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Womanly Wiles:

An Analysis of Women's Power in Four Novels by Jane Austen

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ABSTRACT:

Jane Austen käsittelee romaaneissaan naisten elämää ja heidän asemaansa 1900-luvun alun englantilaisessa yhteiskunnassa. Kirjojen sankarittaret ja monet sivuhenkilöt tarjoavat useita eri näkökulmia naisten yrityksiin selvitä miesvaltaisessa maailmassa sekä heidän valtapyrkimyksiinsä ja itsemääräämisoikeuden tavoitteluunsa. Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma keskittyy neljän Jane Austenin romaanin naissivuhenkilöihin ja tarkastelee heidän kauttaan, mitä naiseksi tuleminen ja naisena eläminen tarkoittaa Austenin luomassa maailmassa. Lisäksi tutkielma selvittää näiden henkilöhahmojen vallantavoittelutapoja ja sitä, kuinka heidän valtapyrkimyksensä onnistuvat.

Tutkielmassani analysoin yhteensä kymmentä naissivuhenkilöä, jotka on valittu romaaneista *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park* ja *Emma.* Olen jakanut valitut henkilöhahmot kolmeen kategoriaan, joiden kautta tarkastelen yllä mainittuja aiheita. Tutkielmani teoreettisena pohjana ja analyysini perustana on feministinen kirjallisuuskritiikki. Teoriaosassa määrittelen tutkielmassa käytetyt keskeiset käsitteet ja valotan 1800- ja 1900-lukujen vaihteen keskiluokkaisten naisen elämää ja asemaa sellaisena kuin se historiallisten todisteiden pohjalta näyttäytyy.

Austenin esimerkkien pohjalta on mahdollista todeta, että tullakseen naiseksi Austenin romaaneissa, naishenkilöhahmojen täytyy ymmärtää, että heillä ei loppujen lopuksi ole todellista valtaa. Tämän tosiasian hyväksyminen edellyttää yhteiskunnan sääntöjen noudattamista ja sen naisia koskevien odotusten täyttämistä. Sankarittarien tarinat loppuvat aina onnellisesti, mutta naissivuhenkilöt saavat useimmiten tyytyä vähempään ja jopa pettyä odotuksissaan. Näiden sivuhenkilöiden onnellisuus, selviytyminen ja kunniallisuus määrittyvät lopulta sen mukaan kuinka valmiita he ovat alistumaan yhteiskunnan naisille luomaan rooliin. Toiset henkilöhahmoista käsittävät, mitä heiltä odotetaan ja heille myönnetään kohtuullisen onnellinen loppu, mutta toiset eivät pitkienkään koitoksien jälkeen huomaa virheitään ja joutuvat elämään niiden kanssa.

KEY WORDS: Jane Austen, women, power

1 INTRODUCTION

In her novels Jane Austen (1775-1817) masterfully depicts early nineteenth century English society, concentrating on the domestic life of the middle class. The fact that it is the domestic life that is recounted in these stories foregrounds the women, for home life and functioning in small society is what their due was. Even though Austen wrote stories whose settings, code of behaviour and characters carry a strong resemblance with her contemporary society, it cannot be said that she actually depicted the English country society as it was at her time. Rather, she created a parallel world filled with caricatures living the lives that Austen wrote for them.

However, there is one aspect on which Austen concentrated with alacrity and took great care to examine from many different angles: the status of women in society is a recurrent theme throughout all of Austen's novels. Not only with her heroines but also with the supporting female characters Austen found ample opportunities of portraying the survival strategies of women in the male-dominated world, and their struggles to gain power and control over their own lives. It is these minor female characters, and not the heroines, on which this study concentrates, examining what it means to become and be a woman in Jane Austen's novels. This study also takes interest in the means these characters use to pursue power and how well they succeed in it.

As to what it means to become a woman in Austen's fiction, I claim that the female characters need to realise that women have no real power, and to accept this fact they must submit to the prevalent norms and expectations of the society. To support and illustrate this statement I have chosen to concentrate on some of the minor female characters that are young and single, because they all are in a phase in their lives where there are considerable changes waiting. For the most part, their stories run parallel to that of the heroine and thus go through roughly the same stages as hers, but in slightly less of a fairy-tale manner. The lives of these women represent a variety of directions that a life of a single woman of small fortune could lead to: spinsterhood, a marriage of reason, becoming a governess, years' worth of secret engagement, elopement, and losing one's reputation.

For the purposes of my study I have chosen four of the six completed novels written by Jane Austen, namely *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice*

(1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Emma* (1815). Picked from these novels, the characters analysed in depth are, respectively: Marianne Dashwood and Lucy Steele, Lydia Bennet and Charlotte Lucas, Mary Crawford, and Jane Fairfax. The qualifications for the chosen characters are that they are single, of the heroine's immediate society, thus engaged in similar pursuits of a suitable husband as the heroine is. In addition to these, I have added analysis on matriarch characters in each of the novels, because they have significant influence on the destinies of the characters listed above, and through them, the scope of female life and its stages in Jane Austen's fiction is considerably widened and deepened. The matriarchs that receive a closer examination are Mrs. Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*, Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park,* and Mrs. Churchill in *Emma.*

The method with which this study is conducted and constructed relies mostly on literary analysis and concentrates on the characterization in the above mentioned four novels. For my study, *Studying a Novel* (1997) by Jeremy Hawthorn has been most beneficial. The analysis involves reflections on the portrayal of women in Austen's prose and the representations of the woman of the time in general, and thus it gives the thesis a bent towards feminist studies. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984) by Mary Poovey, concerning the ideology of female propriety as style in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen, as well as *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (1998) by Amanda Vickery, with its insight to the lives of middle-class women in Jane Austen's contemporary England, have been very useful in terms of constructing a theory. *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (1980) by Susan Morgan, with its analysis of the novels of Jane Austen, and *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2001) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, that observes the works of the nineteenth-century women writers through feminist criticism have, among others, given me ideas and insight and aided my study.

To lay foundations for my study, in the second chapter I first explain some important issues regarding the status of women as it was at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in Jane Austen's England. This chapter clarifies points about patriarchy and the separation of the male and female sphere, that are essential to understand when reading Austen's stories, since in her

fiction she dealt with issues concerning women that were a steadfast and unquestionable part of society. In the third chapter, I will then proceed to analyse six minor female characters chosen from four of Austen's novels, and examine their pursuits of power, their relation to it, and how they succeed in their struggle to gain control. I will also analyse the four matriarch characters mentioned above, especially the way their actions affect the individual plotlines of the single female characters that are the main concern in this study. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I present the conclusions of my analysis to prove and support the point I made above about what it means to become and be a woman in Jane Austen's novels.

1.1 "By A Lady" – Jane Austen as a Novelist

It is good to keep in mind that as an author Jane Austen (1775-1817) was a Realist and not a Romantic, despite the choice of topic in her fiction. The irony and humour with which she handles her plots, portrays her characters, the society they live in and the ideas and thoughts they present, have established her as a Realist writer. It can be said, as Ioan Williams points out, that with her work, Austen provided the basic format for the later Realist novel and made an entirely new kind of development possible in the English novel (10). Moreover, according to Roger Sales, Austen's fiction symbolises a lost innocence, which is also an attribute readily attached to the Regency period itself, which in itself has been described in quite controversial terms as a pastoral idyll and a period of utter elegance, but also as a time of scandal and an era of ugly coarseness (14, 26).

In Austen's case, quality definitely compensates for quantity: she only ever completed six novels, two of which were published after her death by her brother. She led a relatively uneventful life, though her large family provided diversion enough for anybody. She never married and lived most of her adult life together with her mother and elder sister. It cannot be said that she lived by her pen, since the total of her earnings from her novels reached only about seven hundred pounds. She did not wish to be a public figure, and protected her privacy carefully after her writing had become famous.

It may be, as has been stated, that she "chose settings for her novels which allowed her to exercise her strengths and conceal her weaknesses so far as her knowledge of different sorts of people and of human experiences was concerned" (Hawthorn, 136). This kind of writing strategy can hardly be claimed to have been used exclusively by Austen, and it does sound quite patronising and tries to persuade the reader not to take Austen and her literary efforts seriously. It is true that Austen's fictional world is fairly limited, but as she herself has said "3 or 4 families in a Country Village [was] the very thing to work on" (*Jane Austen's Letters,* 401). Especially, in Austen's work, the lives of women are brought to the centre of attention: the limitations, the domesticity and the virtual uneventfulness of their lives that were prevalent. Where Austen's male contemporaries wrote about men-about-town, adventures, and women of a questionable reputation, she concentrated on the feelings and the internal lives of women, dealing with social relations and demands, and thus gave accounts of situations that everybody could well relate to. When it comes to this "domestic comedy of middle class manners" (Southam, 5), Austen is on her native soil and there is no other that could conduct the story quite as she does; and for a reason too, for it is she who invented the mode in the first place.

1.2 The Novels

The primary sources for this study are the four novels mentioned earlier, namely *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park,* and *Emma*. As to why the choice has fallen on these four and not some other combination that could be made of the total six novels, I claim that these four present Austen's style in its truest form, being the works from the height of her career as an author. The plotlines, though by no means copies of each other, circle around the same subject matter – how young women marry – and follow the similar course from the initial kindling of affection between the hero and the heroine, to toil and troubles, and the eventual happy ending culminating in often more than one marriage among the characters of the novel. Moreover, the plots being as they are, there is an abundance of characters, especially supporting females, who are provided with plotlines of their own that run parallel to the main story of the heroine and the hero.

In order to facilitate citing and keep the references to the bibliography light, I have used the following abbreviations concerning my primary source material, the original texts by Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*: *P&P, Sense and Sensibility: S&S, Emma: E,* and *Mansfield Park: MP.* In the following sub-chapters I have summarised the plots of the studied novels.

1.2.1 *Sense and Sensibility*

Sense and Sensibility was Jane Austen's first published novel, and it is a story about the Dashwood sisters Elinor and Marianne who have to leave their home with their mother and younger sister after their father dies and the estate is entailed to their half-brother. The Dashwood ladies land in Devonshire to live in a cottage which soon fills up with romance and broken hearts. Elinor pines for her sister-in-law's brother Edward, whom she met and befriended shortly before they had to leave their previous home. Marianne falls passionately in love with the dashing Mr. Willoughby, who rescues her after a fall during a rainy walk. Marianne is also keenly admired by a Colonel Brandon, who sees in her the chance to relive his youthful love affair. The Dashwoods' society also includes the Miss Steeles, one of whom, Lucy, secretly confides in Elinor and knowingly crushes her dreams of loving Edward by telling her she has been secretly engaged to him for four years. Also Marianne's heart is broken by no other than Mr. Willoughby who is forced to dump her because she is not wealthy enough a bride. Eventually Marianne comes to see the true nature of Mr. Willoughby, a disgraceful libertine, and also the merits of Colonel Brandon who has patiently waited for her, and Elinor is united with Edward whom Lucy has released from their engagement after she learns that Edward's mother has disinherited him and intends to give everything to Edward's younger brother Robert. Lucy deals Edward for Robert and eventually everyone is happy.

1.2.2 *Pride and Prejudice*

Being Jane Austen's most famous and maybe also the most popular book, *Pride and Prejudice* tells a story of the pretty and witty Elizabeth Bennet, the second-oldest of the

five daughters of a country gentleman. The story involves a great deal of misunderstandings, pride and prejudice that must be overcome before Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, the hero of the novel finally get together. Though Elizabeth's story is at the centre of the novel, there are also sub-plots running parallel to the one of hers. One is the more conventional love story of Elizabeth's older sister Jane and her patient waiting and pining for Mr. Bingley, the eligible bachelor recently arrived to the society of the Bennet girls. This story needs its time to tangle and untangle again with the help of manipulating relatives and well-meaning friends. Another Bennet sister causes a scandal by eloping with a poor, good-for-nothing officer who first was Elizabeth's admirer. One more storyline inside the main story deserves mentioning: Elizabeth's close friend Charlotte Lucas chooses to marry for establishment and a secure future, she too with a man who first courted Elizabeth with poor results.

1.2.3 *Mansfield Park*

The story of *Mansfield Park* centres at a country manor of the same name and around the Bertram family residing in it. The family includes Mr. and Mrs. Bertram, their two sons Thomas and Edmund, two daughters Maria and Julia, Mrs. Bertram's sister Mrs. Norris and a foster daughter Fanny Price who is the niece of Mrs. Bertram and Mrs. Norris as well as the heroine of the book. Fanny loves Edmund because he is the only one who has always been kind to her and interested in her. However, Edmund is smitten by Mary Crawford who is the relative of the parish parson and visiting Mansfield parsonage for a time with her brother Henry. To amuse himself, Henry tries to woo Fanny, while he also is courting the Bertram girls. Mary befriends the reluctant Fanny, a relationship that Edmund wholeheartedly supports, though Fanny would only want Edmund to see how false and wicked Mary really is. Fanny is further tormented by Henry who proposes to her; Fanny refuses because the only one she wants is Edmund, not Henry whom she thinks false because she knows of his affairs with her cousins. Eventually, Henry and Maria, who has married one Mr. Rushworth for money and status, cause a scandal by eloping, and Julia follows her sister's example by running away with one of her older brother's friends. Thomas Bertram falls ill, and when this occasion is added to the woe caused by the Miss Bertrams, Fanny's aunt and uncle

begin to see her merits. Edmund's eyes are finally opened to Mary's true nature when she tries to talk away the damages made by her brother, and is already counting the money Edmund will be entitled to if and when Thomas should die of his illness. Fanny gets Edmund and the defeated Mary has to return to her life of idleness and fancy in London.

1.2.4 *Emma*

Emma Woodhouse is a pretty, wealthy and bored girl who tries her hand in matchmaking in order to have something to while away her time. For a while this goes well, and she prides herself in having found her governess, Miss Taylor, the most eligible husband in Mr. Weston. However, when she decides to match her young friend Harriet Smith with the most unlikely partners and fills her head with nonsensical ideas of her chances, the matters take a turn to worse. Mr. Knightley, the hero of the book, tries to moderate and guide the headstrong Emma, but with questionable results. Emma's immediate society includes a spinster Miss Bates and her old mother, whose niece Jane Fairfax comes to visit, very much at the same time when Mr. Weston's son from his earlier marriage, Frank Churchill, also pays a long-awaited visit to his father and his new wife. Jane and Frank are both familiar to everybody, but still outsiders who have secrets together, as it eventually turns out. Jane's story, her silent anguish makes an interesting and contrasting sub-plot to that of Emma's, whose life in principle is very carefree and easy. Eventually, all the problems are solved, and due to fortunate circumstances everybody marries the right person and misunderstandings are sorted out.

2 A WOMAN'S WORTH – THE STATUS OF A WOMAN IN REGENCY ENGLAND

In order to understand the actions and the situation of female characters in Jane Austen's novels that are under examination in this study, one has to be aware of the ideas that the turn of the eighteenth century English society had about women. The status of a middle-class woman was something of an institution, very firmly established and full of controversies and paradoxes with which each woman of the time had to live. These ideas about women and the female status in society were something all women had to adjust to in order to retain their respectability and lead a tolerable life in the patriarchal society. They limited women's access to power, and condemned those who tried to struggle against them. The social expectations and norms shaped a course of life acceptable for women, a course with very little room to follow any other path if one was not ready to jeopardise one's reputation and position in society.

2.1 Patriarchy

When one considers the status of a woman during the Georgian and Regency periods – or, for that matter, during any other time period – it is evident that the structure and the rules of society played a crucial role in the development and preservation of that status. With this in mind, the first thing to be understood about Regency England is that it was a highly patriarchal society, which had an exhaustive effect on women, their lives and status in the said society, as well as on their identity and self-perception. As Sylvia Walby points out, there are several overlapping definitions of patriarchy by different theorists and disciplines, but the key idea in almost all of them is that patriarchy is a system of society where men have the dominant status over women. In such a society, women are excluded from the public sphere, and male supremacy is prevalent in every sector of life from the government to the private household (19–24).

This describes Austen's contemporary England particularly well, and the same structures can be detected in her novels. Middle-class women of the time had no active, assertive role in the public sphere, they had no right to vote, and they had to forfeit their

right to control their property and children to their husbands after marriage. To be able to make a will, sign a contract or press legal charges against something or someone, women needed their husbands' consent. The concept of patriarchy is also strongly connected with the socialisation process and the formation of masculine and feminine identities. Boys and girls were brought up to very different roles and there is an emphasis on the idea that masculinity and femininity were the mirror images of each other. While men were active, assertive, and rational, women were passive, cooperative, and emotional (Walby, 91–3). This supports the concept of the ideal woman, the Proper Lady that became such an institution during the late eighteenth century and continued to thrive over the next decade.

2.2 Courtship and Marriage

A woman, economically and politically, was considered to be equal to a child; she had no say in politics, the inheritance laws and customs favoured men, and could and would leave a woman with nothing if the chance should so order. Socially, a woman was valued for her marriageability, and her reason for existence was to be a wife and a mother, because only as a married woman she could have a status in society. Thus, the ideal woman was defined as a proper lady, always well-behaved, modest, quiet and subservient, having no greater ambitions than being a good daughter, wife and mother (Poovey, 3–10).

Such emphasis laid on marriage, it is no wonder that the events leading to the state of matrimony, the time of courtship was considered "the supreme adventure for a woman" (Vickery, 82). This in-between period between being single and being married was for most women the only time they had serious influence over men. A courted woman was the centre of attention, on the verge of gaining everything she had worked for so hard, the leading female of a thrilling drama. Indeed, it is as Amanda Vickery states that "a girl of family, fortune and character could make a career of her coming out in society" (ibid.). Here too, the balance between propriety and failure or scandal was a difficult thing to maintain: if a woman was to appear too eager and encourage her suitor in an impudent manner, in the worst case she was to run a risk of appearing to disobey her parents, which could in turn lead to far worse endings, such as disinheritance and

scandal. If, on the other hand a woman exercised too fastidious a decorum, a suitor might tire of her and find some other lady more willing to receive his attentions (Vickery, 82).

Where a man could choose what to do with his life and modify his choices in case he made a mistake, a woman was expected to make only one choice in her life, and that choice would define the entire course of the rest of her life (Gilman, 71). Women were born, trained and exhibited for one purpose only, marriage and motherhood, but as it happened, a proper lady must not even look as if she wanted it. The reason for not being allowed to appear too eager was simply in the norms of behaviour foisted on women: because a man supported a woman in return for the duties of wife and mother, no honourable woman could ask for it (Gilman, 89). This paradox was indeed a problem: to have so much depending on one single thing, and to see the possibilities for ever gaining it diminish year after year, and on top of it all, to be forbidden by propriety and honour from taking any actions in order to secure it (Gilman, 87). In this light, the ridicule and mockery many contemporary spinsters were under might seem a little strange, but as women's status was primarily sexual and their marriageability depended upon it, failure to marry was seen as a failure to attract, as lack of any sexual value. After having failed in the function for which they were initially created, the only thing left for these women was some value in housekeeping and domestic service (Gilman, 90).

By the spread of the capitalistic organisation and the increase in individual property, inheritance and family lineage became important matters. To be able to assign children to particular parents called for monogamous family which was based on the insistence on female chastity (Robinson, 100). A woman was to be defined by her relationship to a man; she was someone's daughter, wife, mother or a widow. Her marriageability gradually became one of the most important issues in society, as women were instrumental in the process of forming a beneficial link between the wealth of the middle classes and the political power of the land gentry, the aristocrats. This role as an improver of her father's social status and her husband's financial one made a woman essentially an object; she was something to attain, to have, and eventually the visible sign of a man's position in his pursuit of social prestige. Therefore, a woman could also

endanger the entire system, the status of her male guardian: with one act of infidelity or otherwise scandalous behaviour everything could be lost.

Here, especially, the double standards of society were blatant. When a man broke the norms of behaviour, or proper conduct, he would still be able to continue living in the society, and would only obtain a status of notoriety which would, indeed, be considered scandalous but also, in a way, romantic and appealing. If a woman was to behave in a similar manner, she lost her respectability and was shunned out of the society, her reputation ruined. She would be conveyed to seclusion, to repent, to think of what she had done. A woman's actions never concerned only herself; if she was single, all her immediate family and nearest relations were to suffer from her misconduct, as there would be talk and a scandal. If she was married, her improper behaviour would ruin the very respectability of her husband in all his endeavours (Poovey, 5, 10–11).

This precarious situation called for means of control and such was suitably found in promoting modesty as the supreme female virtue. A woman who was modest was also chaste, and thus her desires would be under control, her fidelity to her husband guaranteed, and the whole system of the society basing on the idea and importance of a family life would be safe. It is notable that everything described as "unladylike" was likely to be something that would endanger the woman's fidelity to her husband. Also, all definitions of female virtue referred to and attempted to control female sexuality. The concept of honour also supports this view: a woman's honour was in the public recognition of her virtue, whereas a man's honour on the other hand was based on the reliability of his word (Vickery, 54).

The taboo status of female desire was based on an assumption that women were less capable than men to contain their passions because of their inconstant and unstable character. Women's emotional responsiveness had a dual nature: when properly controlled, it was displayed in domestic harmony and social charm, but when exposed to temptations it would eventually develop into a sexual desire that was feared (Poovey, 15–22). Thus, it is paradoxical that modesty should be the most reliable protector of a woman's chastity. According to Poovey,

> a modest demeanor served not only to assure the world that a woman's appetites were under control; it also indicated that female sexuality was still assertive enough to *require* control. That is, even as modesty was proclaimed to be ... the external sign of her internal integrity – it was also declared to be an advertisement for – and hence an attraction to – her sexuality. (21)

Here again a woman's objectified status is brought up; according to the stereotype and prevalent ideas, she appears as the Other, a passive being who is needed, not because of her as a person, but more as a tool to obtain something else, a social status, money, or pleasure. Moreover, as Lillian Robinson states, "physical pleasure and material security were essentially separated and assigned to different women. To a man the frigid wife was the assurance of fidelity and safeguard of respectability whereas seduction or rape of a lower-class woman provided him with sensuality and feeling of ownership" (101).

2.3 Education and Intellectual Life

In theory, middle-class women had access to education: by this day and age the ability to read and write was a given, and young girls could attend schools to refine their upbringing. As it appears in the biography of Jane Austen, written by Claire Tomalin, Austen herself attended such a school at a very young age. Tomalin states that "boarding schools for girls were not hard to find in the 1780s, not least because keeping a school was one of the very few ways in which a woman could hope to earn a respectable living" (36). As to what was taught in such schools, the education was mainly social: it appears that an accomplished young woman

> must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved. All this she must possess ... and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading. (*P&P*, 43)

The list above is a description of a well-educated young woman as presented by the well-educated Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, and when considering the mentality of the time, it was probably more than sufficient for most women to be able to entertain,

hold a civilised conversation and look agreeable. These accomplishments were, according to Mary Poovey, "one legitimate vehicle for the indirect indulgence of vanity" (29). Female self-expression was, with all due thanks to the idealisation of modesty, characterised by indirection, and only by disguising it as something else could women practice self-assertion. A woman's talents were not to be considered instruments to attain fame, but rather a husband: a proper lady would never attempt calling attention to herself by flaunting her talents. In fact, it is as Poovey states, that "a woman should think it [her] greatest commendation not to be talked of one way or other" (21).

All this supported the picture of an ideal woman in a time that "strongly encouraged even genuinely talented women to avoid behaviour that would call attention to themselves" (Poovey, 21). Though briefly embraced during the turmoil caused by the French Revolution in 1789, individualism was frowned upon, and its influences on women, and through them the society, were feared to cause the destruction of family life. Considering this and all the idealism concerning a proper woman, it is not surprising that "any unconventional attempt to explore, develop, or express the female self was to be branded 'monstrous'" (Poovey, 35).

Then again, women, though not able to study for a specified occupation, had the access to both scientific and fictional literature. This is noted also by Jane Austen in her novels: "[S]uch of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might." (*P&P*, 186). It is implied, therefore, that a woman's education was greatly a matter of her own interest: if she wished to improve her mind by studying, she could, because most middle-class homes had at least some form of a library. If she was not bothered, nobody would think to urge her because in her eventual duties as a wife and mother, it did not play a great role whether or not she could discuss philosophy or apply geometry in her everyday life.

In fact, too much reading was even considered to be a bad thing for a woman. Fiction was described to be "a result of an intellectually primitive attempt to explain the world in terms of fancy, crudely combining inadequate materials" (Williams, 4). It was also seen as especially appealing to children and women, and it would eventually distract the readers from serious study and prevent them from gaining intellectual maturity. It was claimed that novels tended to twist the readers' judgement, over-

stimulate their imagination, give them false impressions, and thus have an undesirable effect on their moral views (Williams, 4–5). Though women read for an entire host of different reasons, for escapism, instruction, or moral purposes, reading for pleasure was considered a distinctly female activity. As Rita Felski points out, the many depictions of women as readers were created by men, and indeed, at the time a figure of a reading woman was seen as intriguingly mysterious and sexually charged (29–33). The female reader led astray by fancies she had concocted under the influence of novels, was a popular topic in both the moralists' texts but also in fiction, and also Jane Austen has paid attention to the phenomenon in her novels. Such characters are typically young, romantic, and rather silly women who dream of a dashing lover to sweep them off their feet, but are through a series of mortifying and educating events eventually brought to their senses.

On the other hand, as women were an important group of readers and consumers of fiction, they were gradually accepted as participants in the moral debate which novels aroused. According to Margaret Kirkham,

> women of the middle class might be excluded from the major schools, the universities and the Church, and most of them received trivial education, but they were avid readers to whom the circulating library had provided something equivalent to an eighteenth century Open University. (14).

Thus, although the combination of women and books was not considered to be without its evils, female intellectuals were few and far apart, and bookishness was not an appealing feminine quality, women were able to "acquire a public voice and the authority of moral teachers" (Kirkham, 14) by participating in the new fiction phenomenon as readers and critics, as well as authors. Though female participation in the intellectual life was in principle quite informal and private, the number of female and mixed societies – literary, scientific, polemic – operating in London in the late eighteenth century proves that disapproving female participation in the public life did not always have the desired effect (Vickery, 257–8).

Though feminism, as it is now understood, did not exist in the patriarchal society of the turn of the eighteenth century England, there was a certain strong tendency towards the ideas that would not truly begin to emerge before the end of the

nineteenth century. Several of the contemporary women authors, such as Mary Astell, Catherine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft and indeed Jane Austen herself, strongly criticised the then prevalent idea that assigned women to be inferior to men as spiritual and moral beings (Kirkham, 4). Categorising women as “good” or “bad”, and grouping them under the demeaning and unrealistic label of “an angel” – as was quite common in the contemporary conduct books that had a strong influence on the ideas about the ideal female – encouraged hypocrisy and made women less than rational human beings (Kirkham 44). Also, the unnaturally strong emphasis on marriageability as defining the value of women roused criticism, because it meant that a woman’s status was first and foremost a sexual one (Gilman, 49).

This and the idea that women were somehow intellectually inferior to men just because they were women, denied women the right to be regarded as persons and not objects. As the early feminists saw it, the very inability of many women to take care of themselves, to support themselves and to be independent in thought was directly caused by the inadequate and evidently damaging education they received. If, therefore, women would be adequately educated, it would hone and add to their powers of rational understanding and in turn improve their status in society (Kirkham, 4–11). Of course, this kind of thinking was seen as a “threat to the patriarchal basis of authority in the family” (Kirkham, 4), and by extension the patriarchal authority in whole society.

2.4 Private and Public Spheres

The dawning of the age of industrialism in the eighteenth century separated the home from the workplace and increased the class difference, and as a result the everyday worlds of men and women became even more separated from each other. As men were the principal producers of wealth, the public sphere was automatically theirs, and alongside it, the freedom and social rights. The private sphere was thus appointed to women, and with it the many restrictions. Elaine Showalter’s well-known article “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” (1981) illustrates this very structure, where the male sphere is clearly the dominant one. The female sphere, on the other hand, is distinctly smaller and clearly isolated from the male one. Showalter points out that though the women’s sphere was a male invention and maintained by the male ideas of

the right place for women, women themselves often took these ideas as their own, and identified with the feminine ideals (198). With the image of a proper lady came the new domestic woman, who according to Amanda Vickery, was "created in and by print" (3), and was essentially "the epitome of bourgeois personality and an ornament shared by the middling ranks and the landed" (3). The conduct books and guides for women, most often written by men, were a popular product of the printing presses, and the image they promoted defined the female ideal. This proper lady, whom also Mary Poovey studies in her book the *Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984), became almost an institution, a model for all the middle-class women to look up to and to try to imitate.

Though the public and the private spheres were fairly gender-restricted, it did not necessarily mean that they did not meet in some respects. Politeness and polite conversation, which the eighteenth and nineteenth century periodicals promoted as an intellectually and morally acceptable past-time for mixed socialising, helped to establish an unofficial third sphere, the social one, which became "an intermediate sphere between the public and the private worlds" (Vickery, 196–7). It was neither private nor domestic, and though it enabled intermingling between the sexes, the social sphere was always in some ways a more female sphere. This social sphere included many kinds of diversions from private tea-parties to promenades, exhibitions, opera and public balls, where, incidentally, women were in the majority as audience and partakers. Of course, many of these attractions were available only in London or other cities, whereas in rural areas one had to content oneself with less extravagant pleasures and more private gatherings. Since the main reason for going out in public was to see people and to be seen and, if one was young and single, to find a potential spouse, a trip to town for a season of balls and other diversions was synonymous with entering the marriage market (Vickery, 265–7).

Pleasure and entertainment aside, the social sphere had also a more developing and civilising function. Even though the male and female spheres of life were very different from each other in their limitations and possibilities, the mutual benefit to be gained of interaction between the spheres was not a small matter when it came to proper upbringing and socialising. If women were restricted with diverse norms and multiple rules of conduct, it did not mean that men could behave in any which way they chose or that male brutality would not be frowned upon. As it was seen, "unpolished masculinity

seemed to pose a chronic threat to polite sociability" (Vickery, 213), so therefore, in order for a man to become fully socialised and attain civilised masculinity, he should seek the company of accomplished women.

The private sphere was emphatically dedicated to women and apart from motherhood, being a good housekeeper was a role that appeared to satisfy both the moralists' concern of idle females as well as the women's need to be useful. The importance of this role is well illustrated in the fact that prudency and frugality were as crucial qualities in a bride as charm and good breeding. A woman's life changed markedly when she became the mistress of a family; the house was a woman's dominion, and her management of it was an institution in itself with recognised symbols and ceremonies (Vickery, 129, 160).

Compared with earlier periods, in the eighteenth century there was a gradual shift away from "household production of raw materials and their manufacture towards final processing and management of a wider variety of often purchased goods in a semi-finished and finished state" (Vickery, 156). Though there might be a change in the methods of manual housework due developments in society, science and manufacturing, there was no change in the essentials of the housekeeping. The demands of the managerial role that housekeeping required from genteel women with government of servants, household economy, consumption and childcare remained unchanged throughout centuries (Vickery, 156).

A genteel Georgian household was not complete and smoothly running without a female superintendent, and it was quite unanimously accepted that such a post could not be fulfilled by a mere upper servant. What ever labours and strain must be endured to make the inner hierarchical system of a house run like a well-oiled machine, they must not show on the outside. Subtlety was a valid key word also in this sector of the female life. Because housekeeping was a role preordained for women, "those who advertised their pains [concerning housework] were vulnerable to disdainful mockery" (Vickery, 131). Usually gentlemen acknowledged their housekeepers' authority, and this was one of the few roles available to women that was a source of personal satisfaction and public credit. A house that was managed well reflected favourably on its residents: it promoted their decent gentility for the world. A smoothly running

household did therefore credit to its mistress and placed her in favourable comparison with other women (Vickery, 131–160).

Though individual expression and development, or at least their public display were also restricted, a woman could extend her domestic activities to charity work. By attending to the poor or teaching in a Sunday school, she had the chance to vent her energy, exercise her talents, and have one experience of a seemingly worthy occupation that was not directly linked to her family life. The church was a traditional forum for female public life, and it also was an important factor in social life for those living in small towns and villages. Because the thought of female preachers was unthinkable, and women were naturally excluded from expressing their religiousness in any polemic way, charitable activity was the only proper public forum for a woman's religious energy (Vickery, 254). Charitable giving had long been an established, though informal tradition of elite landowners' stewardship. The eighteenth century saw the institutionalisation of this activity in diverse female societies, and women seized the opportunity to be useful. According to F.K. Prochaska, this promoted a rapid growth in so-called district visiting,

> with its emphasis on the moral and physical cleansing of the nation's homes; the prominence of institutions for servants, widows and "ladies"; the application of family system in orphanages, ragged, schools and other institutions; and the expansion of children's charity (386)

It is debatable if charity activity can be defined as self-expression in the same scale as for example writing or pursuing a career in music, but it did, nevertheless, provide women with a socially accepted role. Charity work appears to have been yet another extension of good housekeeping, and its duties were similar to those of private housework, only the objective of charity was to promote greater good as opposed to individual and private welfare.

The "domestic imprisonment" (Hawthorn, 38) of women created by the etiquette, stereotypes and ideals was ambivalent in nature: on the one hand, at home a woman was able to give orders and be obeyed, make decisions on housekeeping matters and act the important role of the primary educator of her children. On the other hand, a woman was still dependent on her male guardian: she could not forget her status as the

visible sign of his success, and moreover, her sphere of life was limited, for example any longer journey outside that sphere required the leave and the assistance of a man. While a man was a public figure, lead an active live in a world where everything was open to him, a woman was his shadow, her life turned inwards towards the home, her own feelings and personal relationships.

Though a middle-class woman occupied a socially lower status when compared to the unrivalled patriarchal leadership of men, it did not mean that she had no say or authority in anything. Even though women were obliged to accept patriarchal authority whether it came from their fathers, brothers, husbands or other male guardians, it is good to note, as Amanda Vickery points out, that “to be mistress of oneself was paramount ... Abject feminine servility was the ineradicable mark of the kitchen maid, not her employer.” (8). It appears that most women were able to accept the role foisted on them quite stoically; as there was no use to strive against something so preordained, acceptance and resignation were better approaches. A proper genteel woman knew that in order to maintain her status, she had to know her place in the world: she was brought up to allow a man the rights of his place, but at the same time she was determined to hold on to her own rights.

The above summarises the female existence of not only the first decades of the nineteenth century that are the main concern here, but also hundreds of years before the said time. To a woman, life was always necessarily a struggle of survival in the male-dominated world, with no rights to speak of. Home was her domain, whether she liked it or not, and beyond housekeeping and duties of a wife and a mother, very little else was expected of her. This is, of course, a very generalised view of a middle-class Regency woman’s life but, nevertheless, the foundation of it. What ever course the individual lives took, these are the facts that formed the basis of every woman’s life.

3 WOMEN AND POWER IN FOUR NOVELS BY JANE AUSTEN

As the previous chapter shows, a middle-class woman's means to gain power and to express herself in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England were excessively limited. In order to have any freedom of action, a change of situation in society was the only way, and as one had to heed the etiquette, marriage was the only respectable way of changing one's situation. A married woman had a standing in society, and her influence, though nothing compared to that of a man, was nevertheless considerably stronger than the influence of a single woman. It is no wonder, then, that the minor female characters of Jane Austen's novels studied in this thesis, the single women in particular, strive hard for marriage and the benefits and status of a wife. Their motives for marrying are largely similar: every one of them wants to secure their future and avoid spinsterhood or some other threat to the existence of a single woman with little money. They all know that the only solution to their problem is to find a husband and preferably as soon as possible while they are still young and attractive.

Moreover, all of the characters want to escape certain circumstances in their lives, which too are very similar to each other, for instance annoying relatives or other members of their immediate society that have the means of controlling them, spinsterhood, necessity to earn their living, poverty, and dependence. In a way they all want to be free of the constraints of the norms of society that define their existence, and believe that marriage would liberate them. They have yet to discover that in order to survive at all, they all need to realise that a woman can never be free, nor have any real power, and that to be accepted, they need to acquiesce to the fact that society and its norms favour men.

The power structures throughout all Jane Austen's novels are in their essentials quite similar. At the initial stage, there is the young female heroine, who in the power hierarchy is at the lowest stage with other single women. The men rule the roost and do what they want even thought there are certain other female characters that try – intoxicated by their access to money and through it to power – to control even the outranking males. According to Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, "... all the angry dowagers in Austen's novels represent a threat to the enlightened reason of the male god who eventually wins the heroine only by banishing the forces of female sexuality,

capriciousness and loquacity" (172). All this echoes the reality of Austen's contemporary English society and the standing women had in it, putting an emphasis on the importance of a woman's modesty and to the fear of female individualism. The heroines' power struggles and eventual submission are presented from several different angles through the heroines themselves, as well as through the supporting female characters; the supporting characters' stories also reinforce the concept of female dependence on superior males and augur a disappointing ending to women's pursuits of liberation and power.

3.1 The Romantics

The Romantics, that is, the romantic young women to be discussed in this chapter are recurrent characters in all of Jane Austen's novels. Here, under scrutinizing are Marianne Dashwood from *Sense and Sensibility,* Lydia Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice,* and Jane Fairfax from *Emma.* They all share features that make them appear stereotypically romantic and stand out from Austen's Realist prose. Though in all of the novels Austen wrote the plotlines seem typically romantic, the way Austen handles the plot and the characters – with irony and gentle humour – makes it evident that she is indeed a Realist writer. The three Romantics mentioned above present a true cavalcade of romantic clichés and conventional features that they must shed in order to survive in the male, Realist world they live in. Novel-reading, dashing beaus who save damsels from difficult situations, elopements, tragic and mysterious orphans, threat of having to make a living as a governess, and failing health are some of the building blocks that make up a romantic character in Austen's fiction. Their youth and naïveté, good looks and undefined longing for a way out of their present situations connect these three women. Another common characteristic for them is their niceness, their good-heartedness: they are good people, despite all their bouts of selfishness, stupidity and aloofness. Also, the romantic affairs these three characters have are the principal cause of problems in their lives, though they think that the said affairs will help them out of their present situations and liberate them.

The features that connect these characters also make them vulnerable in the Realist society of Austen's fiction. Their testing of the boundaries, disregard of the

rules, and unwillingness to forfeit their privacy for the diversion of the society are, in a way, strategies for attaining power and control, but the results of these strategies are not very good. Marianne learns through her unfortunate affair with Mr. Willoughby the limitations and demands of becoming a woman and surviving. In that respect she has more luck than Lydia, who after all the trouble she has caused – involuntarily or on purpose – still does not understand what is expected of her and has to live with her unwise choices for the rest of her life. After a long period of silent suffering and desperate endeavours to hold on to the vestiges of her privacy in the middle of the nosy Highbury society, Jane earns a questionable honour of being saved by Frank Churchill. Of all the Romantics, she is probably the most powerful, with her determinated silence and usefully frail health that enables her to withdraw from the company of others.

3.1.1 Marianne Dashwood

It is sometimes difficult to discern which one of the Miss Dashwoods is the heroine of *Sense and Sensibility,* but considering the point of view of the narrative and the fact that Elinor's thoughts and private observations are most frequently presented as the starting point to the events in the course of the story, it is safe to claim that Marianne Dashwood is indeed a supporting female character. Marianne is the opposite of Elinor, she is passionate, uncompromising and dramatic, whereas Elinor is more quiet, reasonable and steady. As Mary Poovey points out, Elinor makes proper and prudent decisions even though doing so is painful, whereas Marianne's decisions are selfish and often potentially damaging, either to herself or to others (184–5). Marianne is in essentials rather self-centered; to her only her own suffering is important, and she eagerly indulges in it. Then again, she and Elinor are very close, and when reminded that also others feel and suffer as acutely as she does though they may not display it quite as openly, she is ready to sympathise and console.

A romantic young girl, Marianne's imagination is enflamed by the great love stories of the literature and by poetry in which she delights. She fancies herself a tragic heroine in her own little story and when duly rescued and literally swept of her feet by the dashing Mr. Willoughby, she sees her destiny unfold. According to Poovey, the opening scene of *Sense and Sensibility* – the tragic loss of the father of the family, and

the pressing situation where the four Dashwood women have to leave the family home and to go to live in a little cottage far away with very little money – can be seen as a central reason behind Marianne’s fancies (188). Marianne, who from the beginning has been described as a rather uncompromising and rebellious character, always says what she thinks and does not practice any other restraints in her behaviour. She dislikes the norms of society that define her life and does her best to ignore them. In her romance with Mr. Willoughby, she tests her limits and seeks to break free from her situation, the impoverished state of her family, the annoying society and relatives.

In all the novels studied in this thesis, Austen looks into the female immobility, the real, physical stagnation of women that is the direct cause of the norms restricting them. The heroines, as well as the supporting female characters are dependant on men or matriarchs for transportation, and even when making use of the only independent form of exercise, walking, they run the risk of ending up in danger. Marianne rides the carriage alone with Mr. Willoughby (*S&S,* 66–7) and is “exposed … to some very impertinent remarks” (*S&S,* 68) on her conduct and boldness. Twice she takes a walk alone and both times she hurts herself physically: the first time she sprains her ankle and is chivalrously rescued by Mr. Willoughby, and the second time she catches a severe cold and fever which will eventually threaten her life and make her see the fault in her past actions.

Because the narrative is partial to Elinor and her opinions, it is implied from the very beginning that Marianne’s passionate nature and quick feelings are something to be wary of. Elinor sees in her behavior the seeds of destruction and often tries to reproach and coax Marianne to heed the norms. Colonel Brandon, one of Marianne’s most devoted admirers, sees in her the chance to relive his youthful love affair with Eliza, the ward of his family. Eliza, however, ended up for the worse, as did her daughter, and this darker undercurrent in the story can be seen as a warning to Marianne. She needs to be restrained and controlled before something bad happens, before her feared sexuality overtakes and steers her awry. According to Poovey, “only the presence of a male guardian [can] protect her from herself” (191), and Colonel Brandon wishes to be this guardian to Marianne, to set his mind at ease, to correct his failures with the two Elizas in his past and to save Marianne from Willoughby whom he knows to be the worst kind of libertine:

> He had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address! He had left her, promising to return; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her. … His character is now before you; expensive, dissipated, and worse than both. (*S&S*, 203)

Willoughby's past conduct with young women does not recommend him as a person to be trusted on, nor with whom one should form a very close attachment. Colonel Brandon reveals the secret of his past – in which Willoughby eventually had the role of a villain – to Elinor in order to help Marianne realise her good fortune in losing Mr. Willoughby.

An exception to the rule, Marianne does not seek to gratify her needs by the means of indirection. She says what she thinks, expresses her feelings openly and cannot pretend to be something she is not:

> Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor therefore the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell. (*S&S*, 119)

This makes her vulnerable in the world where a woman's very survival and possibly even her happiness depend upon subtlety and pretention. As it is later proved, the very denial and dismissal of the norms and what they require from a woman make life rather more difficult to Marianne than what it would otherwise be. Marianne is a classic case of rebellion, punishment, remorse and a submission to the rules she first rebelled against. Her unfortunate romance with Willoughby is the last act of independence, the last attempt to pursuit power and control over her own life by making decisions only with her own happiness in mind. After Willoughby snubs her, she loses what control she had over herself or the course of her life. From now on she is an object to be steered and looked after by others, while she wallows in her grief and heartache, very characteristically not even trying to see a way out of it but indulging in her despair.

> Misery such as mine has no pride. I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to all the world. … They who suffer little may be proud and independent as they like – may resist insult, or return

> mortification – but I cannot. I must feel – I must be wretched – and they are welcome to enjoy the consciousness of it that can. (*S&S*, 183).

True to her principles, Marianne refuses pretention even in emotional upheaval. She refuses to carry on as if nothing had happened, she will not keep up appearances of contentment for the appearances sake. Unlike Elinor, who communicates nothing (*S&S,* 164) and escapes her feelings to duty – in the event of the death of her father as well as when she learns of Edward Ferrars' engagement to Lucy Steele – Marianne conceals nothing of her feelings. She suffers, and does not care who sees her at it.

In relation to matriarchs, Marianne's case is rather different from the other minor female characters studied here. She does not really have to face a power struggle with an intimidating and controlling matriarch before she is allowed to marry. Willoughby has an old female relative, Mrs. Smith, who he is to inherit and she does impose some sanctions on him in order to make him do the honourable thing and marry the young protégée of Colonel Brandon. However, out of affection to Marianne (*S&S*, 314) he refuses and is then banished from Mrs. Smith's house and consequently from Marianne. Mrs. Smith does not really have anything to do with Marianne, nor does Mrs. Ferrars, who is more of an adversary to Elinor and Lucy Steele, as they entertain hopes of marriage with her sons.

Unlike the other minor female characters, Marianne is influenced by benevolent and guiding matriarchs against whom she tries at first to struggle but later comes to realise that she would do better submitting to their will. Mrs. Jennings as well as Marianne's own mother both try to match her with Colonel Brandon, who from the first encounter with Marianne is very taken with her. Marianne's haughty comments on her and Colonel Brandon's age difference, his supposed infirmity and inability to express any stronger feelings are completely reversed after Marianne's illness. The long recovery seems to have aged her suitably to see the merit in Colonel Brandon who earlier, compared to Mr. Willoughby, did not appear so enticing. With her own opinions turned to favour the colonel and the added gentle pressure from all her family and immediate society, there is not much Marianne can do, her fate is set: she is to settle all the debts of gratitude and satisfy everybody's expectations, including her own:

> Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed as late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another! – and *that* other, a man who had suffered no less than herself under the event of a former attachment, whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married (*S&S*, 366)

It almost seems as if Marianne has lost her own free will and is being steered by those who claim to have her best interests at heart. Then again, Marianne being the headstrong character she is, one that "could never love by halves" (*S&S,* 367), it would not have been possible to force her to do anything that was not her own idea (*S&S,* 59). But as an individual, as a person she no longer exists. She has, albeit willingly, forfeited her earlier passionate and uncompromising self for the common good and grown up to accept the limitations of a woman's life. Marianne has indeed become an object: her person is the means to happiness of many people around her, and she is the ideal woman for more than one man. By learning to care more about other people and their happiness, she is said to find balance and submit to the role that life had in store for her.

3.1.2 Lydia Bennet

The youngest of the five Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice,* Lydia is another example of a "bad girl" whose behaviour goes unpunished. Lydia's function in the storyline is to make the heroine, Elizabeth, appear everything that her youngest sister is not: well-behaved, considerate and witty, opposed to Lydia's indecorum, thoughtlessness and silliness. Elizabeth is repeatedly obliged to check her younger sisters', especially Lydia's, behaviour and this further underlines the difference between them. Responsibility and duty are wholly unknown concepts for Lydia, who is always seeking nothing but new pleasures, in what ever form. Her hedonism is a constant source of frustration and shame to Elizabeth who has been forced the less gratifying task of an acting parent, since her mother sees nothing wrong in Lydia, her favourite child, and her father does not bother to participate in the rearing of his children.

> If you my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous. ... Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrouled [sic]! Oh! My dear father, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not be often involved in their disgrace? (*P&P,* 256).

Elizabeth fully acknowledges the flaws and faults of her younger sister which explicitly reflect the fact that Elizabeth herself is completely the opposite of her sister. Lydia, or her mother, does not see anything wrong in her behaviour whereas Elizabeth feels the effects of it most acutely. Having not digested the ideal of female modesty, Lydia vents her "high animal spirits" (*P&P,* 50) whenever she feels like it, regardless of propriety. The salient point here is that a woman always needs some higher authority to guide her: she must be *made.* All her life, Lydia has lacked this guidance because her mother has only indulged her and her father has not been interested. Therefore, it is evident that Lydia cannot have a proper understanding of right and wrong behaviour, as there has not been any benevolent male or female tutor to lead her to the right direction.

First it seems that Lydia has no greater plan in her life, and that her sole desire is to flirt and dance with as many officers as possible. She is ignorant and self-assertive, she acts before thinking, and considers herself entitled to unlimited admiration from everybody. However, the relationships between her and her sisters reveal the rivalry, and the motives for Lydia's actions. Most often she is at odds with Elizabeth, who is the only one in her family who openly criticises and checks her behaviour. As it turns out, in Lydia's eyes Elizabeth becomes her rival on the marriage market, as she engages the attentions of a new and mysterious officer joining the Meryton regiment, Mr. Wickham, who is also Lydia's own particular favourite. Lydia's goal is therefore to secure Mr. Wickham to herself before her sister, and, for once, acquire the first place in the hierarchy of the sisters. She expresses this by saying to her elder sister: "Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman." (*P&P,* 347).

The strong emphasis laid on the fact that Lydia is her mother's favourite and very much like her, forebodes Lydia's future as well as her dearest ambition: she is to

become her mother, with a status of a married woman, with power to rule over her sisters:

> "We shall be at Newcastle all the winter, and I dare say there will be some balls, and I will take care to get good partners for them all."
> ... "And then when you go away, you may leave one or two of my sisters behind you; and I dare say I shall get husbands for them before the winter is over."
> "I thank you for my share of the favour," said Elizabeth; "but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands." (*P&P,* 348)

The above gives an example of Lydia's line of thoughts as she visits her parents and sisters with Mr. Wickham after their elopement and hasty marriage. To Lydia, her present state is something to be admired and envied, and she cannot see anything wrong in her means of attaining it. Because of having always been very close to her mother and doubling her in every way, she is more than keen to take on her mantle of a match maker, and leading her single sisters to the conjugal bliss as well.

Even after all the trouble she has, with her behaviour, subjected all her nearest relations and all the fuss that has been made to keep her scandalous elopement as quiet as possible, Lydia still cannot see that she might have possibly done something wrong. To her, an elopement to marriage is a dare, something she was bold enough to try while her sisters sat at home. She believes that this is something she should be congratulated for, that she has really succeeded in life by catching herself a husband. Without realising it, Lydia has succeeded in creating herself an exact copy of her mother's life. Lydia's marriage with Mr. Wickham shows the signs of becoming a duplicate of her parents' life as a wife and a husband:

> Her father captivated by youth and beauty, and ... appearance of good humour ... married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. (*P&P,* 261)
>
> Wickham's affection to Lydia, was just what Elizabeth had expected to find it; not equal to Lydia's for him. ... Their elopement had been brought on by the strength of her love, rather than by his. (*P&P,* 348)

Lydia's own father, Mr. Bennet, was once attracted to a lively, pretty young woman, enough so to marry her. After realising that there was nothing much beyond the pretty

surface, any affection that he had had was quickly spent. It can be anticipated that Lydia's relationship with Mr Wickham will turn out much the same. Lydia is lively and pretty, and Mr. Wickham has readily admired these qualities in her, simply to amuse himself. The reasons for his elopement remain a mystery, but it is fairly clear that he certainly did not intend to marry Lydia but was forced to do it under the circumstances. In a way, this omen of unhappy future could be taken as Lydia's punishment for her behaviour, but then again, as she is so wholly free of any embarrassments or remorse, it is hinted in the novel that she never notices her husband's indifference and continues to live in the happy illusion she herself has created.

Lydia's power lies in her absolute disregard for the rules of society, and the consequences resulting from breaking those rules. Because she is not embarrassed, nor feels any remorse, she cannot be punished. Because she sees no fault in her conduct, the others' displeasure with her remains their problem only, and in her opinion, she need not be troubled with it. She might have obtained a status in society by marrying Mr Wickham – however questionable her means have been, she still has more than any single woman – but she will never grow up or become a woman as such, because she does not realise that she would need to accept the rules of society and submit herself to the expectations of others.

3.1.3 Jane Fairfax

Had Jane Austen ever been so inclined, she could have easily made Jane Fairfax a real heroine with a story of her own. Jane's struggle in life brings darker undertones to the otherwise fairly carefree and blithe story of *Emma.* Jane Fairfax appears to be an alien character in more than one way: she has the certain more realistic and sombre feel to her with her silent suffering and unhappy, suspended situation in life. She is also concretely an outsider, bringing a breath of air from the "real", less playful world to the little closed society of Highbury. Despite her heroinesque characteristics, Jane Fairfax is at best a shadow, spiced only with a few instances of action and self-expression. It is evident that she is equal or even superior to Emma Woodhouse in her qualities; Emma only has the advantage of fortune. Therefore, Jane must be kept in the background lest Emma's position as the centre of attention be endangered.

Indeed, unlike Emma with her imagined or self-afflicted snags, Jane has real problems in her life that give her much uneasiness. Jane is connected to the Highbury society through her aunt Miss Bates, a middle-aged spinster. Being an orphan, Jane has from an early age lived in the family of her late father's friend and is thus not an everyday member of the Highbury gentlefolk. As her only living relatives are the Bates', Jane is poor and has no other choice than to try and choose from the meagre means provided for a single woman to support herself respectably:

> The plan was that she should be brought up for educating others; the very few pounds which she inherited from her father making independence impossible. To provide for her otherwise was out of Colonel Campbell's power ... but, by giving her an education, he hoped to be supplying the means of respectable subsistence hereafter. (*E,* 142)

That she is forced to become a governess, is one of the sources of Jane's grief, but she is generally very stoic about it and knowing there is no other solution, she has gradually come to accept her fate. "What must be at last had better be soon" (*E,* 144) summarises Jane's attitude towards the matter, as she tries to act bravely about it. Being a governess appears to have equalled spinsterhood with its degree of disagreeableness; in the course of the story, it is frequently described to be a sacrifice, penance or mortification, and the time when Jane must eventually submit herself to it, is referred to as the "evil day", "wretched moment", and "retire from all pleasures of life, rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope" (*E,* 143–4). Considering the in-between status of a governess, as she was not considered to be of gentlefolk, nor a servant, these attributes are not surprising.

The only thing that could save Jane from this fate is marriage, and the uncharacteristic measures she had been ready to take in securing her future prove how unpleasant she has always thought her predestined means of supporting herself. Jane, who is presented as the model of propriety, has surprisingly consented to a secret engagement with Frank Churchill, but begins to doubt her choice of husband when she has to endure his cruel teasing in which he indulges primarily to keep their engagement a secret, but also out of his own innate mischievousness (*E*, 432). Frank is a master at circulating new rumours, and who would be a better object than the beautiful and

talented Jane Fairfax, who, though connected to Highbury through the Bates', is still an outsider who brings with her an alluring promise of tales and gossip from the outer world to liven up the sleepy little village. She further encourages the rumours and gossiping over her life by refusing to relate any tasty morsels of information to anyone.

Jane's power is partly in her silence, in her unwillingness to gossip or to relate any information of her own past to the Highbury society, and partly in her failing health which allows her to postpone her duty as a governess, or keep away from people when she so wants. In a society where everybody knows everybody else's business, Jane's natural reserve and refusal to gossip are definitely not merits, and especially to Emma Woodhouse, the heroine of the story, this kind of rebellion and reluctance to submit to her rule are immediately unpleasant qualities, and by them she justifies her dislike of Jane. As Jane is steered here and there, by her guardian Colonel Campbell, by her aunt, by the meddling Mrs. Elton, she takes to the last resorts she has and uses "silence as a means of manipulation and passivity as a tactic to gain power" (Gilbert & Gubar, 163). To Jane this is safety, something she is still able to control; it is the little bit of herself that is still hers, the only means to real self-expression.

Jane, as well as many other female characters in Austen's novels, is restricted in terms of mobility. Under the course of the story, she is conveyed from one place to another by several people, and has to adjust her actions according to this. When she first comes to Highbury, her benevolent guardian Colonel Campbell is "so very good [as to] send her the whole way" (*E,* 138). Before she has the misfortune to attract Mrs. Elton's attention, Jane is brought to a party and taken home again by Mr. Knightley, who is for a moment remarkably concerned about her physical well-being and frail health. In addition to keeping quiet, walking alone is another expression of independence Jane tries to undertake, with varying results. Considering that Emma and Harriet Smith are attacked by gypsies on one of their walks, the Highbury surroundings are not so safe exercise grounds for young women to walk around without company. Nonetheless, Jane insists on fetching the letters from the post office herself, regardless of the weather, even though she receives plenty of reproach on her carelessness.

> 'I went only to the post-office,' said she, 'and reached home before the rain was much. It is my daily errand, I always fetch the letters when I am here. It saves

> trouble, and is a something to get me out. A walk before breakfast does me good.' (*E,* 261–2)

Though intercepting Frank's secret letters from the daily post of her aunt is the principal motive behind Jane's eagerness on performing this errand, the side benefit of being alone and independently transported for the length of the walk to the post office and back again must also be considerable.

As stated earlier, Jane seeks control also by using her failing health as a tool. Hypochondria, feigned invalidity, and general ailing were set characteristics attached to women, whether real or imaginary, and considering that the feebleness of mind and fragility of body were emphasised and idealised as qualities of a proper lady, it is only understandable that authors should take benefit on the feature. Jane's ailments are a vestige of an earlier illness, but they are also caused by the prospects of her future life, and the disagreeableness of her present situation. By declaring that she is feeling unwell she is presenting an acceptable reason for keeping away from people and avoiding the company she dislikes. This is demonstrated more than once, when Jane refuses to see Emma or accept her offers of help (*E*, 351–4), and also when she leaves the party at Donwell Abbey to indulge in a few moments of peace and quiet away from everyone.

> 'I am fatigued; but it is not the sort of fatigue – quick walking will refresh me. Miss Woodhouse, we all know at times what it is to be wearied in spirits. Mine, I confess, are exhausted. The greatest kindness you can show me will be to let me have my own way. ... Oh, Miss Woodhouse, the comfort of being sometimes alone!' (*E,* 327)

This is the only instance in the course of the story when Jane openly shows that the attentions her situation excites in the society of Highbury, in her aunt and especially in the ever meddlesome Mrs. Elton, are rather too much for her and she would wish nothing better than to be left alone.

By keeping quiet, Jane is on the other hand left powerless and on the mercy of others enjoying their daily banter. Her refusal to reveal facts from her life, her refusal to provide the little closed society with fresh gossip leaves her as an outsider, and prevents her from defending herself against the less flattering recounts of her past. The situation she has landed in is paradoxical: if she were to speak up she would forfeit her only

means of control and power, but the gossip has already made her powerless and an open target for anybody to slander. Jane is, indeed, more talked about than what she is talked to; coming from the outside world, she awakens the imaginations in the little society of Highbury, and with her silence and secretiveness, she provides an ample source of speculation to the people around her. Jane's objectified status is further enhanced by her secret fiancé Frank Churchill and also by her well-wisher, Mrs. Elton.

> However, my resolution is taken as to noticing Jane Fairfax. I shall certainly have her very often at my house, shall introduce her wherever I can, shall have musical parties to draw out her talents, and shall be constantly on the watch for an eligible situation. My acquaintance is so very extensive that I have little doubt of hearing of something to suit her shortly. (*E,* 254)

Mrs. Elton sees in Jane the opportunity to exercise a certain form of philanthropy and thus boost her own image as a distinguished lady. She chooses Jane as her favourite because a grand dame such as herself should always have a poor, grateful protégé depending on her good will. As Mrs. Elton has effectively been put to her place by Emma (*E,* 245–250), and Harriet Smith being Emma's close friend, Mrs. Elton has no other suitable candidate for a favourite left but the talented and "remarkably elegant" (*E*, 145) Jane Fairfax. In this respect, Emma's and Mrs. Elton's situations are alike: they are both of an esteemed social standing. Emma, though single, has the full command over her invalid father's household, and Mrs. Elton has made a good match marrying the local reverend and thus gained a standing in the first set of the Highbury society. She and Emma both have a special favourite, whose case they try to promote, in order to banish the tedium of their everyday lives.

Frank Churchill first adopts Jane as the object of his mischievous jokes which he shares with Emma, concocting wild rumours of Jane's real relations to her acquaintances outside Highbury. His enthusiasm in concealing the secret of their engagement is rather overdone in his attempt to establish that Jane actually has a secret love affair with her protector Colonel Campbell's daughter's fiancé. All in all, Frank does such a thorough job in keeping the secret, that one begins to doubt what he could possibly have against Miss Fairfax with whom he is reportedly only "a little acquainted"

(*E,* 147). Later, when the secrets are revealed and everything is nearly resolved, Frank flaunts his admiration to Jane by pointing out her physical beauty to Emma:

> Did you ever see such a skin? such[sic] smoothness, such delicacy, and yet without being actually fair. One cannot call her fair. It is a most uncommon complexion, with her dark eyelashes and hair – a most distinguishing complexion! So peculiarly the lady in it. Just colour enough for beauty. ...
> She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every gesture? Observe the turn of her throat, Observe her eyes, as she is looking up at my father. You will be glad to hear ... that my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair? (*E*, 432)

Frank's rhapsodising is peculiarly unemotional coming from a happy groomsman; he is more concerned with her looks than with the actual person that is Jane. He calls her an angel, but considering the contemporary connotations of the word, it is not a very intimate praise. In times it feels as if Frank were talking about a beautiful statue to be further embellished than a real woman; Jane's skin, throat eyes and dark colouring against her fair skin receive much more minute examination than her other, more abstract capacities.

The characters of Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Churchill, Frank Churchill's aunt, are interestingly alike and parallel. The first similar characteristic that catches one's attention is the failing health of both the women. Mrs. Churchill uses her illness to control her surrogate son and her husband, thus preventing also Jane's happiness. Jane, on her part, uses her ailments to postpone the unhappy day that she must begin working for her living, as well as to avoid disagreeable society. Jane and Mrs. Churchill are not the only sickly characters in Austen's novels; in fact, illness, and ailing women and men are a recurrent feature in every one of her novels. Mr. Allen, Marianne Dashwood, Mrs. Bennet, Miss de Bourgh, Lady Bertram, Fanny Price, Mr. Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, Mrs. Smith, Mary Musgrove, and Louisa Musgrove all suffer from either real or imaginary chronic diseases or sudden, usually serious accidents or illnesses. Primarily, all these illnesses exclude the patient from social life, either by design – which is most often the case – or more rarely, against the patient's will. According to Roger Sales, "invalidism was a part that women were encouraged to play. Their frail bodies were seen by the conduct writers and others as complementing their fragile minds" (48).

In Austen's fiction, the ill rarely have a fatal condition; rather, they are portrayed as caricatures that vent their boredom and want for attention in hypochondria. Peculiarly, illness in general, has often been considered a romantic feature, and in Jane, her ailing only adds to her already mysterious and tragic character. The key in making a character ill and not losing her romantic appeal is to keep the illness suitably vague. A clinical description of symptoms would only slow down the story and make the reader and the potential lover lose their interest. Austen's sarcastic prose on the subject does follow this rule, and her ailing females do not have a single name for their complaints; the most important part is to be able to lie languidly on a sofa and be as helpless and fragile as possible.

Illness is also strongly related to time; in Jane's case she uses her failing health to buy time, to put off the day she has to take a position as a governess. Time running out is another side to this: death is a threat that is not mentioned, but it looms by the shoulder of the fragile and sickly. Austen hardly ever mentions death openly in her novels, it is only implied or referred to in passing, when some less important characters are talked about. Also, as it has been pointed out earlier, life-threatening illnesses are fairly rare and extreme events in Austen's prose. All in all, sickness is often only imagined and used as a gimmick, but whenever a character is seriously ill, it is treated as a useful time for self-reflection and growing as a person.

It is interesting how Jane's situation is parallel to so many of the other female characters in *Emma.* Apart from her being Emma's equal in everything else but fortune, she, like Harriet Smith, is also an orphan of small means and has to rely on the goodwill of other people to survive. Like Mrs. Weston – formerly known as Miss Taylor, Emma's governess – also Jane is destined to become a governess. Her dread of the situation is very pointed, but interestingly enough, Mrs. Weston, whose position in the Woodhouse family has apparently been very agreeable, does nothing to ease Jane's fears. In fact, this connection between Mrs. Weston and Jane goes entirely uncommented in the novel. Also, Jane's aunt, the spinster Miss Bates, can perhaps be seen as a warning of what becomes of women who have little money and little opportunities in life to better themselves.

Throughout the story, Jane Fairfax's existence is characterised by uncertainty: she is uncertain about the length of her stay in Highbury, uncertain about the

preordained path of a governess she is about to embark on. Frank is another factor that makes Jane feel insecure; so many things depend upon him and the strength of his affection to her that Jane almost cannot cope with the precarious situation. Jane's story could therefore be resolved in numerous ways and this makes it even more difficult for her to gain control over her own life.

Jane's power is perhaps more considerable than her fellow Romantics because, for a time, she does have some control over her situation by keeping quiet and not sharing her life story with the Highbury society. However, such power can only be expected to be short-lived, for in order to create a satisfactory ending to a story, secrets must be revealed and mysteries solved. In Jane's case, this is partly true: her relationship with Frank is revealed and she is spared from the fate of a governess, but still, her mysteriousness is not diminished. The reader never gets insider her head, she is very effectively shut up by the narrator, by the gossiping Highbury society forming their own opinions about her, and also by her own actions. Because she would be such a vivid character if let out to fully rival Emma, she must be kept in the background, quiet, silently suffering and waiting the one lucky turn of events that would liberate her.

3.2 The Cunning

The Cunning, similarly with the Romantics, are another character type that Austen has written of in many of her novels. These women seem to have a slightly tighter grasp of reality than the Romantics; they think that they have realised how the world works and try to make the most of their possibilities of surviving in it. Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility,* Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park* are such characters. Their attitude towards matrimony is primarily practical, but their means of attaining a husband and interacting with others differs. Lucy and Mary are cunning in the negative sense of the word: they want to win, to gain as much profit as possible, and view other women as competitors. Charlotte, on the other hand, is cunning in a positive sense: she has made her plan and then meticulously acts it out, harming nobody, besides maybe Mrs. Bennet's nerves.

The Cunning characters are the most skilled in using indirection as a means to gain what they want. Lucy flatters and sycophantically agrees with everybody that she

is hoping to use as a stepping stone in her social climbing. Mary is much the same, though she is a subtler version of Lucy, and her personal charm does most of the work. Mary is also more genuine in her feelings than the volatile and scheming Lucy; though both the ladies are cunning and put their own advantage first, Mary shows that she is able to be genuinely affectionate and attached to people. Charlotte very neatly secures Mr. Collins' affections to herself and thus ensures her material happiness. She is the only single girl who is not looking for a romance; she entertains no pretences of affection but puts her plan in action when the opportunity arises. The skill with which she cleverly steers her husband, and also Lady Catherine, is perhaps the most developed of the three characters studied here.

3.2.1 Lucy Steele

As has been said before, indirection is the one tool all the minor female characters are very deft to use. Lucy Steele, who appears in *Sense and Sensibility* is no exception to this, as she flatters and ingratiates herself to the good graces of everyone, using all her wiles to gain what she wants. Lucy, as the other young women, has one goal in life: to get married, and she is doing all she can to enter the happy state of matrimony. If money is power, then marrying a wealthy man grants power to the wife as well. Lucy, it appears, is indeed in pursuit of a rich husband and is not too particular if her eventual husband is the first object of her attentions, or the man's brother, as long as he is wealthy. From the first encounter with Lucy Steele in the course of the story it is evident that this woman is not a pleasant person and Elinor Dashwood, with whom Lucy tries to force a friendship very quickly comes to the conclusion that

> she could have no lasting satisfaction in the company of a person who joined insincerity with ignorance; whose want of instruction prevented their meeting in conversation on terms of equality, and whose conduct towards others made every shew [sic] of attention and deference towards herself perfectly valueless. (*S&S*, 124–5)

Though Lucy might be ignorant and disinterested in developing her mind, she is by no means stupid. She is intelligent and crafty, and her perception quickly enables her to

figure out behaviour patterns which are needed to please different people, for being pleasant to the point of adulation is her tool of gaining what she wants. What Lucy wants is not difficult to figure out as the story develops; she is well aware who the worthy allies are and quickly moves her way up on the ladder of her little society. She blandishes Lady Middleton and her children to get in her and her mother's good graces; she tries to confide in Elinor because she might have information about Edward Ferrars', her secret fiancé's family that would be essential to her success in the next phase of her plan. Eventually, she manages to wile her way in favour of Edward's mother and sister, who is also Elinor's sister-in-law. This is a great and instrumental step in her process to recommend herself to Edward's family, without whose consent he cannot marry her.

A master manipulator, Lucy appears always to fall on her feet. Even after her rather scandalous affairs with the Ferrars brothers, she manages to flatter her way back to the bosom of Mrs. Ferrars and all of her escapades are conveniently forgotten. In Lucy, the two traits that were by the contemporaries declared to be the essence of the female nature are very strong: indirection and inconstancy. The latter especially should make her quite an outcast in every good society and mar her reputation, but her skills in the former make amends to her flaws.

> The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience. (*S&S*, 364)

Lucy is selfish to the core, and only works for her own benefit; she does not care who she has to use as stepping stones to reach her goal. She even readily abandons her sister in the first occasion that occurs to her, when she has secured a provider and does no longer need a companion to share her miseries and triumphs.

As others before her, Lucy, too, is dissatisfied with her situation as a single and dependent female relative of more influential people. She also finds reason enough in her sister – whose behaviour is a source of embarrassment to her – to wish to alter her circumstances. When she is admitted to the society of the Middletons, the

Dashwoods and the Ferrars, she sees what a change a right kind of a marriage can make in a woman's life. Despite her schemes and machinations, Lucy, as all women, is dependent on the actions of men. She is stuck in the secret engagement with Edward and cannot announce the matter publicly nor back out of it because there is a chance she might not get another offer. This is the case, in theory. In reality, there are no such inhibitions as Lucy's sister spills the secret, and eventually, it is only respectable that it is Lucy who renounces her ties with Edward as the other way around it would seem that she had been ill-used. It is all very well for her to fancy herself attached to Robert as he is moved to the first place in the inheritance line. This only proves Lucy's materialism and shallowness; to appease her own mind and to justify her actions she convinces herself that she has feelings for Robert, the man with money and thus power.

It is evident that Lucy has with her behaviour broken many norms of the society and breached the etiquette that governs her everyday life. Nevertheless, she is not punished, as might be expected, but gets what she wants in the end and is heartily welcomed to the family by those who first thought her a shameless little upstart.

> But perseverance in humility of conduct and messages, in self-condemnation for Robert's offence, and gratitude for the unkindness she was treated with, procured her in time the haughty notice which overcame her by its graciousness, and led soon afterwards, by rapid degrees, to the highest state of affection and influence. (*S&S*, 365)

Lucy has understood that while her survival is from now on dependent on her husband's approval and protection, in order to make her life at all tolerable, she has to be in good terms with the most influential woman in the family. Because the home is the woman's domain and she is necessarily confined to it, it may be expected that she spends more time with her mother-in-law than with her husband. Where a man can leave an unpleasant situation at home and go where ever his will takes him, a woman cannot help but to stay put and cope with the circumstances she has blundered into. This is why Lucy is so ready to take all the blame, to overdo her repentance, and to subordinate herself to the will of her mother-in-law.

Women might have been forced onto a lower stage in the social hierarchy of the time, but this did not mean that all women would think themselves equal to each other.

As Lucy's behaviour proves, women have a hierarchy of their own inside the larger ranking system of society. Because of their powerlessness, women cling onto every piece of control they can get and there is fierce rivalry between them. The rivalry concerns, of course, the male approval; who ever is first to catch a husband is the winner. According to Gilbert and Gubar, in Austen's fiction "female anger is deflected from powerful male to powerless female targets" (126), and when it comes to Lucy, it could not be clearer. Lucy's deliberate cruelness towards Elinor is caused by this rivalry. Lucy quickly finds out that Elinor has feelings for Edward, and recognises a weapon when she sees one. She cannot resist a chance to flaunt her success on the marriage market to Elinor in every turn, because she has secured a man whereas Elinor is, in her eyes, doomed to eternal pining and sad spinsterhood.

> 'But if I dared to tell you all, you would not be so much surprised. Mrs. Ferrars is certainly nothing to me at present – but the time *may* come when we may be very intimately connected.'
>
> She looked down as she said this, amiably bashful, with only one side glance at her companion to observe its effect on her.
>
> 'Good heavens!' cried Elinor, 'what do you mean? Are you acquainted with Mr. Robert Ferrars? Can you be?' And she did not feel much delighted with the idea of such a sister-in-law.
>
> 'No,' replied Lucy, 'not with Mr. *Robert* Ferrars – I never saw him in my life; but,' fixing her eyes upon Elinor, 'with his elder brother.' (*S&S*, 126)

The above gives a good example of Lucy's general behaviour, her pretences and falseness which she has chosen as her tools of survival. Lucy willingly acts the role of a tragic heroine in her little story, feigning anxiety over her secret – which is all very well and good, for if it came out at the wrong moment, everything would be lost and she would have to start from the beginning again. Overall in the narration, great emphasis is placed on Lucy's eyes, described as "sharp and quick"(*S&S,* 117), and through them her true nature is always betrayed.

Lucy is able to play a game with the etiquette and the norms of the society to her own benefit, all the time seemingly staying on the safe side of the rules. Still, the narrator questions her morality in acting the way she does, though Lucy herself has no scruples or regrets. It is implied, though, that Lucy's carefully laid out plans may not

have worked as well as she thought, and that the liberation from her situation which she expected to gain by marrying will never take place.

> They settled in town, received very liberal assistance from Mrs. Ferrars, were on the best of terms imaginable with the Dashwoods; and setting aside the jealousies and ill-will continually subsisting between Fanny and Lucy, in which their husbands of course took part, as well as the frequent domestic disagreements between Robert and Lucy themselves, nothing could exceed the harmony in which they all lived together. (*S&S*, 365)

Though Lucy does not receive a direct punishment for her unruly behaviour, it is insinuated that she nevertheless has to pay for her scheming in some respect. For the outsider, the lives of the Ferrars and the Dashwoods might appear harmonious and cordial, but the truth is something else. Lucy has gained what she wanted with her scheming sacrificing only her conscience (*S&S*, 364). It is questionable whether or not she has gained any power, though, as in order to survive and steer through the days she has to resort to the tools of indirection, flattery, pretention, lies and forsaking any remnants of pride she might have once possessed.

3.2.2 Charlotte Lucas

The case of Charlotte Lucas presents the concept of a marriage of reason. From the very first encounter with her it is clear that Charlotte knows her own chances and limitations. Being neither very young nor very beautiful, let alone wealthy, Charlotte stands on the brink of spinsterhood and there is a certain feeling of quiet acceptance in the air whenever she is referred to in the story. Therefore, to her the prospect of becoming a wife of a well-situated country parson is a strike of luck which she is ready to accept and willing to work for.

> Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. (*P&P*, 138)

Mr Collins might be obnoxious, irritating, and not at all an ideal husband, but when one considers the options Charlotte has, marrying Mr Collins begins to look very agreeable indeed, if not the best choice she can make in her life.

In comparison to the other characters studied here, Charlotte is a slight exception to the rule. Because of her age and situation in life, she has had time to realise how the world works, what she must do to secure her future, and therefore there is not such rebel against the rules of society as one can perceive with the other characters. Then again, Charlotte does refuse to play a part in any display of romance though Mr. Collins is eager to act the role of an ardent lover and make use of all the cliché phrases ever uttered by affectionate suitors. This is the only norm Charlotte deliberately objects, partly because her husband-to-be, because "the stupidity with which he was favoured by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that would make a woman wish for its continuance" (*P&P,* 137), but partly simply because she can. There were not so many occasions in life where a woman of the time could decide what was to be done, but decisions concerning courtship, proposals and marriage were such moments. Charlotte recognises this and does not leave the chance unused.

As opposed to the lovelorn, flirtatious girls in her immediate society, Charlotte has, with her steady manners and impassionate view of the world, earned the reputation of being sensible. She does not dream of Prince Charming sweeping her of her feet; at twenty-seven she is old enough to know that the world does not work that way, and that those who are foolish enough to believe in such nonsense will end up for the worse. Charlotte has a strong mind of her own, and she is not easily carried away with rumours or prejudices; she is not at all readily convinced by Elizabeth's accounts of Mr Wickham's misfortunes with Mr Darcy, nor is she letting disagreeable behaviour or characteristics to put her off of a person. She is equally civil to everyone and keeps her opinions to herself.

Charlotte's function as a foil to the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, is to enhance the romantic aspect of the plot. What is said of her, how she is presented and talked about and how she expresses herself, contrast sharply with the characteristics of Elizabeth. Elizabeth is in a constant need of a moderator to tone down her often rather uncompromising opinions and hasty conclusions, and alongside with Jane Bennet Charlotte Lucas is one of such moderators. Charlotte's steadier nature steers her choices

and decisions in life and eventually make her seize the opportunity to leave the state of a hopeless spinster and move up in the world:

> I'm not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only for a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state. (*P&P,*140).

Considering this, and the fact that Mr. Collins first made an offer to Elizabeth and was forcibly refused, Charlotte Lucas's statement of not being romantic reinforces the opposite in Elizabeth. She most definitely is romantic, and is asking for more in life than just a comfortable home. In the match of Mr. Collins and her dear friend, Elizabeth sees the repetition of her own parents' marriage and finds it unbearable that her friend should abase herself so.

The reasons Charlotte presents for her marrying Mr. Collins are credible enough, but one cannot help but think that she does after all choose unwisely. It is true that by marriage her social status is going to improve and she becomes the mistress of her own household, instead of being an unpaid domestic servant in her father's, and later in her brothers' households. Her marriage to Mr. Collins does indeed secure her material welfare, but simultaneously she, all the while described as an intelligent woman, must acquiesce to live her life with Mr. Collins, bear the shame of his inanity and keep up the impression that she recognises his superiority over herself. Susan Morgan tries to explain Charlotte's reasons for marrying Mr. Collins by stating that Charlotte thinks that she has no future, that she has nothing to expect from life. She does not believe in possibilities and takes no chances to see if a more agreeable choice of a husband would come her way (Morgan, 94–7).

Making certain sacrifices in order to gain power is typical of Charlotte. By marrying Mr. Collins, by taking a business-like attitude towards matrimony, and by denying the importance of romance, Charlotte uses what means she has to gain power and control over her own life. Though it is not directly said, one gets the impression that she marries the first man who will propose to her and offer a reasonably good living. When she accepts Mr. Collins, she is well aware what awaits her: a lifetime in the company of a silly and annoying man, but it is the price she must pay for gaining a

status in society, for becoming someone who can be taken seriously. This way she becomes the mistress of her own household, relieves her parents and her brothers from a burden of a spinster daughter and sister, and allows her sisters to begin their social life earlier than what would otherwise been the case. From this perspective, then, it looks like a beneficial situation for everybody concerned (*P&P,* 137).

When Elizabeth visits Charlotte in Kent after she has married Mr. Collins, it is shown how well Charlotte's plan has worked out. She has her comfortable home where she can give orders rather than be the one ordered about, and she has already worked out a system to keep away from her husband as much as possible. Especially this ability of subtle manipulation is an excellent proof of her strength of mind and the success in her pursuit of power. "My dear Charlotte and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in every thing a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas between us" (*P&P*, 238), says Mr. Collins, without realising that his wife has deftly got her own way on things when ever possible. When faced with an impossible situation to turn to her benefit, she wisely closes her ears from him and keeps her silence, again creating an illusion of agreeing with her husband.

It is interesting to note that Charlotte lives according to her own teachings: what she advises others to do, she also does herself. Her views of marriage and love are presented very early in the course of the story, though at the time they are only taken as a joke. To Charlotte "happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance." (*P&P*, 25); she does not believe in courting, in falling in love, or finding any kind of a soul mate – all the things that are traditionally linked to the idea of marriage are secondary to her. Steady income and an ability to handle it sensibly are much more important matters in her eyes: the age-old problem of women not being able or allowed to provide for themselves is a recurrent theme in Austen's novels, a starting point for almost all her stories and the one thing that is certain to prevent lovers from ever getting together. Therefore, it is not in the least surprising that money matters should be so openly discussed; in Austen's fiction, the income of a single man is his most important merit in the marriage business, as well as is the dowry that a single woman is entitled to.

Women who have money have also the power, a fact well evident in the one person who has and will continue to have the strongest impact on Charlotte's life. This person is of course Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Collins' patroness, from whom all

his benefits come, and whose power in the little society is absolute. Charlotte may be able to fool her husband and steer him, but for the sake of the etiquette, the norms of the society, she must always keep up the illusion that she is agreeing with him and submitting to his will. Lady Catherine's role in this little charade is instrumental, because she is often the operating force behind any opinion of Mr. Collins. Because of her powerful status she has been able to form the society she inhabits the way she wants, and is a most rigid follower of etiquette and rules. This trait is well proved in her will to meddle in everything – as Elizabeth finds out during her visit to Kent, "nothing was beneath this great lady's attention, which could furnish her with an occasion of dictating to others." (*P&P,* 185) – and there is nothing Charlotte can do to prevent it or complain about it. As with her husband, she just has to live with it, submit herself to it and accept the advice with gratitude. When she states that "Lady Catherine is ... a most attentive neighbour" (*P&P*, 178) it may sound as praise to Mr. Collins, but behind the words Charlotte allows herself to express her annoyance with Lady Catherine's nosy manners.

Charlotte's way of conduct is a good example of the fact that a woman's only tool to power and self-assertion was indirection. To be able to gain what she wants, to have the effect she is after, she has to go around the corner rather than ask for it directly. She knows her own mind and knows what is required to satisfy it: in fact, it appears that all Charlotte's actions are guised as something else than what they really are. Elizabeth thinks that her talk about marriage and the most beneficial way to make a successful match are only a joke, but as it turns out, Charlotte was actually telling her friend the truth. It appears that Charlotte is only doing her friend a favour by engaging Mr. Collins' attentions to herself, but really, she is laying the groundwork to realise her plan of a marriage of reason (*P&P*, 136). Her encouragement might seem like affection to Mr. Collins, but actually, she is only clinching her victory in making a good match. She seemingly agrees on everything with her husband, but in fact, she is steering him to get what she wants. Still, despite all the influence she has, Charlotte's power is only an illusion: she constantly has to exercise self-control and modesty, to stay at the background and to keep up the appearance of obedience.

3.2.3 Mary Crawford

In essentials Mary Crawford is very alike all the other young, single women in Jane Austen's novels, with her desire to marry well and acquire a status in society. It could be said that Mary is cast in the similar, if not the same mold as Lucy Steele before her. Mary's charming manner, her feigned modesty and forced friendship with the heroine Fanny Price remind forcibly of a similar situation between Elinor Dashwood and Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*. However, Mary is an updated version of Lucy, much more charismatic, subtler in her conduct, more mature and definitely more sensual.

Mary's qualities are such that in a very short time she has established herself as a vital member of the Mansfield society. Her London glamour makes her the instant favourite amongst the younger Bertram generation, and her charm is so strong that her opinions and conduct are readily accepted. While Fanny is often considered having as much significance as a piece of furniture when keeping company, and is repeatedly referred to as if she were not present, nobody would ever consider treating Mary Crawford in such a manner. Mary has presence that cannot go unnoticed. Fanny with her moral principles does not stand a chance when Mary sets out to conquer Edmund's affections.

The London life, her fortune of twenty thousand pounds and her other merits have made Mary a confident young woman who knows what her goals in life are. Very soon after settling in Mansfield Parsonage, she has, by the helpful suggestion of her sister Mrs. Grant, set her mind on Thomas Bertram, the eldest son of Mansfield Park, to become her future husband. She is determined that Thomas is by no means a poor choice for a woman such as herself, and that she should be well satisfied with the situation in life he can provide. She is certain that there can be no objection to her endeavours as she has all the qualities of an acceptable bride: she is pretty and her manners are agreeable, she has a substantial dowry, and she is a gentleman's daughter. She even tries to show some interest in Thomas's pastimes, but other than that, there is no evidence of a lengthier courtship to be expected. Mary has made up her mind to become a baroness; she has decided to make the most of her merits on the marriage market:

> Matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well: and having seen Mr. Bertram in town, she knew that objection could no more be made to his person than to his situation in life (*MP*, 37)
>
> ‘ … I would have every body marry if they can do it properly: I do not like to have people throw themselves away; but every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage.’ (*MP,* 38)

Advantage is exactly what Mary is after with her choice of Thomas, as she can hardly be expected to be very much attached to him after such a short acquaintance. To her, marriage “is a manoeuvring [sic] business” (*MP,* 41) and she sets out to assure herself of the favourability of the match. Thomas’s “liveliness and gallantry” speak for his favour, and Mary knows that “she *should* like the eldest best” because “it was her way” (*MP,* 42). Despite her light manner, Mary is sensible of the benefits of a marriage and the situation of a wife. She is by nature an independent person and wishes to fortify her independence by entering the only position in life in which she can be taken seriously. Her avid interest in the material goods that Thomas could provide reveals her dislike of being dependent on her relatives for a home and keep.

Mary may have chosen Thomas – as is only right, since a marriage with the eldest son of a baronet is the most advantageous one to be had at the moment – but in his absence her heart does not grow fonder. Instead it turns to Edmund, the younger son, who is conveniently present and the next most eligible bachelor in the area. Edmund is drawn to her, due to her charm, her skills and general attractiveness, though he cannot help noticing some of her more unflattering characteristics. To hear her criticise her uncle, Admiral Crawford, with whom she is not in the best of terms, “[does] not suit his sense of propriety” (*MP,* 52). Nevertheless, he is already so much ensnared by Mary that to have anybody else pass negative comments on her makes him stand up for her and clear her name:

> ‘Ungrateful is a strong word. I do not know that her uncle has any claim to her *gratitude*; his wife certainly had; and it is the warmth of her respect for her aunt’s memory which misleads here. … I do not censure her *opinions*; but there certainly *is* impropriety in making them public. … we must suppose the faults of the niece to have been those of the aunt.’ (*MP,* 58-9)

Edmund expresses his doubts on the propriety of Mary's initial upbringing already at this early state of their acquaintance, thus relieving her from the responsibility of her conduct. His opinion on her having fallen into incapable hands is reinforced in the course of the story. This idea of women needing someone to mold them and their morals is prevalent in the story, as Edmund plays Pygmalion to Fanny with eventually very commendable results. Thus, considering that a presence of suitable moral guide is essential in a young woman's life, there is more than one example in the novel of the effects that a faulty upbringing can have on female morality: in addition to Mary, both of the Bertram girls manage to bring disrepute to their family with their infamous elopements.

Motherlessness is a recurrent issue in Austen's fiction, and nearly all of the heroines and the supporting female characters experience the lack of a guiding, competent, older woman. There are many whose mothers have died and then others whose mothers may be alive but are performing their maternal duties quite poorly. In Mary's case the former applies, and she has principally been brought up by her aunt, much like Fanny Price, the actual heroine of *Mansfield Park.* Mary has also an older sister, Mrs. Grant, who takes on the role of a mother when Mary and her brother come to stay in the Parsonage.

When one compares Fanny and Mary's situations, they are in some parts surprisingly similar, though their personalities are nothing alike. Both of them have been brought up by their aunts and they both have a brother they are very fond of. It is implied that the difference in their characters and morals is dependant on their surrogate parents and immediate surroundings but also on the qualities of their male relatives. Fanny has from an early age lived in the country, in the household of her aunt and uncle and been tutored by her cousin Edmund, who is a righteous and upstanding young man, sometimes even to pompousness. Mary, on the other hand, has spent plenty of time in London, and has been under the influence of her aunt, who, as it appears, has not been very thorough with her duty of upbringing. Mary's closest male relative after her brother Henry is her uncle Admiral Crawford, in whose house she has lived before coming to Mansfield. Her relationship with him is hardly very affectionate:

> The Admiral delighted in the boy, Mrs. Crawford doted on the girl; and it was the lady's death which now obliged her *protégée* after some months' further trial at her uncle's house, to find another home. Admiral Crawford was a man of vicious conduct, who chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof (*MP,* 35)

The Admiral's disregard of propriety and his abandonment of Mary, together with the fast life in the City and the aunt's affectionate but inexpertly conducted upbringing appear to have had an impact on Mary's morals. The full effect is revealed when she expresses her opinions on the scandals that her own brother causes.

Mary may not be flawless but that only seems to add to her attractiveness. She manages to enchant Edmund with seemingly very little effort on her part, by just being Mary. She is pretty and musical, she is passionate and courageous, and Edmund is only a man (*MP,* 60–4). Her spirit is unfaltering, and supposedly Edmund fancies himself as the man who can set her right and rectify the defects that her earlier life has caused. Mary, however, will not be corrected:

> He still reasoned with her, but in vain. She would not calculate, she would not compare. She would only smile and assert. The greatest degree of rational consistency could not have been more engaging, and they talked with mutual satisfaction. (*MP,* 89)

On an outing to Mr. Rushworth's estate, Mary, Edmund and Fanny explore a little copse and Mary lets her imagination run wild, pretending the small wilderness to be a vast forest where they have been wandering aimlessly. Her attempt to engage Edmund's attention with her feminine disregard of science – in this case, measurements and time – work predictably well and further increase Edmund's will to become her guide and tutor.

At times, Mary seems to be oozing restive energy and this quality is often strengthened by contrasting her with Fanny and her fragility. Mary "must go and look" (*MP,* 89), she is not one to be interested in quiet musings or dull company; her activeness appears incessant and whenever she appears in a scene, something is bound to happen. "Nothing ever fatigues me but doing what I do not like" (*MP,* 63), she declares, and continues to hunt pleasures wherever she can find them.

Mary's power is in the first place in her personal charm. She is a delight to be around, pretty to look at, and with her brother, she enlivens the otherwise quite stagnant Mansfield household. She is aware of her qualities and is able to use them to pursue what she wants. An advantageous marriage is one of her goals, and here she makes the same faulty presumption as all the other single females in Austen's fiction: she believes that marriage would make her more independent. She does not see what is in front of her, the example of what awaits her is portrayed in the languid and listless Lady Bertram who "[spends] her days in sitting, nicely dressed, on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children" (MP, 16). To imagine that Mary would willingly submit to such a half-hearted existence is fairly difficult to believe. Her attempts to veer Edmund away from the profession of a clergyman to something more distinguished and interesting (*MP,* 82–7) are a testimony of her resistance to the idea of being buried alive in a country parsonage counting the contents of her pantry.

Mary's relationship with Fanny and their contrasting personalities reflect the other similar couples of the heroine and her double, or mirror image, in Austen's fiction. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, as well as Elinor and Lucy Steele are such pairs, as are Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, and Emma Woodhouse and Jane Fairfax. Mary's befriending of Fanny is another case example, because partly Mary is genuinely interested in Fanny and wishes to draw her out of her shell and stand up for her, much like Edmund does. Fanny, on her part, cannot help but admire Mary's lively spirit, attractiveness and musical talent, and respond to her kind regard towards herself. Then again, there is a degree of forcedness in their relationship as Fanny is instinctively suspicious of Mary's motives and jealous of her effect on Edmund.

Mary is thrown into favouring Fanny's company in the lack of better amusement: Maria has taken Julia with her on her honeymoon with Mr. Rushworth, and Henry Crawford is away to supervise the managing of his estate. Fanny satisfies Mary's "desire of something new" (*MP*, 193) and Fanny, out of politeness and gratitude of Mary and Mrs. Grant's kindness, keeps up the appearance of friendship:

> Fanny went to her every two or three days: it seemed a kind of fascination: she could not be easy without going, and yet it was without loving her, without ever

> thinking like her, without any sense of obligation for being sought after now when nobody else was to be had; and deriving no higher pleasure from her conversation than occasional amusement, and *that* often at the expense of her judgement (*MP,* 193)

Mary and Fanny are very different in dispositions, not at all on the same wavelength in most matters, but as they live close to each other and are both young, a degree of friendliness is almost expected between them. Fanny, similarly to Edmund or Thomas before him, is the best option for company to be had at the moment; Mary may be a radiant personality but her radiance needs a surface to reflect upon, someone suitable to admire her and keep her company. In this, as in many other respects, she is like her brother Henry, who "must have a somebody" (*MP,* 213).

Mary's attachment to Edmund does have a certain feeling of her contenting with the next best thing, but there is also something in her behavior that does betray genuine affection. Her preferring Edmund is not planned, as it was with Thomas, and it appears that she is attracted to him against her will. He is not the eldest son, he will never be very rich, and he has chosen a profession that is most disagreeable to Mary. His character is nothing that would normally attract her, his seriousness and moralizing are not very appealing, and his liveliness leaves a great deal to be desired. Still, they court each other, both expecting rather more from one another than can ever be possible. Mary, though slowly beginning to see the benefits of a quiet country life in the company of some excellent friends, hopes to turn Edmund's head and see him in a more distinguished position in life and thus be worthy of her love. Edmund, despite claiming that he "[has] never been blinded" (*MP,* 251) wants Mary to be the perfect woman for him so much that he projects on her the qualities of his ideal woman that is, in fact, Fanny.

Mary is an intriguing character because she is not simply good or bad. She has good qualities that recommend her: her attention to Fanny is often genuinely affectionate and seeing how unfairly she is sometimes treated, she tries to rectify this by being kind to her (MP, 137). Then again, her materialism, her tainted moral and "faults of principle" (MP, 427) give her a dimension that makes her attractiveness all the more dangerous for Edmund:

> …Miss Crawford, in spite of some amiable sensations, and much personal kindness, had still been Miss Crawford; still shewn a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light. (*MP,* 341)

What is notable here is the persisting assumption that Mary's notions of propriety and moral are not her own, that she has been "led astray" and spoiled beyond rescue. Also, pairing Mary with Fanny, their differences of nature enhance one another and set Mary's less commendable characteristics in relief. According to Valerie Shaw, Fanny's shyness and "proper reserve" (292) do in fact reveal the perils that Mary's more outgoing and social nature pose to other people (292–3). Because Mary does not agree with Edmund's view of what is right and what is wrong, she is, after a lengthy infatuation on his part, deemed bad. The strong moralism of *Mansfield Park* is against Mary; it has been stated that in all its primness, *Mansfield Park* is in a way a Victorian novel (Collins, 175), and with this in mind, Mary and her brother could be considered remnants of an earlier, more liberal period. The small and contained society of Mansfield Park is, in a way, the symbol of Victorianism, and the Crawfords, coming from the outside, from London, represent the Regency, the period of elegance and scandal (Sales, 26).

3.3 The Matriarchs

In addition to several single women in Austen's novels there are also many married and widowed women who play central roles in the stories. In each of the novels studied in this thesis there are minor female characters that can be regarded as matriarchs. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Mrs. Ferrars controls her single sons with threats concerning their inheritance and in *Pride and Prejudice* Lady Catherine de Bourgh seeks to rule over everybody whom she has ever met. In *Emma,* Frank Churchill's surrogate mother Mrs. Churchill manipulates her husband and son with her failing health, when in *Mansfield Park* there are in fact two of these formidable women, Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram. Mrs. Norris' power is in her cruelness, whereas her sister Mrs. Bertram controls her family with her indifference and inability to do anything herself. Inevitably, these

means of manipulation used by the matriarchs remind the reader of the similar behaviour exercised by the younger counterparts of these women.

Using money or illness to control others, meddling in other people's lives, creating norms on what one can or cannot do – all these ways of manipulation and control are essentially indirect, and that feature connects these seemingly powerful women to those below them on the social ladder. Even if a woman's social standing is high, and she has gained an appearance of power, it still seems that she cannot pursue what she wants openly and head on. Instead, she has to resort to indirection to be able to produce the desired results. This shows that women in Austen's novels can never achieve the kind of absolute power that is a given to all the male characters. All the power that these women have – be it social status, money or sheer force of personality – has essentially been given to them by men, or they have obtained their means of power through their relationships with men.

Somehow, these powerful women prove the point that in Austen's own time was implied through the idea and properties of a proper lady. Though the matriarchs are rigorous guardians of propriety and appropriate conduct, in their demeanour there is an undercurrent that clashes with their respectability. A prevalent characteristic in almost all of the matriarchs is their bad temper; their anger flares up easily especially when they are opposed, especially by other women. Anger can easily be seen as passionate behaviour and as has been stated before, women were considered less capable than men to contain their passions (Poovey, 18–9). Modesty being the very essence of an appropriate behaviour for women, the meddling, bossy and angry matriarchs are a prominent deviation of this norm. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim that matriarchs

> are mothers who seek to destroy their docile children. Widows who are no longer defined by men simply because they have survived the male authorities in their lives, these women can exercise power even if they can never legitimize it; thus they seem both pushy and dangerous. (170)

Gilbert and Gubar make a point here though their statement of matriarchs being no longer defined by men is not entirely true. All the matriarchs have close male relatives that the matriarchs, try as they might, cannot control. They have reached their positions of power only because they have formed fortuitous relationships with men, and just as

easily they could be ousted from those very positions by men choosing to favour some other women instead. The uncertainty of the matriarchs' status may not be as palpable as that of the young unmarried women but it is there and the matriarchs recognise it. Therefore, they make every effort to guard it against any threat by creating norms and rules of social conduct and judging the young aspirants to their thrones. Thus, it is implied that power makes a woman behave in an unladylike manner, it makes her scary and despicable, and because she realises that she can never have absolute power, she vents her uncertainty and frustration in anger. This unladylike behaviour is in a strong contrast with the very norms and behavioural codes that the matriarchs are so keenly foisting on others.

With these women, Austen deepens her depiction of the scopes of female life by describing what awaits the young hopeful maidens once they enter the connubial life. In a way, these women are also future versions of the single female characters in their respective novels, and in them, the pursuit of power and social standing is embodied in a very extreme, caricatured way. None of the ladies mentioned above is a very pleasant person and all in all, they do their best to make the others' lives very difficult and try to hinder their "victims'" endeavours to happiness. Of course, the matriarchs themselves do not think that they are causing any problems; rather, they all think that they are absolutely right about everything and no one should have any objections to their reasoning and advice.

3.3.1 Mrs. Ferrars

Apart from Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice* or Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park* the matriarch characters are not very talkative, nor are they brought to the centre of the stage. Rather, they are talked about, their opinions are voiced by other people, and they loom menacingly in the background of every plotline. The descriptions of the matriarchs are not very flattering; their bodily appearances are by a rule affected by their spiteful natures:

> Mrs. Ferrars was a little, thin woman, upright, even to formality, in her figure, and serious, even to sourness, in her aspect. Her complexion was sallow; and her

> features small, without beauty, and naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong characters of pride and ill nature. She was not a woman of many words; for, unlike people in general, she proportioned them to the number of her ideas (*S&S*, 226)

As the depiction reveals, Mrs Ferrars is hardly the type of a regal character as for example Lady Catherine de Bourgh is. Her stature is not imposing, she has lost her looks – if she ever had any – and it is implied that she is not very clever, as her later actions well prove. The only thing she has, is her status as a widow with money and the power to decide who is entitled to it.

When one examines the rivalries between the female characters in Jane Austen's novels, be they between the single women or women of different ages and social positions, they all have the same reason behind them: rivalry for a man's attention. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Mrs. Ferrars is determined to see her sons make good matches in marriage (*S&S*, 22), so when her eldest son Edward announces his secret engagement with the penniless upstart Lucy Steele, her anger is understandable. In order to return her son under her thumb, she threatens him with disinheritance, but the ever-honourable Edward will not go back on his promise to Lucy and is deprived of means to put up a family. The irony of ironies is that later, when Lucy herself finds that she does not love Edward enough to marry him – that is to say that he has become too poor for her – she uses her charms on Robert, the brother who unexpectedly has benefited on Edward's schism with their mother. It is therefore, as Elinor says:

> And your mother has brought on herself a most appropriate punishment. The independence she settled on Robert, through resentment against you, has put it in his power to make his own choice; and she has actually been bribing one son with a thousand pounds a year, to do the very deed which she disinherited the other for intending to do. (*S&S*, 354)

The power struggle between young women and matriarchs always seems to have the same outcome in Austen's novels: eventually, the young women succeed to have their way and the matriarchs, despite all their schemes are obliged to give in and resign. The women's hierarchy in Austen's fiction has a strong basis in money and wealth: women who are well off, are high on the hierarchical ladder, while poorer women have to marry

money or find a way to the favours of a wealthier woman if they wish to improve their status. Women's value is equal to their value in money, their dowry, their inheritance, the wealth of their family. In Austen's novels, those who have money, namely the powerful matriarchs, usually want more of it and measure everybody around them according to their financial situation. Mrs. Ferrars, with her determination of seeing her sons distinguished and marrying for economic benefit rather than for affection, is a good example of this.

3.3.2 Lady Catherine de Bourgh

Maybe the most prominent and active of all the matriarchs studied in this thesis is Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*. She appears as an archetype of an influential female relative whose mere presence intimidates those below her in society:

> Lady Catherine was a tall, large woman, with strongly-marked features, which might once have been handsome. Her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner receiving them, such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank. She was not rendered formidable by silence; but whatever she said, was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance (*P&P*, 183)

Lady Catherine has all the characteristics of a rich and elderly woman who is used to have things done in her way, under her supervision. The fact that she has a title only adds to her power because she is thus part of the aristocracy, and that alone is enough to entitle her haughty attitude towards others. Her relationships with other people are spiced with her conviction of her own superiority, and thus with her right to meddle in every little detail of everybody's lives. Due to her social status, she has a considerable standing in her own parish and with the help of Mr. Collins, she is aware of everything that goes on in her realm. She is described to have active interest in the lives of those below her, and whenever her tenants try to voice out their opinions or concerns she – like a true feudal mistress that she is – "[sallies] forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty" (*P&P*, 190).

Lady Catherine is indeed free with her advice and judgement and considers it her right to have everybody obeying her. In her daughter, the sickly Anne de Bourgh, one sees the result of Lady Catherine's imposing influence to those weaker than her. Miss de Bourgh, who under her mother's tutelage should have become "the brightest ornament" (*P&P*, 75) of any society, has failed her mother's expectations and her duty towards her rank. She is completely under Lady Catherine's control, having no voice or opinions of her own, let alone the talents or attractiveness that Mr. Collins' loyal compliments bestow upon her. Miss de Bourgh's powerlessness and diminished existence in the shadow of her mother is a warning to those entering Lady Catherine's immediate society. To be dependent on her goodwill is obviously not advised. Those who oppose her, such as Elizabeth Bennet, face her wrath – though it must be noted that when her nephew Mr Darcy does not heed her orders, but goes on to marry the "unfeeling, selfish" (*P&P*, 393) Elizabeth, he is not completely excommunicated from her presence but after a proper time is again welcomed into her good graces. Then again, Mr Darcy's situation in life is much more superior to any of those sycophants that usually surround Lady Catherine, and thus he cannot be expected to be treated in the same way as them. Of all the matriarchs, Lady Catherine has the most power in her situation: she is a widow and a wealthy one at that, she has the absolute command of her inheritance as it is not entailed away to any male relative, and she is formidable enough to have her way in almost everything. The one thing she would like to control she cannot – namely her nephew's actions – but otherwise she has enough underlings to order about.

Interestingly enough, deviating from the general rule by which the matriarchs in Austen's novels usually socialise with the young women, there is one woman of the younger generation with whom Lady Catherine does get along. Charlotte Collins is perhaps sensible enough to see that in order to lead a tolerably peaceful life at home and in society, in which Lady Catherine is the most prominent factor, she must find a way to get along with her. It must be said that Charlotte does meet Lady Catherine's definition for a suitable wife much better than Elizabeth when she advices Mr Collins to marry: according to the suitable attributes of a wife Lady Catherine has related to Mr. Collins, Charlotte is "a gentlewoman" but also "an active, useful sort of person, not brought up too high, but able to make a small income go a long way" (*P&P*, 119). Also, Charlotte,

who is not as impulsive and rash in her opinions as Elizabeth, can contain herself in the presence of her foolish husband and tyrannical Lady Catherine and go about her business as she pleases. Once again, the matriarch has to – if partly unconsciously – acknowledge that she has lost the power struggle with younger women. Elizabeth "refuses to oblige her" (*P&P,* 393), and Charlotte may appear to listen to Lady Catherine and her endless criticism and orders, but when she goes home, there is no telling whether or not she follows the advice given to her.

3.3.3 Mrs. Norris

The delicious character of Mrs. Norris is, alongside Lady Catherine, one of Austen's most memorable supporting characters. Her incessant talking, her mean-spiritedness towards the heroine Fanny Price, and her manipulative powers make her stand out. Mrs. Norris is the instigator of most of the important turning points in the storyline of *Mansfield Park.* She arranges for Fanny to come and live in Mansfield, and promotes her inferior status in the household with her continuous repression and scolding. She works for Maria's marriage with Mr. Rushworth, and basically runs the household in Sir Thomas's absence.

Bitterness, envy, and disappointment with the course her life has taken are the determining characteristics of Mrs. Norris. She did not make a good match in marriage in her time and has ended in a gallingly dependable state, hanging on the goodwill of her brother-in-law (*MP,* 1). She has had to move out of the Mansfield Parsonage after her sickly husband's death, and has, through her family ties to Mansfield Park, been appointed a house in the village. Her dependable state seems to add to her spite and make her even more bitter, as she has to dance attendance to Sir Thomas and use her incessant talking and manipulative skills to get what she wants.

For an active person such as Mrs. Norris the duties to be performed in a lonely widow's household appear not to be diverse enough to while away her time. She knows that despite her family relation, she is not essential to the Bertram family unless she makes herself so, and does everything in her power to meddle in the everyday life of Mansfield Park, to escape the tedium of her own little house and have some meaning in her life. Her status will not be important if she does not work for it: she is a widow of

small means with no children of her own and has therefore no employment in her own life to keep her busy. For this, she turns to her sisters' families and tries to make herself indispensable, "she must be the doer of everything" (*MP,* 235). Also, as she is in fact the lowest in order in her sister Lady Bertram's house, she finds a way to boost her status by procuring their niece Fanny Price to come and live in Mansfield Park. This way, she has somebody even lower and more obliged to gratefulness than herself on whom to vent her frustration.

The lack of property, the necessity of always having to placate somebody else to get what she wants have made Mrs. Norris a frugal housekeeper:

> ... her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew quite as well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends. Having married on a narrower income than she had been used to look forward to, she had, from the first, fancied a very strict line of economy necessary; and what was begun as a matter of prudence, soon grew into a matter of choice (*MP,* 6)

There is an interesting similarity, as Gilbert and Gubar point out (170), in Mrs. Norris and Mary Crawford, concerning property and money. Mrs. Norris's penny-pinching and delight in saving and gaining money is only a more developed version of Mary's wish to make an advantageous match. The way Mary first chooses Thomas Bertram as a possible husband has first and foremost to do with money and status. His personal merits are not nearly as important to Mary as his property and material advantages: "a park, a real park, five miles round, a spacious modern-built house, so well placed and well screened as to deserve to be in any collection of engravings of gentlemen's seats in the kingdom" (*MP,* 43).

Having failed – possibly by no fault of her own – to produce any children, Mrs. Norris sheds her attention on her sisters' children. By far the dearest to her are those who are nearer and of a family of consequence, the children of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram. Especially the girls, Maria and Julia are her special favourites, and the faults in their upbringing are partly blamed on her, her having indulged them "by the blindness of her affection, and the excess of her praise" (*MP*, 433). As Gilbert and Gubar state, "for all her noisy bustling, Aunt Norris is a much more loving mother to Lady Bertram's daughters" (171); she may meddle and fuss and indulge, but in the end she

shows more maternal spirit than Lady Bertram, who cares more for her dog and needs her husband to tell her how to feel on any given time. Mrs. Norris volunteers to go off and live with Maria, who is after her infamous elopement and ruined marriage sent off to live in seclusion. On the one hand this seems like a punishment to Mrs. Norris as well as Maria, but when one considers the independence of her new existence in a new society, and their secure living provided by Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris's live does appear to have taken an upward turn after all.

Mrs. Norris's power is in her skill to wield the tool of indirection, in her industrious way of working for what she wants. She talks and talks, argues her case so thoroughly that most often her counterpart gives in just to silence her. Here, too, Mary and Mrs. Norris are alike in character. Also Mary is a master in the art of manipulation, but her way is subtler as she turns on her charm whenever she wants something, and usually the people it is directed to never realise that they were manipulated in some way.

3.3.4 Mrs. Churchill

In *Emma*, one could say that the character of the matriarch is quite passive-aggressive. Mrs. Churchill never makes an appearance in the story, but her presence is acutely felt through the messages of her ill health, and her seemingly strong effect on her surrogate son Frank Churchill. Mrs. Churchill is thus resorting to the ultimate tool of manipulation, invalidism, to control others around her, gain attention and an illusion of importance. Though the reader never meets the ailing Mrs. Churchill in person, there are several occasions in which she is talked about and her personality presented in quite an unflattering light. "The aunt was a capricious woman, and governed her husband entirely" (*E*, 12) comments the narrator in a fairly neutral tone, but those who actually know her, such as Mr. Weston, do not spare their words:

> I used to think she was not capable of being fond of anybody except herself; but she has always been kind to him [Frank] (in her way – allowing for little whims and caprices, and expecting everything to be as she likes). And it is no small credit, in my opinion, to him that he should excite such an affection; for ... she

> has no more heart than a stone to people in general, and the devil of a temper. (*E*, 106–7)

Mr. Weston, Mrs. Churchill's brother-in-law is actually the only one of the Highbury society who has ever met and has had to deal with her, so his authority in voicing his opinion on her, even though a subjective one, cannot be questioned. Then again, this does set the foundation for everyone else's opinion on Mrs. Churchill, so the reader never really finds out what the said lady is like and what her true motives are.

Mrs. Churchill's illness is quite plainly a mere gimmick, and nobody seems to take her ailments seriously, though Frank Churchill readily hastens to her whenever it is announced that she is feeling poorly and cannot do without him. Still, there is certain resentment in him each time he is summoned to her bedside: "He must be gone within a few hours, though without feeling any real alarm for his aunt, to lessen his repugnance. He knew her illnesses; they never occurred but for her own convenience" (*E*, 230). The influence she has over him astonishes the Highbury society exceedingly, especially when Frank's first, eagerly awaited visit is repeatedly put off on account of Mrs. Churchill's allegedly unstable health. That a young woman should be so prevented from seeing her relatives would be more understandable, but "one cannot comprehend a young *man's* being under such restraint, as not to be able to spend a week with his father, if he likes it" (*E*, 108). As it later turns out, Frank was taking his own advantage of Mrs. Churchill's well-known tendency to manipulate others with her ill health in order to time his visit to Highbury with that of Jane Fairfax.

Mrs. Churchill and her caprices are also among the central reasons behind Jane Fairfax' miseries. Jane and Frank's engagement must be a shameful secret because Mrs. Churchill would never approve of his choice of a bride, a penniless orphan and a would-be governess. Because they cannot announce their engagement and intention to marry, Jane is stuck in an in-between state from which she cannot honourably get out. Consent to marry from Frank's family would solve all her problems, but as long as Mrs. Churchill lives there is no chance for it. Jane is meant to enter her preordained profession as a governess very soon and her anguish over it, the dread of such a situation makes her physically ill. In fact, here she and Mrs. Churchill are alike, using illness to postpone or prevent disagreeable things from happening. Though Jane and

eventually also Mrs. Churchill do have real ailments, most of the time they appear to imagine and fake their bouts of sickness when the need arises. When Frank and Jane meet again in Highbury, Jane's tolerance is tested even more when Frank, taking improper delight in his task of concealing their engagement, proceeds to treat her in a rather cruel manner and ridicule and mock her publicly.

It appears that Mrs. Churchill is, in a way, a necessary evil, a character that is needed to enable Jane's growth into a woman. Jane, who is the heroine of her own sub-plot inside the main story of *Emma*, needs a proper, stressing ordeal in order to realise what is expected of her as a woman, and the spiteful, ailing Mrs. Churchill creates a suitable situation. As long as she is alive, Mrs. Churchill controls those nearest to her, Mr. Churchill and Frank, and by extension Mr. and Mrs. Weston, Emma, and Jane. When Mrs. Churchill's body fails her spirit and she dies, those controlled by her are liberated and free to do what they will.

4 CONCLUSIONS

As this study has showed, the definition of power is hardly simple and unambiguous. Power is an abstract commodity and yet it can be pursued, gained and lost. This thesis has been a study of fiction but the fictional world it immerses in has its basis in actual ideologies and phenomena, such as the patriarchal society and women's struggle for survival in the male-dominated world. There are different forms of power but the most typical, the most often used form for women in Austen's fiction is indirection. In their excluded state, confined to their homes for the most of the time, the middle-class women – albeit fictional and mere portrayals of the author's imagination – wield the tool of indirection to gain control and to influence the outcome of the events. The analysis of the supporting female characters in four novels by Jane Austen has showed that women, try as they might, cannot have absolute power, the power allotted for men. Their power is more temporary and periodic; women have the ability to influence those with real power, but they can never occupy the actual power seat.

The Romantics, the Cunning, and the Matriarchs all strive for power and control in ways that identify them as typically female but also as separate types of characters. The Romantics have perhaps the most to learn, and often they also have to suffer the harshest lessons in order to grow and to become women. The Romantics have the most difficult time in realising their limitations in society, and as women. Because of their romanticism, naïveté, and idealism, they do not see that their struggle against the norms of society is in vain. Therefore, large, life-changing events are needed to open their eyes. Marianne Dashwood is a classic example of such a character and her story is perhaps the yardstick to which the other Romantics are measured. Jane Fairfax, who has sometimes been described as a combination of Marianne and Elinor Dashwood, is a darker, more tragic and more mysterious variant of this type of character. Lydia Bennet is more unfortunate than her fellow Romantics, for despite the ordeals she goes through – or rather, forces others go through for her – she does not realise her own flaws and is confined to an eternal state of confusion. To become and be a woman in Jane Austen's fiction means that one has to shed the naïve and romantic fancies, understand the

expectations of society and adjust one's aspirations and wishes accordingly in order to be able to survive and make the most out of one's situation. Because Lydia does not understand what is expected of her as a woman, she can never become one, no matter what superficial merits she has collected.

All the three Romantics seek liberation, freedom of choice and right to steer the course of their own lives. As the stories show, they are not very successful in these pursuits. They all are forced to exchange their want of freedom and control for a respectable status in society. Marianne Dashwood, abandoned by Mr. Willoughby, sheds her romantic notions and, consenting to the will of her family, marries Colonel Brandon. Jane Fairfax narrowly escapes the horrors of spinsterhood and the obligation of earning one's own living by marrying Frank Churchill, though this relief is granted to her only after a lengthy period of uncertainty and suffering. Lydia throws away all caution and consideration, and in theory, she does get what she wants the most: a man she professes to love, and the social status of a married woman. However, her failure in seeing the consequences of her actions leaves her just as powerless and struggling as she was before her marriage. In the end of each story, one is left with a feeling of want, that there should have been something more for these characters.

The Romantics are the most powerless characters studied in this thesis, and due to their ignorance in the ways of the world, they also suffer the most. The romantic fancies they entertain are their stumbling stones, thus proving the point Mary Poovey makes:

> Romantic love ... promises women emotional fulfilment and the legitimation of their autonomy, their intensity of feeling, and even their power; but, given the actual power relations institutionalized in society, such rewards are short-lived. Romantic love makes women dream of being swept off their feet; it ends by reinforcing the helplessness that makes learning to stand on their own two feet unlikely. (243)

Though the Romantics all dream of liberation and wish to escape their present situation, they do not think they would be able to take the decisive steps by themselves. Marianne's short romance with Mr. Willoughby begins with him literally sweeping her off her injured feet, and when the affair ends, she is devastated. As Colonel Brandon

anticipates, she needs a male guardian to be able to survive. Lydia pays the price of her folly by marrying Mr. Wickham because without a marriage taking place, she would be destitute and her family with her. Jane needs to be rescued from her difficult economic and emotional situation, and at length she is rescued, but loses the power she has gained by keeping her secrets and keeping quiet. She could not survive without Frank Churchill, because her only other alternative is to become a governess, a fate she wants to avoid at all costs.

The Cunning are similarly in search for liberation, power and control, but their methods are different from those of the Romantics. They believe that they know how the world works and pursue their goals sometimes quite ruthlessly. The Cunning are all materialists, and their conduct on the marriage market is markedly businesslike. While the Romantics are looking for love and sympathy of souls, the Cunning seek material comfort and security. Affection and other feelings have less significant roles. Lucy Steele, Charlotte Lucas, and Mary Crawford all profess to know what they want from life and act accordingly to fulfil their plans. Of all the characters studied in this thesis, they are the most skilled in scheming and manipulating; they have a deft hand in indirection and subtlety, the characteristically female tactics for obtaining influence and, as these characters believe, power.

Even though the Cunning are aware of the social expectations and norms they must follow, and entertain less rosy visions about marriage, they too, similarly with the Romantics, want to marry in order to escape the present situations of their lives. Lucy Steele is after a wealthy husband and a social standing, but she also wishes to escape her dependent status and the company of her apparently tiresome sister. Charlotte Lucas seeks "preservative from want" (*P&P,* 138), and by marrying Mr. Collins she secures her future, but as a side benefit, she becomes the mistress of her own home and is able to leave the stagnant society of Meryton. Mary Crawford looks for a potential husband who would be worthy of her and her twenty thousand pounds, but she is also looking for a home of her own, a place to settle down after her nomadic ramble through other people's houses.

The patriarchal society depicted in Austen's novels favours men, but it does not mean that the women would all be equal. In fact, women have their own hierarchy based on their social class and status, wealth and other merits. The Romantics are often

the lowest of this order, because they wish to break the norms and do not understand what is expected of them as women. The Cunning have a tighter grasp of reality and are able to manoeuvre people to their liking. However, hierarchies are often an obstacle that even the most skilled manipulator cannot circumvent. Here again the truth about the extent of female power is revealed: indirection is merely a tool to influence and influence is not power. The Cunning can therefore have effect on things, but they can never declare their power openly, nor is it openly recognised.

The Matriarchs are seemingly the most powerful females in Austen's novels but even their power is only temporary; more often than not, the male characters or the younger women gain the upper hand in the end and the Matriarchs are forced to give in. The Matriarchs have the situation in life that the Romantics and, even more so, the Cunning are pursuing, and this adds to the rivalries between the said characters. Mrs. Ferrars, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mrs. Norris, and Mrs. Churchill have all fulfilled their most important duty as women: they each have, in their time, managed to find a husband and thus secured their future. Apart from Mrs. Churchill, they have also out-lived their husbands and have thus gained a considerable amount of power and control as widows.

Mrs. Ferrars and Lady Catherine are both wealthy and money is in fact their most influential tool in controlling others. In Lady Catherine's case, the fact that she has a title, adds to her formidability and grants her an advantage in intimidating others to her will. Mrs. Ferrars keeps her sons in a short leash by threatening them with the loss of their inheritance, which she knows to be a very important factor when they contemplate their marriages and future livelihoods. Mrs Norris' situation is different and more dependable than that of the other Matriarchs, but, with her husband dead, she is after all her own woman and desires to be important to her immediate society, the Bertrams. Mrs. Norris has no money or title to use in controlling others and bullying them to her will, but she uses other, subtler ways that connect her to what could be called the female tradition of indirection. By making sure that she is involved in everything that goes on in her brother-in-law's family and household, she has the means to control everything and influence those who actually make the final decisions.

Mrs. Churchill is the most passive of the four matriarch characters studied in this thesis; she does not have a voice, her words and orders are only reported by others.

Because her husband is alive, she does not have a similar seat of power as the other three Matriarchs have, and thus she has to resort to the most influential tool she has in her use, namely claiming to be ill. She uses her failing health as a gimmick to make her husband and surrogate son Frank bend to her will, but does not realise that Frank actually uses her bouts of hypochondria against her to his own advantage. Mrs. Churchill's only power is her invalidism, a trait that connects her not only to Jane Fairfax who also seeks control by professing to be ill, but also to the contemporary Regency image of the female invalid whose tragic infirmity was supposed to invoke pity and emphasize the frailty of the female mind (Sales, 48).

Even though the Matriarchs loose their power struggles, they do not appear to acknowledge their failures but believe to be in the right despite everything. Because of this, because of the fact that they, unlike the other characters studied in this thesis, do not grow and adjust their opinions in order to survive, the Matriarchs are rather flat characters. They jealously guard their status and with their behaviour preserve the patriarchal order created by men. Then again, the Matriarchs' rigid formality and adaptation of the patriarchal rule can also be interpreted as a means to obtain a voice that is acknowledged and heard also by men. They do not wish to change the prevalent order of society because it is beneficial to them, but by adjusting to the patriarchy, they are able to gain small personal victories.

The supporting female characters of Jane Austen's novels that have been the focus of this study, do, in their caricatured way, illustrate the fierce female rivalry and the dislike and mistrust of each other in their competition for male approval (Robinson, 105). Their aspirations of power primarily concern their own lives, as they strive to control what happens to them instead of being pushed around by others. At the same time, these women try to win each other in their pursuits of control and influence, and even try to rule over the all-powerful men, but are eventually doomed to fail. Even the Matriarchs, though seemingly attuned to the expectations of society and adjusted to act the role of a proper lady, become blinded by the possibility of having more power than men and other women, and are brought back to reality rather harshly. Whether or not the characters realise what is expected of them as women, is another matter. Their means for attaining power and influence are diverse, but they all spring from the same source, indirection and subtlety. The Romantics, the Cunning and the Matriarchs all

believe at first that they can change their situation by their sometimes rather controversial behaviour, but, in order to become women and to survive, the characters need to subsume to the rules of the society and acknowledge that they have no real power.

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