more superficial relationship with music. While Mary’s passion for music leads her to overestimate her abilities, Elizabeth commits halfway, leading to her music to pass as proficient but not a reflection of the individual. Klein specifically calls back on the moment Lady Catherine mentioned that Elizabeth would better play piano when she’s not in anyone’s way, showcasing Elizabeth’s social standing. Elizabeth meets the requirements for genteel women on a base level, however she lacks the sizable resources that come from one’s wealth. Similar to Mary, Elizabeth lacks the additional training needed to compete with the successful people they meet. However

Elizabeth does not pursue music as constantly because she is not seeking to compete with others; she seeks to find and be herself to its fullest extent. That desire for human authenticity connects to how she treats music, not as social capital but as an extension of the self. Elizabeth introduces an alternate perception of music where success is not drawn out of technical prowess but rather the quality of character expressed through the instrument. Many musicians such as Bob Dylan or Kurt Cobain were revered even with flaws because those flaws reflected the humanity of performance.

Austen supports this perspective with Elizabeth's performance from Chapter 6, where "Her performance was pleasing, although by no means capital." (Austen 223). Elizabeth is able to satisfy people's expectations but doesn't hold that priority musically. Her not receiving any capital from her performance shows a refusal to comply with the superficial achievements marked by the rest of society. In an assertion of her character she displays both privilege and her battling the privilege of others. Her separation of the self from their accomplishments drives a sense of her status, although the Bennets lack wealth to indulge in their lifestyle, they still live a comfortable lifestyle that many others couldn't attain. While Elizabeth carries that privilege she also contrasts it against the accomplishments of others like Caroline Bingley who uses music as a means to display her wealth.

Caroline Bingley contrasts the Bennets by having a financial base to indulge on her desired achievements. As Ashfaq and Khattak highlight in their article "Dilemma of Class Classification in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*", "Bingley earns half the amount of Darcy's yearly income and he is not even from the landed gentry, still they share social equality. While Mr. Bennet's connections, according to them, make him unworthy of becoming a relative through marriage." (Ashfaq and Khattak 33). Caroline has the means to devote both her time and money

towards proper instruction and resources. Bingley's privilege stems from her wealth, and it's because of that wealth that Caroline is socially refined. Her ability to use music as a demonstration of her status suggests that financial security is crucial to one's musical progress. Her musical ability contrasts Mary's desperate passion for piano and Elizabeth's commitment to the self over a commitment to the achievement. In *Pride and Prejudice*, musical prowess is an achievement, however Austen argues through the Bennets that these achievements do not define one's self worth. Caroline contrasts the Bennets by externalizing that worth to one's wealth, accomplishments, and lifestyle. Gillian Dooley comments on the relationship between privilege and success through her article "A Most Luxurious State: Men and Music in Jane Austen's Novels", writing:

"Darcy's pronouncement on accomplishments in conversation with Caroline Bingley and Elizabeth, during her stay at Netherfield early in the novel, is often quoted—he agrees with Caroline that "a woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages, to deserve the word", and adds the requirement of 'the improvement of her mind by extensive reading'" (Dooley 602).

Darcy's agreement with Caroline on the necessities of refinement shows the different attitudes monetary privilege leaves on people. Caroline demonstrates that wealth allows one to accomplish goals easier while the Bennet sisters push their limitations through a level of discipline. Elizabeth is shown to have discipline but not towards music, while Mary carries that musical discipline in service to the recognition of the self. Mary's lackluster performance and Elizabeth's adequate musicianship show that one's wealth and musical prowess is not a marker of one's self worth. Darcy and Caroline's assertion that a woman must carry specific knowledge and insight limits one's potential to their family's wealth. It's in this assertion that music

becomes more shallow even if it's more complex; Darcy and Caroline's mentality shows that they can see the value of something like music, but not understand what makes it valuable.

Austen characterizes music as a reflection of privilege through how each of these characters tie their background to music. For those with disposable income music isn't what you play but who you know, while for the Bennet sisters music is a reflection of the self. This pattern of treatment towards music is further embodied in Austen's later novels.

Emma further establishes music as a stationary character, however varies in how the presence of music impacts the characters in the novel. Similar to Mary, Jane Fairfax transforms music into a passion, however Jane differentiates herself as a character due to her background and potential career as a governess. Gillian Dooley's article "Music and Class in Jane Austen" discusses how Jane Fairfax is altered as a musician:

"Jane Fairfax, grand-daughter of an impoverished clergyman's widow, while she is patronized and pitied for her ambiguous social position, is admitted to Highbury society because of her elegance and accomplishment. As Kathryn Libin writes, 'musical affinities.. help to define character and to illuminate the true social hierarchy in Highbury' ('Music' 15). Musicianship is by no means the only way to a man's heart in Austen's fiction, with heroines such as Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Catherine Morland not playing at all, but Austen is conscious of the potential social and romantic benefits of performance." (Dooley).

Dooley comments on the social and romantic benefits of performing music, allowing Jane to be noticed as more than a governess in training. Jane's humble background becomes less limiting because of her talent. It's because of her musical ability that Jane Fairfax is accepted and praised socially. Without her musicianship she would remain with a lack of social capital and in response

a lack of recognition. Dooley reaffirms the idea that Jane achieves more opportunities because of her musical talent with the moment Frank Churchill gifts Jane a pianoforte for Valentine's Day:

“Jane Fairfax's proficiency may grate on Emma, but she is honest enough to acknowledge that her own ‘playing is just good enough to be praised, but Jane Fairfax's is much beyond it’ (250). Until Frank's gift of a ‘very elegant looking.. large-sized square pianoforté,’ Jane did not ‘have an instrument’”(232–33). Mrs. Cole, in justifying the purchase of a ‘new grand pianoforté’ that none of the family is able to play, argues that the acquisition will enable them to enjoy the music of guests to their home, like ‘poor Jane Fairfax, who is mistress of music, [but who] has not any thing of the nature of an instrument, not even the pitifullest old spinet in the world, to amuse herself with’ (233).” (Dooley).

Jane Fairfax's comparison to Emma not only places Jane's talent above Emma's, it is also an example of Jane being limited by her wealth. Until Frank's gifting of the pianoforte, Jane had no instrument at home. In comparison to Emma, whose playing is adequate but unremarkable and the Cole family who purchase a pianoforte with no musicians in the family, Jane's relationship with music distinctly declares music as the collision between wealth and ambition. In the context of the Cole family, they seek that their pianoforte will bring other musicians into their home, reaffirming their social status and making their home a meeting place for the community. The Cole family garners social capital with the pianoforte in their home, its inclusion gives the family the opportunity to flaunt their social status.

Jane Fairfax's drive towards music also reflects that part of her motivation is to cope with the possibility of having to become a governess. Dooley explores Jane's motivation, “Jane does

not look on the prospect of becoming a governess with favor, describing the profession as the ‘sale... of human intellect.’ While she repudiates an exact connection with the ‘slave-trade,’ she does claim that the ‘governess-trade’ may cause an even ‘greater misery [to] the victims’ (325)” (Dooley). Fairfax compares the profession to the slave trade, because of the imbalance of wealth that many governesses grip with. Jane’s lack of wealth instills her with the perpetual responsibility of remaining independent, professions like being a governess drive a reliance on the families they assist, leaving the governess treated as lesser than and leaving them isolated from the rest of society. Jane sees the position of a governess as a travesty, also sharing insight into why she would explore music as much as she does. For Jane, her musical talent creates an escape, even Jane is ultimately forced into the profession. Her musical ability is impressive and appreciated, however it is not seen as a true accomplishment because of their background. Jane lacks the social freedom to allow her talents to reflect her status, where instead her talents communicate to others that she’s ready to become a governess. When the Cole family pities Jane for not having a practice space, it’s due to her not having the opportunity to make herself accomplished enough to be employable. Dooley’s exploration of Jane Fairfax’s skills and future argues that Jane’s musical skills remain social capital and don’t serve as a viable vocation.

Austen also reflects music as privilege through her focus on Emma Woodhouse. In Chapter 2 of Volume 2, Emma plays the piano at a social gathering and becomes annoyed at both her reception and Jane’s quiet reaction. Austen details the scene:

“They had music; Emma was obliged to play; and the thanks and praise which necessarily followed appeared to her in an affectation of candour, an air of greatness, meaning only to shew off in higher style was her own very superior performance. She was, besides, which was the worst of all, so cold, so cautious! There was no getting at her

real opinion wrapt up in a cloak of politeness, she seemed determined to hazard nothing. She was disgustingly, was suspiciously reserved.” (Austen 779).

Austen notes that Emma was expected to perform and got the expected praise for it. Emma grows frustrated in response, feeling that their praise was ingenuine and out of politeness. She perceives Jane’s quiet behavior as her being cold when in reality Jane remains reserved because she doesn’t have the same achievements to vocalize. What Emma perceives as “suspiciously reserved” is a lack of privilege. While Emma sees Jane’s superior musical accomplishments as purely competitive, Jane’s ability demonstrates music defying class assumptions and expectations. Jane lacks the experience to act as performative as others around her, leading a refusal by necessity to not partake in the superficial flaunting of one’s talents. Emma’s attitude towards Jane demonstrates her natural privilege and assumptions in performing music; her negative response to others praise shows that Emma receives praise frequently enough to diminish its value. Emma continues to display social superiority in her constant assumptions in other people. Paul Stasi’s article “‘She Knew She Ought to Be Happy’: Socialized Subjects in Emma” showcases Emma’s mindset at the beginning of Volume 2:

“This point returns us to Frank Churchill, who has been secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax all along. Emma is outraged: ‘What right had he to come among us with affection and faith engaged, and with manners so very disengaged? What right had he to endeavor to please, as he certainly did—to distinguish any one young woman with persevering attention, as he certainly did—while he really belonged to another?’ (372).” (Stasi 369).

Emma’s frustration in this scene depicts a social entitlement that she carries towards life. Her outrage with Frank and Jane’s secret marriage exhibits an outlier to Emma controlling the social

order of Highbury and of those around her. Emma is socially driven by being able to be a matchmaker in someone else's life, it's why she takes in Harriet with the attempt to improve her and why she feels so challenged by Jane Fairfax. Emma's entitlement is her social privilege, stemming into her musical performance. She resents Jane Fairfax's because Jane surpassed people's expectations while Emma lives by meeting expectations. Emma performs when obliged and in return receives the expected response, she lives without the stress of needing to succeed because Emma was born into wealth. Jane lives her life in spite of her fear of failure; Jane is driven to be successful because she has to prove that she's successful. Emma stands as a contrast to Jane's musical success, showcasing that Emma is protected from a pressure to perform due to her wealth.

Frank Churchill stands out in comparison to Emma and Jane in his openness to insincerity. Similar to Emma, Frank was born into wealth but limited by the superficial decorum of polite society. Frank utilizes music as a means of establishing charm, where music becomes even more performative than its contributions towards Emma and Caroline Bingley's image. Frank asserts it not only in his image, but also in his connection with Jane Fairfax. As Dooley notes in "A Most Luxurious State: Men and Music in Jane Austen's Novels", "None of her [Austen's] male characters seem to play musical instruments. There are some men who sing duets with ladies, but they always turn out to be more or less disreputable" (Dooley 606). Frank's singing serves no emotional purpose outside of establishing social connections with other people. Where Jane Fairfax found a more accurate reflection of her potential, Frank lives through his privilege. Dooley strengthens this claim stating:

"Frank knows that Jane 'would never had allowed me to send it, had any choice been given her', (43) but does it anyway. Emma also behaves badly: she cannot resist making

the gift an occasion for malicious gossip as she discusses with Frank her groundless suspicion of an attachment between Jane and her friend's husband, Mr Dixon." (Dooley 605).

Frank abuses his privilege in this moment to live as he pleases. His pianoforte is an inappropriate gift, however follows through on gifting it to Jane, depicting a power imbalance where Jane is indebted to Frank and that Jane's say on the matter means less than Frank's opinions. Not only is the gift manipulative, it shows that he perceives music as a means to an end. Whereas for all the other women discussed prior, music served each of them for one reason or another; Frank differs by using other's musical talents to serve his motives. He serves himself by reaching towards other's talents, that act of attaining one's desires through other people is a prime example of his wealth and the privilege he carries as a man. As seen in Jane, artistic skills served a woman's efforts towards employment. As a man in that time, Frank Churchill had nothing to lose by indulging Jane's musical side. Jane however, stands with everything to lose; not only was the gift a secret, that secret creates a level of drama curated to reach Emma. Emma's reaction and turn to gossip depicts that Frank intended to instigate conflict in his gift. Gillian Dooley explores this gift further in an alternate article titled, "Music and Class in Jane Austen":

"Frank Churchill's expensive Valentine's Day surprise for Jane Fairfax is also replete with class symbolism: the prestigious Broadwood piano conveys his promise that the cultivated life Jane Fairfax shared with the Campbells will be resumed. She will not be forced to become a governess, who could not possibly take her instrument with her to any of the establishments pressed upon her as solutions to her future by Mrs. Elton. However, as David Selwyn perceptively comments, before their marriage the instrument is also 'freighted with the burdens of deceit and concealment that it has come to represent'

(143). Miss Bates reports that the seeming impossibility of keeping the Broadwood causes Jane pain and anxiety, with her niece addressing the instrument: 'You and I must part. You will have no business here' (417–18). Yet in spite of the almost suffocating presence of the pianoforte, she cannot bear to part with it and all the hopes it represents, deferring the moment of relinquishment until Colonel Campbell can 'help [her] out of all [her] difficulties'(418)" (Dooley).

The gift is exhibited to instill Jane with anguish and anxiety, while Frank in return reaps the benefits of the act of giving. Dooley explores the pianoforte as an act of class symbolism, where Jane is caught between the promises Frank carries in that piano and the harsh reality that he can't truly act out these promises as long as their marriage is secret. While Frank experiences no consequences in the gift, Jane is limited by the presence of the instrument. She cannot accept the gift and explain that it's from Frank, leaving her confined by an instrument that'd otherwise give her exponential opportunity. Jane's conflict with accepting the gift places music as a medium for both her ambitions and her troubles. Austen uses music as a means to display how people manipulate their privilege to attain a sense of superiority.

Austen's final novel *Persuasion* transitions into more of a reflective state, exploring how Anne Elliot's internal emotions impact her music. Rhadika Gupta's article "Reading Austen's Fiction as Modern: Women's Outward and Social Movements in Jane Austen's Novels" mentions how Austen depicts the setting of Bath as similar to London, with the important distinction that the classes are harder to pick apart (Gupta 973). Gupta observes how the roles of women impact interactions throughout the novel, starting with Austen's story structure:

"Most of her novels begin with the heroines banished from their homes including the Dashwood sisters in *Sense and Sensibility*, Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*,

Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, or facing a looming threat of such expulsion, for instance, the Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*. When the domestic space is rendered uncertain, it is no surprise that these women often resort to the outdoors for solace” (Gupta 976).

Gupta highlights the importance of the domestic space in creating or intentionally disrupting the interior of one’s life. When these women turn towards the outdoors they are in search of peace of mind, which typically only comes from a physical distance from their stressors. Although these stressful characters tend to stick around, music is detailed to be both a propelling force and a rescuing answer to that stress. For someone like Anne Elliot, who cannot always get away from their stressors by going outdoors, she turns to music as a soothing remedy. Gillian Dooley article “A Most Luxurious State: Men and Music in Jane Austen’s Novels” discusses Anne’s musical experience writing:

“As *Persuasion* begins, Anne Elliot does not lack an instrument to play. Her deprivation is crueller still: she doesn’t have the luxury of an appreciative listener. When she plays, even in company, She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself; but this was no new sensation: excepting one short period of her life, she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste. In music she had been always used to feel alone in the world.” (Dooley 605).

Dooley suggests that Anne Eliot distinguishes herself as a character by having a lack of emotional engagement instead of a physical deprivation. Anne Elliot lacks the appreciative audience to give her music social capital. Austen depicts only Anne deriving pleasure from her music, portraying a situation where Anne isn’t seen for her true value. Austen proposes a social

absence where music can coexist as a passion alongside Anne's wealthy background, however Anne still experiences a lack of fulfillment in life. Although she has privilege and she has musical prowess, she lacks the environment to exemplify her talent. Compared to many of the other women musicians featured in Austen's other novels, Anne Elliot differs because she seeks that social connection that Austen's other heroines sought to break away from. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, music served towards one's image, while in *Persuasion*, Anne lacks the social setting to perform. Austen depicts Anne going unnoticed in Chapter 8 of Volume 1, where, "The evening ended with dancing. On its being proposed, Anne offered her services, as usual; and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved" (Austen 1130). Austen notes how Anne expected to go unnoticed, however one's realization of an issue does not equate to Anne making peace with that issue. She grew tears just sitting at the instrument because she was denied a voice. While music gave others like Jane Fairfax and Mary Bennet the attention of the room, Anne Elliot's playing carries the opposite effect, leaving Anne desiring recognition of her value. Although she is troubled, she exhibits her privilege in her formal education and in the permanent presence of an instrument in her life. Dooley notes that Anne does not lack an instrument but lacks the social freedoms others demonstrate in performances. As a result, music functions as a responsibility, a type of housekeeping Anne pursues in order to be seen. Similar to Mary Bennet, Anne is seen infrequently, but ultimately unrecognized for their efforts.

Austen characterizes music to enforce characters to the status quo, revealing how their privilege limits as many doors as it opens for one. Music in *Pride and Prejudice* reflects the limits of the social order through characters like Mary Bennet and her desperation to be

appreciated for her accomplishments, which in response causes many others to preemptively judge her. Elizabeth proposes the idea that music is an extension of the self, and one's technical prowess is connected to the extent of one's self application. Elizabeth values being herself, cementing a dichotomy between superficial achievements and intrinsic value. Caroline Bingley presents an alternate way of thinking in which music serves towards promoting one's privilege and wealth. While she can play music proficiently, her intentions behind playing music manipulate the function of music from the soundtrack to a social gathering to the presentation of the artist performing the music.

Emma further strengthens music's multifaceted presence. Jane Fairfax demonstrates an application of oneself towards music in spite of her less privileged upbringing, Music serves Jane as a sort of social capital where Jane is praised for surpassing people's expectations. Unfortunately her musical talent does not grant her greater social purpose outside of gaining employment as a governess, an idea Jane is repulsed by, This forced push towards being a governess shows that music is simply an asset for an undesired future, suggesting that music can grant one certain privileges and even sympathy, but not grant one freedom. Emma Woodhouse displays her social privilege in her constant assumptions and comparisons of people around her. Emma devalues the acceptance of polite society in her musical performance, she plays because she feels obligated to perform and in response feels that the praise for her performance is ingenuine. She ultimately is shielded from a pressure to perform, a defining factor in Jane's musical ability. Frank Churchill contrasts the women of these novels not just by having different gender expectations, but by his manipulation of music to serve his social connections and public perception. Frank uses a pianoforte gift as an act of his social status, leaving Jane with a gift she

cannot accept or keep secret. Frank uses his wealth to display his privilege, devaluing music to an act of social capital.

Austen's final novel *Persuasion* shows that music is defined by social connection. Anne Elliot lacks the social connection to make her music act as more than an expectation. Performing music left Anne without the opportunity to socialize, showcasing music as a responsibility rather than an art. Austen uses social classes to communicate that music is not only humanistic, but also driven by benevolence. Whenever music relates to conflict in Austen's novels, it is due to characters being in competition with each other. For characters like Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Fairfax, or Anne Elliot who all choose to do good in spite of hardship, music functions as a reflection of the self. When one lives through passion rather than social performance, their music prospers because it reflects the value of the individual. Austen uses music to communicate the varying levels of authenticity people tie to their wealth. In this exploration, one's privilege is more likely to limit one's desire to apply themselves than to bar one from pursuing music.

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