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COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE AS A FORM OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT
IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*, CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE*, AND
GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH*

Ms. Ploi Phayakvichien

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Department of English
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By Ms. Ploi Phayakvichien
Field of Study English
Thesis Advisor Nida Tiranawasdi, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master’s Degree

..... Dean of the Faculty of Arts
 (Assistant Professor Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, Ph.D.)

THESIS COMMITTEE

..... Chairman
 (Associate Professor Pachee Yuvajita, Ph.D.)

..... Thesis Advisor
 (Nida Tiranawasdi, Ph.D.)

..... External Examiner
 (Associate Professor Chalernsri Jan-Orn, Ph.D.)

พลอย พัทธ์วิเชียร : การเกี่ยวพาราตีและการแต่งงานในฐานะสิ่งสร้างอำนาจให้แก่สตรี
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 EMPOWERMENT IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*, CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE*
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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ศึกษาการนำเสนอผู้หญิงและบทบาทของผู้หญิงในการเกี่ยวพาราตีและการ
 แต่งงานในนวนิยายอังกฤษสมัยศตวรรษที่ 19 สามเรื่องคือ *เพอร์ซูเอชัน* (1818) ของเจน ออสเตน
เจน แอร์ (1847) ของชาร์ลอตต์ บรอนเต้ และ *มิดเดิลมาร์ช* (1871) ของจอร์จ เอเลียต โดยจะ
 แสดงให้เห็นว่าการกำหนดบทบาทของชายและหญิงของสังคมสมัยยุควิคตอเรียนมีผลกระทบกับ
 การใช้ชีวิตในสังคม โดยเฉพาะในครอบครัว ความสำคัญของบทบาททางเพศของชายหญิง และ
 การปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างสองเพศจะถูกวิเคราะห์ภายใต้กรอบของประวัติศาสตร์และสังคมในช่วงต้น
 ถึงกลางศตวรรษที่ 19 ของประเทศอังกฤษ โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เชิงประวัติศาสตร์ (historical
 criticism) จาก *แฟมมิลี ฟอร์จูน: เมน แอนด์ วูเมน ออฟ เดอะ อิงลิช มิดเดิลคลาส 1780-1850*
 (1987) ของ ลีโอนอร์ ดาวิดอฟฟ์ และ แคทเธอริน ฮอลล์ ซึ่งผลงานดังกล่าวได้ทำการสำรวจ
 ความสำคัญของบทบาททางเพศในชีวิตของชาวอังกฤษชนชั้นกลางซึ่งกล่าวว่าบทบาททางเพศ
 เป็นปัจจัยพื้นฐานที่ส่งผลกระทบต่อค่านิยม แง่มุม ชีวิตครอบครัว ความเชื่อทางศาสนา และ
 โครงสร้างเศรษฐกิจของชนชั้นกลางในยุคนั้น (29) ดาวิดอฟฟ์ และ ฮอลล์กล่าวว่าถึงแม้ว่าผู้หญิง
 มักถูกละเลยในงานเขียนและการศึกษาทางประวัติศาสตร์ของยุค แต่ผู้หญิงก็มีส่วนในการสร้าง
 ประวัติศาสตร์เทียบเท่ากับผู้ชาย โดยผู้หญิงมีอิทธิพลที่แยบยลต่อผู้ชายทั้งในแง่ของการเมือง
 เศรษฐกิจและสังคมสงคราม อันเป็นบทบาทที่นักประวัติศาสตร์มักมองข้ามและไม่ได้ทำการ
 บันทึกไว้ วิทยานิพนธ์นี้จะแสดงให้เห็นว่าในสังคมที่ปิดกั้นโอกาสแก่ผู้หญิง นักเขียนหญิงที่
 วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ศึกษายังสามารถใช้การเกี่ยวพาราตี และการแต่งงานเป็นเครื่องมือในการสร้าง
 อำนาจให้แก่ผู้หญิงในท่ามกลางสังคมที่ชายเป็นใหญ่

ภาควิชา.....ภาษาอังกฤษ.....ลายมือชื่อ.....
 สาขาวิชา.....ภาษาอังกฤษ.....ลายมือชื่อ.....ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก.....
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PLOI PHAYAKVICHIEAN: COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE AS A FORM OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*, CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE* AND GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH*. ADVISOR: NIDA TIRANASAWASDI, Ph.D., 137 pp.

The thesis will examine the portrayal of women and their roles in courtship and marriage in three nineteenth-century novels: Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), showing how gender differences played a significant part in Victorian society and more significantly, in the private sphere of the family. The significance of gender roles and how men and women interact with each other in the private sphere will be analysed in the social and historical context of the early to the mid-nineteenth-century England, using the historical criticism provided in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (1987) which examines the significance of gender roles in the life of the provincial English middle class. According to Davidoff and Hall, gender roles are a basis for the construction of the provincial middle class's values, outlook, family life, religious ideology and economic structure (29). They observe that in historical texts and studies of the age, women are almost always neglected and they argue that women played as much part in shaping history as men did, giving evidence of women's subtle influence, which often goes unrecorded or overlooked by other historians, in shaping the political, economic and philanthropic actions of men. This thesis will seek to explain that within the restricted social expectations, female writers of the nineteenth century have portrayed some of the strictest institutions of all, courtship and marriage, as a form of female empowerment against the dominating patriarchal world.

Department: English..... Student's Signature.....
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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth-century British society is generally believed to be one of the most restrictive times for women. During this period, there was clear demarcation of gender roles, particularly those of women which were apparently confined within the domestic sphere. In 1869 William Rathbone Greg wrote in his essay “Why are women redundant?” that there were

...hundreds of thousands of women – not to speak more largely still – scattered through all ranks, but proportionally most numerous in the middle and upper classes, – who have to earn their own living, instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men; who, not having the natural duties and labours of wives and mothers, have to carve out artificial and painfully-sought occupations for themselves; who, in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own. (2)

For Greg, as well as numerous contemporaries of his, women's natural role was fixed and undeniable. They were born to be wives and mothers, to be dependent on men. Earning their own living and being independent were seen as an abomination and something to be condemned. Likewise, the critic and writer John Ruskin wrote in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), about men's role as defender and protector and women's role as keeper of moral purities and the household. Women's role was not for the economic world, he explained, but for self-renunciation and being by their husband's side (Ruskin).

Female writers in the period also endorsed the separation of sexual roles and the belief that women were the weaker and the dependent sex. Hannah More, the author of the popular novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), strongly favoured the designation of women within the domestic sphere; she considered it an honour as

well as a duty. More believed that it was natural that men and women had different responsibilities and roles. In her 1877 *Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Ladies*, More wrote: “the female mind, in general, does not appear capable of attaining so high a degree of perfection in science as the male” (6). More was a fierce defender of the women’s role as the “angel in the house” and argued against women's mobility and independence, claiming that women were born to be dependent and protected by the stronger sex, men. Ann Martin Taylor, a writer and poet, held similar notions. Like More, Taylor believed that a woman's place was within the home. She thought that women's duty was to make the home an attractive place for men, as she wrote: “but where are the charms of the fireside; where is that which should give him a taste for its pleasures, if the wife, its chief ornament is absent?” (qtd. in Davidoff and Hall 173). She also believed that men were the firm ruler and head of the household, the carer and protector of their wives and children: “There cannot, indeed, be a sight more uncouth than that of a man and his wife struggling for power; for where it ought to be invested, nature, reason and scripture concur to declare” (qtd. in Davidoff and Hall 174). Like many of her contemporaries, the designated roles of men as protectors and women as dependents were natural and innate characteristics.

Even Queen Victoria, a symbol of female power, expressed a similar idea to those of Hannah More and Ann Martin Taylor. Queen Victoria voiced her concerns on the increase of women’s advocate since the mid-nineteenth century. To Queen Victoria, women were the weaker and feebler sex and they should not try to venture out of their socially designated position in the domestic sphere:

The Queen is most anxious to enlist every one who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of “Woman’s Rights”, with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety... It is a subject which makes the Queen so furious that she cannot contain herself. God created men and women different – then let them remain each in their own position. (Queen Victoria, letter 29 May 1870, qtd. in J. Marsh)

Today, modern critics' view on gender constructions seems to be directly influenced by the pervading concept of domesticity upheld by most critics and writers in the Victorian period. Mary Poovey, for example, explains in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988) that women in the nineteenth century were abstracted "both rhetorically and, to a certain extent materially – from the so-called public sphere of competition, self-interest, and economic aggression" (10). According to Poovey, women were believed to be governed by a maternal instinct and not by rationality. In this respect, women needed protection and control. Because they were not governed by reason, they could not be allowed to participate in the economic and political world (11). Jan Marsh, in her "Gender Ideology & Separate Spheres in the Nineteenth Century" (2011), discusses the division of gender roles. According to Marsh, men were the "bread winners" and women their "loyal helpmeets". She gives examples of renowned Victorians who supported the separation of gender roles; these included Auguste Comte, Arthur Schopenhauer, Herbert Spencer, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and John Ruskin. These people positioned men as the "competitors in the amoral, economic realm" and women the "decorative trophies". Marsh further explains the separated duties of men and women. Because the workplace and the home became increasingly divided, geographically, as the century progresses, men and women's division of roles became a cemented fixture. Women could not help their husbands with business as they were confined to the home. Women's role became limited to taking care of the household and its residents.

Even though most historians, such as Marsh and Poovey, agree that there were strict demarcations of gender roles, some argue that despite the social repression women found ways to empower themselves. Empowerment, these historians argue, came from unofficial sources since women were denied access to political, economic and educational tools resulting in the omission of women from official documents and historical texts. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, for example, argue in *Family Fortune: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1859* (1987) that women play an important role in shaping the nineteenth-century society, although in undocumented ways. Davidoff and Hall are the first historians to introduce the idea of

the “separate spheres” which is the separation of gender roles in the nineteenth century. Women were restricted to the domestic sphere as “angel in the house” while men were seen to be part of the public sphere and the protector of the family. They argue that during the end of the eighteenth century notions of gender roles changed:

‘Separate spheres’...became the common-sense of the middle class, albeit a common-sense that was always fractured. Something significant changed at the end of the century; there was a historic break and a realigned gender order, during which existing expectations about the proper roles of men and women were re-worked with a significantly different emphasis. (xvi)

By using unofficial historical documents, Davidoff and Hall illustrate how women subverted gender roles and empowered themselves. The historical documents chosen as argumentative proofs include letters, diaries, receipts, religious documents, shopping lists, order forms, hospital records, deeds, and contracts. Although women were idealistically confined to the domestic sphere, they played a significant part in society. Their personal network and kinship played a crucial role in shaping business transactions, agreements, and even religious gatherings. Women’s property also proved a huge funding for the businesses during the nineteenth century. They were also the key contributors to philanthropic causes. More than just portraying women’s history, Davidoff and Hall seek to illustrate and shape the society during the early nineteenth century in which women played a part, as they assert that “the book was to be an intervention not in *women’s* history alone but in history *per se*” (xvii).

Based on Davidoff and Hall’s argument that women had more power and role in shaping the nineteenth-century society than official historical records suggest, this thesis aims to study the role of women from a literary point of view. Through the analysis of three Victorian novels – Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* – the following chapters will illustrate how women empower themselves through courtship and marriage to subvert the rigid gender norms of the century. Each novel, in its own ways, contains female characters that do not allow themselves to be tied down by the strict demarcation of gender

roles. By using various methods, these women successfully have power over, or equal to, their male counterparts. The novels will be examined through a historical criticism. Female empowerment through courtship and marriage can be identified by analysing the literary works alongside historical contexts of the time.

The Rise to Power of the Middle Class and the Place of Women in the Victorian Society

As women's place and role in the shaping of history in each period are often neglected by historical works, the historical background given in this chapter will focus on the dimension of gender and how it plays a full weight in shaping the social life of the nineteenth-century middle class. While the eighteenth century saw the rapid rise to power and control of the middle class, in the nineteenth century, their place in society as the most influential group of people was firmly established (Levy 22). During this time, the middle class had become the rule-bearers of the society, setting the norms for the way of life. The industrial and agricultural revolutions that ensued gave way to the increasing number of people and wealth of the middle class. The Reform Bill of 1832 gave more people, namely the middle-class male population, the right to vote. The Representation of the People Act 1832, commonly known as the Reform Act 1832, was an act that introduced a wide-ranging change to the electoral system including the elimination of the "rotten boroughs" which were parliamentary constituencies that had very small electorates and would normally be used by patrons to gain seats within the parliament and also used the seats to achieve undue influence in the parliament. The Reform Act 1832 also granted seats in the House of Commons to large cities that had sprung up during the Industrial Revolution and were heavily populated but before then, unrepresented. The Act also gave an increasing number of people the right to vote. This increased the size of the electorate by 50%-80%. Along with the increase in wealth and power, the middle class sought to establish themselves as an important basis of society. In contrast to the rich, "morally corrupt," and nonchalant upper class, the middle class sought to gain more control over the society by promoting moral order, religious precedence, and strict codes of conduct which included the rigid separation of gender roles.

Indeed, a clear demarcation of sexual roles that emerged in this period resulted in the work and the domestic sphere becoming dramatically divided. Women were contained within their role of the “angel in the house,” and were cut off from the economic world. Men, on the other hand, were seen as belonging to the outside world; they were the caregiver of the house as well as its head, with women being the passive dependent. More than just an idea, the separate spheres also resulted in women being physically detained in their household. While before, women travelled and were known to possess great horsemanship skills, during this period, women’s mobility was restricted. Traveling alone was not an option; women had to be accompanied by a husband or a male relative. They were seen and treated as a child – they had to be taken care off.

With increasing identification of women to “angel in the house,” women would only work for economic means when necessary. However, it became harder and harder for middle-class women to find any paid work suitable enough for their stature. The increase in manufacturing also closed down many small independent businesses. This also played a significant role in alienating women from the work force as the workplace was no longer physically attached to the domestic sphere. The increasing association of men with outdoor activities and women with indoor propriety did not help women’s economic prospect. If women crossed the threshold into the outside world and had to support themselves economically, they could be viewed as “going down” the social ladder. The loss of opportunity for economic pursuit by mid-century meant that marriage became increasingly important and a means for economic survival. However, with marriage, women lost their legal rights in property. Their belongings were permanently turned over to their husband. Even when women were active in the family business, they were not legally recognised and the law prohibited them to formally hold economic partnership. Furthermore, social norms limited them from being openly involved in business. It was a sign of social inferiority if women had to work to help support the family and was considered the male head of household’s failure to provide their dependents with financial stability.

Religion and Gender Roles

The rise of the English middle class came along with certain unique aspects to the nineteenth-century society. Religion was an aspect that was a predominating influence. Especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, it permeated and had influence on all other aspects of the society. In the second half of the century, morality became so embedded in society that it became a way of life for the people and was used as a way to prove that one was a person of stature and gentility. The middle class used religion as a means to prove that they were morally and spiritually superior to the crudeness of the lower class and the nonchalant attitude of the upper class.

The revival of Evangelicalism in the late eighteenth century had a great impact on the way women were treated and were expected to act. Although at this time, there were also different non-conformist sects, they all largely held the same view and expectations of women. They believed that the domestic realm, or the home, must be a moral sanctity from the corrupt economic world. Religion, for the middle class, had both emotional and material benefits. Religious belief was used as a class distinction tool. It was only the middle class that adhered strongly to the Christian doctrines. The other classes were seen by the middle class to be morally corrupt. The middle class used their rigid morality as a demand for righteous status and power. It also gave a sense of belonging and security in what they saw as an increasingly unstable and rapid changing world.

In this period, individual faith was given primacy and the domestic sphere was upheld for being the setting in which faith could be initiated and maintained. Women, who were seen as part of the domestic sphere, were hailed as the guardian of peace and the bringer of happiness. This role, however, did not come without a price, since the norms forced women to become a traditional subservient wife and/or mother. Their role was strictly kept within the domestic sphere, and they were held there by the enforcement of the religious domain and social codes of conduct. As Davidoff aptly concludes in her essay, "Class and Gender in Victorian England":

...the implication was that middle-class men did brain work while the hands did menial work. Middle-class women represented the

emotions, the Heart, or sometimes the Soul, seat of morality and tenderness. Women performed these functions as keepers of the Hearth in the Home, and here we find a body/house connection which figured widely in the Victorian view. (19)

Since women were seen as the “seat of morality and tenderness” and were the “keepers of the Hearth in the Home,” they played a role of spiritual guidance to men in their households. It was more natural and less problematic for women to conform to the self-renunciation, self-discipline and self-scrutinisation that were the ideals of the Evangelicals because they were in line with their dependent position on men their restriction in the domestic realm. Men, however, were seen as part of the worldly sphere in which corruption and consumerism were prevalent. They were not considered as having innate morality as women did and instead, they relied on self-examination and prayer, and on their women to keep them in spiritual check. Ideally, they were to retire from business as soon as economy permitted.

It is also important to note that the revival of Evangelicalism in this period resulted in a change in the portrayal of femininity. Before the late eighteenth century, women were portrayed as sensual and evil as they were closely associated with the image of Eve. Women were seen to be responsible for the Fall, a characteristic of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. They were thought to be full of “willful sexuality and bodily appetite” (Poovey 9). It was often believed that they did not have self-control. Poovey asserts that eighteenth-century poets, such as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, often associated women with “flesh, desire, and unsocialized hence susceptible, impulses and passions” (9-10). However, all this changed at the end of the eighteenth century. During that time, the world view related that women were a part of the domestic realm and therefore, belonged to the spiritual region. Women were pure and innocent and had to be kept in their domain, while men involved themselves in material matters, such as money and politics. Women held the role of keeper of the hearth and were endowed with the image of Virgin Mary. While they came to be viewed as morally superior, they were nevertheless even more restricted within their domestic realm.

Evangelicalism was not the only religious sect that gained popularity during this century. The century also saw the rise of many religious groups, such as the Dissenters who stressed the importance of maintaining a personal relationship with God, the Quakers who believed in building social networks and ties, and the Unitarians, who believed in reason, freedom of thought and education. Although the many religious sects had their own uniqueness, they all largely believed that women were central to the domestic sphere and needed to be nurtured and protected from the evils of the world. According to Davidoff and Hall, in the 1820s, The Evangelicals and the Dissenters even cooperated in an attempt to win the public over to a Christian way of living. This cooperation was due to the growing fear and suspicion of the Chartists and the Owenites. The Chartists called for universal suffrage while the Owenites promoted religious free thought, women's rights, marriage reform and working-class education (94). Although the religious groups that sprouted up during the period called for religious equality in men and women, and promoted the domestic sphere as a kind of spiritual sanctity from the corrupt public realm, they also played a role in the restriction of women. Self-examination and self-denial were emphasised in religious practice, especially for women. Women were expected to sacrifice themselves for others and forgo their pleasure for the well-being of their family and their husbands.

Moreover, the newly influential religious doctrines also posed a problem with the old concept of masculinity. In the past, "gentlemen" were known for their worldly pursuits. They spent their times going to dances, hunts and parties. However, the Evangelicals and other religious sects stressed the importance of Christian love, morality, charity, and diligence which could cause their masculinity to become undermined. Christian norms which put emphasis on emotion, sensitivity, self-examination and self-sacrifice were all considered feminine qualities. Evangelical clergymen, especially, risked their manhood because their religious personae could be interpreted as a sign of weakness and femininity by the upper class. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, Romanticism and emotionalism had lost their appeal, and religion, instead of its former rebelling force against the upper class, had already become a way of life. Masculinity and the Christian gentlemen lost the emotionalism of the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Masculinity during this period

was a matter of self-control. Men did not show their emotions and could not openly cry. Honour, industry and business competence became the new ideal of manhood and respectability.

Since the late eighteenth century, men's role as head of the household increasingly limited women's opportunity for economic pursuit and public appearances. Women were to be protected by men from the corrupting forces of the world outside the hearth and the home. This role as head of the household corresponded with their religious duty in the family because a family was seen as the basis of society; an earthly family equals a heavenly family. When the men and women of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries died and went to heaven, they were believed to be reunited with the family they had on earth. Men, therefore, took the role of the representative of the clergy and of God. He had a duty to oversee the religious practices within his family.

The religious doctrines and ideas on femininity were also aligned with women's roles in the society and the family. Women were socially dependent on men. Religiously, it was believed that women had equal opportunities to men for religious salvation. However, this does not mean that they had the same path to salvation. As aforementioned, there was a shift in the way women were viewed from the time of the Puritans up until the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Poovey 32). Before the late eighteenth century, women were believed to be sensual and evil. They were seen as the root cause of the downfall of man when Eve partook of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. This biblical incident was also evoked in the nineteenth century. It was not, however, used to undermine women and blame them as the cause of sin. It was used to explain how religion viewed women as subordinate to men. Although the church's doctrine stated that men and women were equal, in practice women were subordinate. Childbirth was then seen as the agony that all women had to face to atone for the sins that Eve had caused. On the other hand, childbirth could also lead to a woman's salvation as it was also associated with Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Therefore, women's moral salvation was linked to her role as a dutiful mother, wife, sister and daughter (Davidoff and Hall 114). In her services to the family, she had to suppress her sexual side and that, in turn, gave her virtue and a path to salvation.

Moreover, women were seen as more susceptible to religion than men as it affirmed her already subordinate role as the “angel in the house”. While men had all the distractions of the outside world and had to juggle with the corrupt business world, women were closed to all the worldly temptations. Women were believed to have had natural passivity and sensitivity. Because women were so closed off from the world and enclosed in their domestic sphere, their role as a Christian was very similar to their role as a housewife and mother. The only kind of work that “genteel” women were allowed to do outside the home was unpaid philanthropic work. However, this could only be done after she fulfilled her homely duty.

However subordinate and confined women were, as Davidoff and Hall have argued, they nevertheless played an important role in the period. They were believed to be the moral influence to and support for men. Even though men acted as the household’s clergy or God, women’s passivity and gentleness were the healing force that brought men back from the impure world outside. Moreover, women’s contribution to the church did not only limit to spiritually and morally influencing their family members, records show that women also gave financial help to the church. However, they were not formally represented in church. They were not allowed to vote unless in some small circumstances, such as the lack of male representations (widows and spinsters) or when male members of the church needed female votes to secure their position. Also, in some very small congregations women were allowed to play significant roles. For example, in the late eighteenth century, the Quakers had some very influential female ministers whose preaching appealed widely to the public (Davidoff and Hall 138) and the Methodists also allowed women to hold office and preach publicly. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, and the ideal of separate spheres became more sharply defined, it was harder and harder for women to hold any public office in the religious world. Although their influence did not cease altogether, it did become more informal. Women held great influence simply in their choice of congregation, attendance or non-attendance, gossip and who they chose to call on or who they excluded. They kept the formal religious officers up to date on what information they had gained. It is also the women who were often the first to convert in a household and it is them who were usually responsible for the religious conversion of the rest of their family.

Economy and the Demarcation of the Separate Spheres

Economy played an important role in the demarcation of the separate spheres. With the Industrial Revolution and easier access to travel and communication from the rapid development of the railway system, the nature of making a living for the middle class changed in the nineteenth century. During the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, businesses started out small and flexible. Partnerships were often between father and sons or between brothers and sealed by active participation, which also prevented fraud and malpractice. The household and the business were seldom separated from each other. Before the late eighteenth century, when the business and the home were still largely on the same property and could not be separated, women played an active role in the running of both the home and the public enterprise. They helped out on farms, did the bookkeeping and accounting and often ran businesses that supported their husband's enterprise. However, from the mid-nineteenth century, with the influence of Evangelical ideals in regards to gender roles, the sexual division of labour was as permanent as the division of the home and the workplace.

Despite economic advantages in some fields, namely millinery and dressmaking, women were seen as dependents of men and needed to be looked after physically and financially. It was a man's duty to look after his dependents even after his death. Inheritance played an important part in the middle-class economic system. Their idea in passing on their fortune, however substantial it may be, is unlike the upper-class. Whereas the aristocracy and some upper-middle class favoured primogeniture (the right of the first-born child to inherit all the property), the middle class favoured partible inheritance (dividing the inheritance among the children). The middle class tended to divide their property in roughly equal parts for their dependents both male and female. Although the forms of property might not be the same they were usually more or less equal in worth (Davidoff and Hall 206).

After a father's or husband's death, he could make sure that his female dependents would not have to lower their stature to work for a living in a number of different ways. There was an increasing use of trust-like arrangements as opposed to the widows receiving traditional dower. Trusts were pieces of land, capital or

business that were entrusted to a male “trustee”, usually the husband or brother of the female recipient, to invest freely or as per agreement. With an annuity, a dependent can be provided for after the death of the head of the household. An annuity gave the recipient a regular income that was negotiated beforehand, but unlike the trust, it does not give the recipient claim over the capital. Another type of income that women depended heavily on is rents, which allowed women to have income without working and therefore keeping their genteel existence. The last significant source of incomes for dependents was life assurance policies, widely used by professional men such as lawyers, bankers and doctors. Because their businesses depended largely on their knowledge, skills and expertise, their means of income stopped after their death. Buying life assurances helped promote their professional image. Life assurances also made it necessary to have documents of civil registrations of births, deaths and marriages (Davidoff and Hall 205). In spite of the income they could gain from their fathers or husbands, daughters or wives were often left legacies and inheritances with no obligations or control. Sons, on the other hand, were likely to receive property or businesses with conditions, such as binding them not to sell their businesses or they had to choose a certain kind of business path to be able to receive their legacy. The reason that daughters usually received inheritance without obligations is because they were considered a permanent and personal dependent of their male kin; their dependency ended when they married and became the responsibility of their husbands.

Nevertheless, women can be seen to have played an important role despite their inability to directly become official partners or work in the family enterprise. Their marriage often increased connections for the family business. Their introduction of their husband into the family could lead to partnerships or mutual beneficial agreements. Marriage increased network connections and business opportunities. Although love and free choice were promoted in courtship and marriage, the prospect suitor had to be accepted by the family. This meant that the young couple had to have similar economic background and religious belief. Forgoing or ignoring these compatibilities could be met with harsh criticism from the family or even disinheritance.

Apart from expanding kinship networks, women contributed greatly to the family enterprise in other ways. Women's capitals were often used in setting up or saving the family enterprise. Also, women that came from manufacturing households could bring useful skills and knowledge to the marriage (Davidoff and Hall 279). Literacy became a key aspect in women's contribution to an enterprise (Davidoff and Hall 280). Being literate meant that they could help write letters, oversee documents, or witness wills. Women also stepped in to take over the running of businesses on a temporary basis. Moreover, women used their friendship building and relationship maintaining skills to ensure that their family business ran smoothly. They brought with them the personal aspect to a business (Davidoff and Hall 281).

In addition, women helped out in other aspects also. In manufacturing, at least until before the mid-nineteenth century, women were still counted as part of the labour. In a consensus made in Witham and Birmingham, 80% of the manufacturing men left their businesses to their wives, or in the very least, to run the business until their sons became of proper age to take it over (Davidoff and Hall 250). In the farming business, women often dealt with direct sales or even open a shop adjacent to the farm to sell their produce. In professional businesses, such as banking and law, women often took care of living-in apprentices and pupils. Moreover, they often held a kind of secretarial position to their fathers, husbands or brothers. Women also held supreme places in millinery and dressmaking businesses, which were often seen as paralleling with their duty in the domestic sphere. They also played an important role in supporting businesses to run successfully.

Even though work opportunities for women became fewer as the century progressed, there were still some professions that middle-class women could do and still retain a sense of gentility. Teaching was such a profession. By mid-century, teaching was one of the few respectable occupations for women. Teaching was seen as an extension of domestic duties; it did not contradict with the norms of the submissive and passive women. The duties of female teachers were more or less aligned with their duties as housewife: cooking, preparing food, baby sitting and being responsible for the education of the small children in the household. The difference between the businesses run by men and women is that women were not usually looking to make a career out of their work. When they were in better

financial situations they usually withdrew from their economic profession and slid back into their domestic sphere.

For the lower middle class, other economic opportunities still exist. Women as innkeepers were not uncommon. Their function was largely in scale with their domestic duties. Their importance to the business was clear. According to Davidoff and Hall, every male innkeeper that left a will in Witham left their inn business unconditionally to their wives; and almost every man in the business in Birmingham also (Davidoff and Hall 299). Women innkeepers often extended their business to include hostelry trade and pubs. However, by the 1830s and 1840s, their former dominance in the trade faded and was diminished by the mid-century.

Fiction of Courtship and Marriage and the Female Empowerment

The three novels chosen, all written by female writers, span almost a century. Austen's *Persuasion*, published in 1818, reflects the changes in society during the early part of the nineteenth century. In *Persuasion*, shifting values are apparent. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards into the early nineteenth century, there was a significant rise of the newly rich middle class. To establish their role in the political and economic issues of the time, the middle class needed a tool that would help them cement their importance in society. They also needed to distinguish themselves from what they saw as the idleness and the frivolities of the upper class. Thus, they used religion as a tool to impose order on society. With the emergence of Evangelicalism, gender demarcations became stricter and more apparent. In opposition to the upper class's lack of profession, Evangelicalism promoted hard work, industriousness and diligence. Women, on the other hand, were increasingly confined to the domestic sphere. These changing norms are reflected in *Persuasion*. Characters of a difference in only one generation display different characteristics. Women from the younger generation had less mobility. However, in subversion to the changing norms, male and female characters in *Persuasion* are portrayed as equals. Women are drawn away from the domestic sphere while men are pulled closer to it, creating equal footings between the two sexes. As will be illustrated later on in the thesis, Austen's domestic sphere is not restricted to physical terms. The author's meaning of a blissed union is openness and equality between the two

genders.

On the other hand, as the nineteenth century progressed, gender demarcations and societal rules regarding male and female roles became a firm fixture within society. The idea of the separate spheres was no longer seen as a revival of a religious doctrine or as resistance to the upper class' nonchalant ways. Instead, it became a way of life – a social code of conduct that was a natural way of things. Because the demarcation of gender roles had already become a fixed way of life, it was even harder to struggle against. Therefore, in *Jane Eyre*, opposition to the restriction society placed on women is even more pronounced. As society's grip on women became harsher, stronger aversion follows. Thus, *Jane Eyre* reflects a clear struggle against these socially constructed norms, a struggle that is stronger than that found in *Persuasion*. In *Jane Eyre*, the heroine struggles against the oppression of society. She moves from one extreme to the next. First, she finds herself restricted and confined. After a period of repression and self-renunciation, she is exposed to another type of extreme – one of passion and sensuality. In both extremes, patriarchal figures in her life always seek to control and own her. Her fate is often decided for her and she seems little in control of her life. In the end, however, after an apparent power struggle with the hero, the table reverses. She becomes in control and has power, physically and mentally, over the hero.

Even though George Eliot's *Middlemarch* was published in 1871, the novel is set around the 1830s – a time of political turmoil (the Reform Bill passed in 1832). Coincidentally, the 1870s also faced political anxiety. Several movements arose, especially those by women advocates. The town of Middlemarch acts as a mirroring society to the 1870s – a time far back enough for Eliot's contemporaries to view it with objectivity but near enough to still be able to identify with it. Eliot uses her heroine, Dorothea Brooks, as an example to show how damaging female confinement can be to a person. Her heroine has a passion and long to achieve greatness; she is compared to St. Theresa Ávila. However, despite her numerous attempts, she cannot struggle against the entire society. She finally submits to her role as a submissive wife, and fades into the life of her husband amidst the disappointment of the narrator, the readers, and some of the characters. In *Middlemarch* a different type of empowerment is apparent – the use of the novel as a literary tool to empower the

author's message.

As the century progressed, different forms of female empowerment emerged. A sense of equality in both sexes was no longer possible as demarcation of gender roles became fixed. A society in which men and women transcended their socially designated gender roles was possible in the changing times of *Persuasion*. However, as restrictions against women became firmer, more drastic measures were called for. In response to strict societal rules imposed upon women, Brontë created an ideal circumstance in which the heroine has control over the hero. The heroine realises what is best for her and is able to achieve it. Eliot's *Middlemarch*, however, has quite a few differences from the earlier two novels. Eliot is influenced by the realism movement. Unlike Brontë, she does not utilise romantic literary tools to empower her heroine. In trying to portray her Middlemarch society as realistic as possible, she cannot allow her heroine's aspirations to be fulfilled because realistically, society does not allow women to become engineers or businesswomen. Within the restriction of society, Dorothea Brooks can only be a nurturer of the domestic sphere; a wife and a mother. However, Eliot uses the heroine's failure as a tool of empowerment for herself; she uses it to convey her message of the dangers of female confinement and repression. She illustrates, through her characters, how social restrictions can extinguish the flames and passion of women.

CHAPTER II

JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION* AND THE CREATION OF BALANCE IN GENDER ROLES THROUGH COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the early nineteenth century saw the establishment of new ideals and norms that were largely influenced by the burgeoning of the middle class and its relation to the Evangelical movement which originated during the mid to late eighteenth century. Along with a stricter and more prudent world view came new definitions of masculinity, femininity and the domestic ideal. During the eighteenth century, aristocracy, rank, the landed estate and connections were generally favoured over money, diligence and private relationships. The emergence of the powerful and rich middle class and their Evangelical ideals inculcated new values in the society – values for profession, morality, and industry.

This particular change in the perspective of the middle class towards themselves and their relationship to society can be perceived in Austen's last completed novel, *Persuasion*, which is somewhat different from earlier novels in her literary career. As Grahame Smith argues in his study, *The Novel & Society* (1984), Austen's work reflects the changes that took place in the society during the period between the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century (132). Austen's earlier novels, including *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816), seem to favour aristocracy and the ruling class. However, in *Persuasion*, a perceptible change in the values of the characters and the novelist is apparent. In *Persuasion*, Austen ridicules the nonsensical pride of the upper class and favours people with professions – aspects which are absent in her earlier novels. However, what makes Austen surpass her contemporaries is her ability to infuse her own opinions on femininity, masculinity, domesticity, courtship and marriage that exceed the changing norms of the time. The chapter will show how Austen seeks to create balance in gender roles in the increasingly restricted patriarchal society in the early nineteenth century. In her novel, Austen distances women from the traditional idea of domesticity, pulling them away

from the realm of the hearth and giving them more voice and decision over their destiny. She gives women qualities that were deemed to be “masculine”. Moreover, Austen places the men in the novel closer to the domestic sphere and feminises their masculinity. By taking women out of their domestic entrapment and positioning men nearer to the feminine sphere, Austen offers the ideal heterosexual relationship. In order for a love relationship to work, men and women have to embrace both their masculine and feminine characteristics and failure to do so will result in obvious and often reproachful flaws as illustrated in many characters in *Persuasion*.

A Change in Class Values

Persuasion chronicles the life of Anne Elliot. Seven years prior to the opening of the novel, Anne fell in love and got engaged with Frederick Wentworth, a man with no property or significant family ties. She broke off their engagement after being pressured by her family members, who pride themselves for their superior class status. At the start of the novel, Anne is already twenty-seven and unmarried. Her family has lost a majority of their wealth and Wentworth, now a navy captain, comes back from war a rich man. However, he has not forgiven Anne for her rejection. The novel focuses on Anne’s and Wentworth’s relationship, ending in their eventual marriage.

The changes in the norms regarding social classes in this period are clearly observed and portrayed by Austen in *Persuasion*. The Elliots, except Anne, belong to the old norms and values. Their extreme pride in their ancestry and lineage is mentioned frequently throughout the novel. Sir Walter Elliot, Elizabeth Elliot and Mary Musgrove (formerly Mary Elliot) constantly look down on those with no rank even though by the opening of the novel the Elliots have lost a large proportion of their money making it necessary for them to uproot themselves from Kellynch Hall to Bath. Mary, the youngest sibling, is married to Charles Musgrove, the eldest son of Mr Musgrove, a man, “whose landed property and general importance, were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter Elliot’s” (28). However, despite the fact that by then the Musgroves are far better off in terms of economy than the Elliots, Sir Walter Elliot still considers it quite a condescending match, for “Mary had merely connected herself with an old country family of respectability and large fortune, and had

therefore *given* all the honour, and received none” (11). Again, Sir Walter Elliot’s snobbery is emphasised when Mr Shepherd, his lawyer, mentions a gentleman by the name of Mr Wentworth. Sir Walter Elliot’s reply clearly reinforces his undeniable and unwavering value for rank and ancestry:

Wentworth? Oh! ay, – Mr. Wentworth the curate of Monkford. You misled me by the term *gentlemen*. I thought you were speaking of some man of property: Mr. Wentworth was nobody, I remember; quite unconnected; nothing to do with the Strafford family. One wonders how the names of many of our nobility become so common.
(25)

Sir Walter Elliot’s view of his family’s high status in society is opposed to other characters’ view of the Elliots. In the early nineteenth century, status and rank were losing their value. The Musgroves, although lower in status than the Elliots, do not take rank and status as seriously. This is seen numerous times in the novel, such as Louisa’s remark about Mary’s “nonsense” and “pride”, or as she calls it, “the Elliot pride” (75). Pride, especially excessive pride was no longer a value, but a defect. In this respect, Mary’s obsession with pride and status is seen by the Musgroves as ridiculous and rude: “...I wish anybody [*sic*] could give Mary a hint that it would be a great deal better if she were not so very tenacious; especially, if she would not be always putting herself forward to take place of mamma. Nobody doubts her right to have precedence of mamma, but it would be more becoming in her not to be always insisting on it” (42). Her “non-sensical” obsession, as one of the Miss Musgroves puts it, is outdated and even deducts her charms.

Apart from feeling that “the Elliot pride” is ridiculous, the characters in the novel care much less about the Elliots’ affairs, economic situation and social status than the Elliots are willing to believe. It is clear that society at the time was changing and the people no longer gave rank and status utmost importance. Anne realises this when she is removed from the family estate, Kellynch Hall, to stay at Uppercross with her sister and brother-in-law: “She had never been staying there before, without being struck by it, or without wishing that other Elliots could have her advantage in seeing

how unknown, or unconsidered there, were the affairs which at Kellynch Hall were treated as of such general publicity and pervading interest,” for “coming as she did, with a heart full of the subject which had been completely occupying both houses in Kellynch for many weeks, she had expected rather more curiosity and sympathy than she found in...Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove” (38-39). No one in the novel, apart from those with rank or the family of those with rank, pays strict attention to the traditional etiquette concerning rank. The passing of aristocratic ideals and rank can be perceived at the beginning of the novel when Sir Walter Elliot muses over the baronetage book. The way he turns to the baronetage book to read and re-read the history of each line of baronetcy, especially his, is nostalgic. For Sir Walter Elliot, the book is used as both consolation and the suppression of any unwelcome emotions that happen to emerge in his life. Sir Walter Elliot needs the confirmation of written history to endorse his baronetcy and his stature. The fact that he needs constant validation from a book indicates the declining values of rank and aristocracy. Because society around him does not acknowledge his rank as much as he would like, Sir Walter Elliot constantly turns to his beloved book in which he often adds additional information of important events concerning his family to solidify his social status. With changing norms in class value, Austen makes it possible for her characters, of different classes, to unite and find an equal footing in their love relationship. This, however, does not come without the combination of changes in masculinity and femininity also.

New Definitions of Masculinity

As certain values began to fade and became outdated in the early nineteenth century, new ideals and norms gradually took precedence. As Tony Tanner has pointed out in his book, *Jane Austen* (2007), money was becoming the new criteria for social acceptance (228) during the time the novel was written. The rising wealthy middle-class families, such as the Crofts, rich from war, are able to both literally and metaphorically supplant the Elliots from their home, Kellynch Hall, and become more established and respected by the characters in the novel. Not only does this signal the increasing acceptability of people with money, but as Tanner suggests further, it also brings to issue new ideals and norms. A new definition of masculinity has emerged,

partly from the increasing power of the middle class and partly from the influence of Evangelicalism. At the time of the novel's setting, the aristocratic extravagant and idle lifestyle that was so valued in the eighteenth century was no longer an acceptable way of life. Starting gradually since the end of the eighteenth century, a "gentleman" was no longer a man who spent his time hunting, travelling, going to dances and being nonchalant about the happenings of his society. Sir Walter Elliot, capable of nothing but vanity, is ridiculed by Austen: "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation" (10). In the novel, the former glory of the ruling class is degraded into mere stagnation and in a state of moral paralysis. On the other hand, the new characteristics that are admired are diligence and adherence to duty. This is embodied in the form of the navy. Characters that hold the navy as a profession (Admiral Croft, Captain Wentworth, Captain Harville and Captain Benwick) are portrayed to be open, courteous, trustworthy and, in short, the embodiment of a "gentleman".

Although Sir Walter Elliot disapproves these changing norms regarding the middle class, he cannot deny the change in the society that makes other values supplant rank and property. He views the navy as "being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of..." (22). Anne, on the other hand, correctly pinpoints the new values of the society when she observes that "The navy, I think, have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow" (21). It is the usefulness and labour that gives a man respectability. Melissa Sodeman explains in her study, "Domestic Mobility in *Persuasion* and *Sandition*," that Anne "endorses a middle-class ethos in which one's social position is earned rather than inherited" (794). This is true especially when she admits that the Crofts are more deserving of Kellynch Hall than the owners because their good sense makes them capable tenants who take the best care of the parish and give the poor the attention and relief they need (102).

What Austen values is "ingenuity" in the professions. While in her other novels, the heroines are often awarded landed estates at the end of the narratives, in *Persuasion*, the landed estate and property are not the utmost reward for the heroine

anymore. The rejection of property over the cultivated mind is established early on when Anne, despite her admiration for the Musgroves, does not want to trade places with them and give up “her own more elegant and cultivated mind” (38). Unlike Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, whose tour of Pemberley conjures up the feelings of regret for giving up the title of “mistress of Pemberley” (187), Anne Elliot views her missed marriage opportunity as giving up on the company of Wentworth’s friends or “brother officers”. Again, this clearly indicates the change in the perspective of Austen. According to Monica Cohen, while Mr Darcy and Pemberley are associated with “generational continuity, historical order, and what can be understood as ownership or mastery,” (349) Captain Harville is respected for his labour and profession. His values are connected with ingenuity. Anne Elliot does not find happiness in traditional property; the mind is more desirable. This is seen when she visits the Harvilles:

...[T]hey all went indoors with their new friends, and found rooms so small as none but those who invite from the heart could think capable of accommodating so many. Anne had a moment’s astonishment on the subject herself; but it was soon lost in the pleasanter feelings which sprang from the sight of all the ingenious contrivances and nice arrangements of Captain Harville, to turn the actual space to the best possible account, to supply the deficiencies of lodging-house furniture, and defend the windows and doors against the winter storms to be expected. (83)

The ingenuity that Austen so much values is attributed to the fact that Harville is a sailor. His ingenuity in concocting contrivances to make up for his small habitat is similar to the living standard in a ship. His living space is a reflection of his profession: “the fruit of its labours, the effect of its influence on his habits, the picture of repose and domestic happiness it presented, made it to her a something more, or less, than gratification” (83). The labour of his profession is significant because it produces a sense of “the scene as situated within an artisanal rather than a commodity-based culture” (Cohen 350).

Another clear indicator of the changing values of masculinity is in Austen's choice of giving the hero a profession, significantly those of the navy. It should be noted that in Austen's previous novels, her heroes have no significant profession other than the landed gentlemen or clergymen. If anything, in the previous novels, it can be said that Austen was even wary of the professions. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, the militia officers were presented as a nonchalant and precarious bunch. By the time *Persuasion* was written, the social change had become apparent and irrevocable. The navy, in *Persuasion*, was the embodiment of goodness, trustworthiness and honesty. At the end of the novel, even the most uptight believers of hierarchy and rank like Lady Russell, Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth Elliot have to succumb to new social values. In Bath, Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth accept, although reluctantly, Captain Wentworth as a man worth connecting with, despite their past disdain. Having first met in Bath, Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth completely ignore Captain Wentworth. However, they soon acknowledge him and invite him to their party: "the truth was that Elizabeth had been long enough in Bath, to understand the importance of a man of such an air and appearance as his. The past was nothing. The present was that Captain Wentworth would move about well in her drawing-room" (182). Lady Russell also formerly deemed Captain Wentworth unworthy of her beloved Anne. However, she finally comes to appreciate his sincerity and ingenuity. Moreover, she also realises that people, despite their rank and outward jollities, can hold unacceptable flaws.

New Definitions of Femininity

As new definitions of masculinity began to take shape, a new ideal for femininity and domesticity emerged also. As explained in the previous chapter, because of the Evangelical influence on the shaping of female identity, women became more and more confined within the domestic sphere. As the nineteenth century progressed, the work place and the home became separated, cutting women from the economic world altogether. Women's mobility was increasingly restricted. While women's mobility, horsemanship and participation in the economic world were not uncommon in the eighteenth century, by the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, independent women who moved around freely became rare. This is

depicted by the awe that Anne views Mrs Croft's nature. Mrs Croft's ability to control the gig better than the Admiral, her interest in the details of the lease of Kellynch Hall, and her experiences at sea seem like a novelty to Anne. In short, in the time of Anne Elliot, women like Mrs Croft are rare. Even in seemingly carefree families such as the Musgroves, a change in values between two generations is detectable:

The Musgroves, like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant. Their children had more modern minds and manners. There was a numerous family; but the only two grown up, excepting Charles, were Henrietta and Louisa, young ladies of nineteen and twenty, who had brought from a school at Exeter all the usual stock of accomplishments, and were now, like thousands of other young ladies, living to be fashionable, happy, and merry. (37-8)

Mr and Mrs Musgroves are of the old stock. They are more similar to Admiral and Mrs Croft, but perhaps, less refined. Their girls, however, are raised according to the change in values of femininity and domesticity. The "usual stock of accomplishments" that is mentioned are most probably instructions in piano or harp, in drawing, and in modern languages, such as French. This type of education would certify gentility and make them good conversation partners for their husbands. In short, they are raised to become good wives. This indicates the changing values that tend to limit women only to domestic roles, both physically and mentally.

Women outside the Domestic Sphere

Austen's females are not as passive or entrapped in the domestic sphere as nineteenth century women should be. More than just alienating her heroine from the domestic sphere, Austen depicts her woman as the creator of her own opportunity, choosing the suitor whom she deems worthy and who sees their worth. Such woman also acts as an influential force of morality and spirituality to men. Finally, the power of the female social network, kinship and communication functions as a powerful plot-moving factor for the novel.

In *Persuasion*, women who are presented as limited within the traditional domestic sphere are contrasted with those who transcend it into other social realms. Those that are willingly confined to the domestic sphere are portrayed as lacking crucial characteristics that make them void of charm or even likability. In contrast, women who are not limited in the home but find their happiness also in the outside world, are rounded and very content with themselves. However, it is not that Austen is against the traditional female role of domesticity, it is as Denise Riley has pointed out, "If woman's sphere was to be the domestic, then let the social world become a great arena for domesticated interventions" (qtd. in Cohen 357). Austen's female breaks the confinement of the traditional domesticity and finds comfort in the outside social world.

Whereas the domestic realm is the central theme and setting of her previous novels, in *Persuasion*, the family is given noticeably less importance. It is clear that Anne is alienated from her surroundings at Kellynch Hall and her family members. She does not connect with either her father or her sisters on any level. At the beginning of the novel, Austen sets the scene and situation of her heroine by mentioning that she is not important in the eyes of her father and sisters: "...but Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; – she was only Anne" (11). Her value in the eyes of others is not to be of any inconvenience to anyone. Not only does her family disregard Anne's company, they prefer someone else – someone not connected in any way to the family. This is shown most clearly when Mrs Clay is "engaged to go to Bath with Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth, as a

most important and valuable assistant to the latter in all the business before her” (32). The fact that Elizabeth does not want nor need her sister in Bath weakens the ties of family and kinship – concepts that are considered to be of prime importance during the nineteenth century (Davidoff and Hall 360).

Anne’s alienation from her family is still very apparent at the end of the novel. Unlike her family, Anne does not believe that she is superior in status to Captain Wentworth. On the contrary, if anything, she views herself inferior to him for not having any worthy friends or connections, excepting two, to add up to his already tight knot of friends. Anne’s frustration is clear:

...[S]he felt her own inferiority keenly. The disproportion in their fortune was nothing; it did not give her a moment’s regret; but to have no family to receive and estimate him properly; nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good-will to offer in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters, was a source of as lively pain as her mind could well be sensible...She had but two friends in the world to add to his list, Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith. (202)

What Anne worries the most is not about property but about her lack of kinship. Not only does this signal the change in values as mentioned before, but it also firmly alienates Anne from her domestic family, a break which is cemented at the end of the novel.

Austen’s own criticism about the confinement of women within the domestic realm is apparent in her disapproval of Anne’s own entrapment within her own family circle. After Anne broke her engagement with Captain Wentworth some seven years before the novel took place, she found herself inconsolable and would not attach herself to anyone. Although by the time the novel took place Anne has come to accept the past, it is clear that she still dwells on the incident and has therefore lost her bloom at a young age. Austen reasons that Anne’s suppression of self is due to her domestic restrictions:

More than seven years were gone since this little history of sorrowful interest had reached its close; and time had softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to him, – but she had been too dependent on time alone; no aid had been given in change of place, (except in one visit to Bath soon after the rupture,) or in any novelty or enlargement of society. (28)

Austen criticises that women's bondage to the domestic sphere limits their perception and the ability to perceive anything beyond their circle. Therefore, time is the only consolation for women as they have no other activities or surroundings to gain from. This idea is brought up again in the famous banter between Anne and Captain Harville. In arguing about the constancy of men and women, Anne attributes women's firmness to their domestic confinement:

Yes. We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are force on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions. (187)

This is perhaps, one of the novel's strongest criticisms of female entrapment within the domestic sphere. Austen clearly denotes that women's traditional role and social expectation of being the "angel in the house" is not necessarily a positive factor. As in Anne's case, her long suffering period is unnecessarily extended by her stationary position at home. Sodeman argues that Anne considers women's isolation from home as an "emotionally damaging confinement" (792). This is opposed to Captain Wentworth's naval profession in which it takes him from places to places. He has the luxury of escaping. As soon as Anne breaks their engagement, Captain Wentworth quits the country, while Anne has to endure being in the scene of their courtship. When Captain Wentworth realises that other people think he is attached to Louisa

Musgrove, he, again, escapes to see his brother and therefore ends the supposed attachment without losing any dignity.

Austen's wariness of domesticity is further enhanced when she concludes the novel with a "homeless heroine" (Cohen 348). Anne Elliot is similar to almost all of Austen's other heroines in that she has little income. However, at the end of the novel, unlike all the other heroines, she has no landed estate waiting for her. Her happiness is not tied to any economic property but rather the understanding of her relationship with Captain Wentworth. In ending up with a homeless heroine, Austen makes her deny the stable domestic life that the landed estate was believed to give. Her denial of the domestic role is first seen in the rejection of Charles Musgrove, the future heir to the Uppercross estate, and again, later on in the novel, the refusal of her cousin and future baronet, William Elliot. Anne refuses what her mother has once been, a mistress of a landed estate, a traditionally domesticated wife. Instead, she chooses to break with the traditional norm by marrying Captain Wentworth, the epitome of the modern professional gentlemen (Sodeman 797).

However, it is not that Austen entirely denies the importance of the family and domesticity. In the conclusion of her novel, Anne becomes part of a "profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than its national importance" (203). Although Austen denies the values of women being entrapped in the traditional domestic role, she argues that domesticity should transcend into the public domain. Domestic and national importance cannot be distinguished. At the end of the novel, the private and the public domains are entwined and become one and the same. As Sodeman suggests, the relationship between Anne and Wentworth are bound together through a "nexus of social relations" (797).

It is important that *Persuasion's* private and intimate conversations are all done in large social gatherings or in a public space instead of in the usually expected private realm. Although the first meeting between Anne and Wentworth is within the domestic realm, it is constricted and suffocating. They do not mention to anybody their mutual past and avoid each other, talking only when necessary, limiting their conversations to just a few words. Their interchange is done in that manner throughout their entire time in Uppercross. However, all the significant and crucial scenes that mark important changes in their relationship happen in a social space. The

first crucial moment takes place in Lyme. While Anne, Henrietta, Louisa and Captain Wentworth are walking up some steps, they pass William Elliot. Mr Elliot, later known to be Anne's cousin, looks at Anne in such a way that it is clear to both Anne and Wentworth that he admires her exceedingly. This makes Captain Wentworth "look[ed] round at her instantly in a way which shewed [sic] his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance, – a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you, – and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again'" (87). Although no words pass between them, it is the first intimate moment since their meeting at the start of the novel. Before then, their conversations were only limited to mere civil pleasantries. It is significant that in order for them to establish a more intimate understanding, they need to be provoked by a stranger. The eye contact between Anne and Wentworth, provoked by Mr Elliot, leads to an almost conversation-like reading of the mind.

The initiation of the understanding between Anne and Wentworth is enhanced in the scene of Louisa's fall from the cob. While Captain Wentworth and the rest of the group stare in horror, Anne is the only one who has her senses and knows what to do. In the end, Captain Wentworth looks to her for instructions and help: "Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look to her for directions" (92-93). This particular incident leads Wentworth to look at Anne in a new perspective. He also learns that stubbornness and the resolute mind are not always a virtue after all. This scene leads Captain Wentworth to understand and forgive Anne for her past persuaded decision to break their engagement. Without this scene, it would be hard for Captain Wentworth to realise his love for Anne and break his courtship with Louisa Musgrove.

The couple's next intimate moment comes in Bath while waiting to listen to some music. Their conversation takes place in a public entertainment hall in front of the whole gathering of Anne's connection in Bath. It is in this very public scene that the couple has their first intimate exchange of conversation since their broken engagement. They recount the unfortunate incident in Lyme which leads to the discussion of the engagement between Louisa Musgrove and Captain Harville. In

talking about Captain Harville's deceased fiancée, Captain Wentworth lets out a degree of his emotion that is susceptible to the readers and Anne: "Fanny Harville was a very superior creature; and his attachment to her was indeed attachment. A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman! – He ought not – He does not" (148). It is clear, whether he realises or not, that Captain Wentworth is actually depicting his unwavering love for Anne. Such an intimate declaration in a public place is very rare for Austen.

In the next crucial scene, the scene of the debate between Anne and Captain Harville that leads to Captain Wentworth's declaration of his love in a letter, is set in the inn where the Musgroves stay in Bath. Even though it is arguably a domestic setting, it is significant that Anne's speech about the constancy of women and Wentworth's declaration are all done in the presence of others. Despite being in a private setting, their conversation is not secluded. They are able to understand each other's feelings because Wentworth eavesdrops on Anne's conversation. Anne, on the other hand, while looking over Wentworth's letter, is not alone but in a room with two others, reading a most intimate declaration of love. Scenes of intimacy between Anne and Wentworth take place in social gatherings.

When their love for each other is known by both, their first establishment of domestic life is done on a street leading to a gravel walk:

There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure everything, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement... And there, as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, seeing neither sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, nor nursery-maids and children, they could indulge in those retrospections and acknowledgements, and especially in those explanations of what had directly preceded the present moment. (194)

Their marriage is made possible amidst the busy public street. As Sodeman remarks, their love is described in the language of commerce making their "exchange" of

private feeling as a “contract of public import” (797). The start of Anne’s life as a sailor’s wife takes place in a space where both the labouring and the leisured classes intermingle. It is not only their relationship that is reestablished, but it is also a celebration “of collective heterogeneity” (Sodeman 798). Their walk leads them to remember and discuss the past. It is the modernity of the present that allows them to be pleasantly reconciled with their past suffering (Sodeman 797-798). This scene illustrates how the public and the private, the past and the present are united. The changing norms that restrict women in the domestic sphere are transcended in this particular scene making it one of Austen’s boldest statements detailing her representation of ideal relationship and domesticity. Domesticity in *Persuasion* is shifting, fluid and open, making it different from the otherwise rigid norms concerning the private sphere.

Apart from the courtship scene being continually set in the social space, Anne is by far the most travelled heroine in all of Austen’s novels. In the previous novels, the heroines travel only to one or two places. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennett travels to visit her friend Charlotte Lucas at Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s estate and then to Pemberley. In *Emma*, the heroine only takes a short picnic trip to Boxhill. Throughout the novel, Anne has no particular attachment to any domestic estate. Although Kellynch Hall has always been her home, she is alienated from her family and feels no domestic happiness within the estate. Throughout the novel, Anne is constantly uprooted from each of the domestic estates. During the course of the novel, Anne travels from Kellynch Hall to Uppercross, Lyme, Kellynch Lodge and Bath. At the close of the novel, she has no prospective home. As mentioned, Austen’s definition of domesticity is not in the literal sense. The physical family in *Persuasion* is presented as meaningless and estranged. The ideal domestic realm is within the mind of the person, based on understanding and communication. One can be in the physical house surrounded by family members but feel alienated and foreign. On the other hand, one can be in the public sphere or a busy social gathering and feel a sense of content domesticity.

Several of Austen’s contemporaries are strong advocates for the idealism of femininity – the belief that women should be content in their domestic space and should not want to venture outside the family domain. Hannah More (1745-1833) is

one of the strongest advocates of female propriety and modesty. Hannah More was famous for her self-improvement books, which informed middle-class propriety and formulated male and female behavior. She argued that women should enjoy their “separate sphere” rather than struggle against it (Davidoff and Hall 155). In *Strictures on the Modern System of Education: With A View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune* (1809), More condemned women who travelled outside their home for pleasure:

From the mention of watering places, may the author be allowed to suggest a few remarks on the evils which have arisen from the general conspiracy of the gay to usurp the regions of the sick; and from their converting the health-restoring fountains, meant as a refuge for disease, into the resorts of vanity for those who have no disease but idleness? This inability of staying at home, as it is one of the most infallible, so it is one of the most dangerous symptoms of the reigning mania. (qtd. in Sodeman 787)

Felicia Hemans is another female writer who was known and admired for her advocacy of domesticity. She is also known as “the poetess of domesticity” (Davidoff and Hall 158). In a poem written in 1835, Hemans criticised Madame de Staël’s *Corinne* (1807), a tale about female creative potential focusing on a woman of genius who is famous for her intellect and artistic quality in Italy. Hemans saw Corinne’s life as flawed because of her neglect of domestic duties:

Radiant daughter of the sun! Now thy living wreath is won
Crown’d of Rome: – O art thou not
Happy in that glorious lot?
Happier, happier far than thou,
With the laurel of thy brow,
She that makes the humblest hearth
Lovely but to one on earth! (qtd. in Davidoff and Hall 161)

The traditional views of More and Hemans are starkly in contrast with Mrs Croft's way of life. Mrs Croft is also another character that transcends the traditionally domestic roles. She is one of the characters that is portrayed in the most memorable light and is exceedingly admired by Anne. She is smart, prudent and is seen as part of the navy. Contrary to the domestic norm, Mrs Croft likes to travel and feels at home in a ship. She travels far and wide for she has "crossed the Atlantic four times, and ha[s] been once to the East Indies, and back again; and only once, besides being in different places about home – Cork, and Lisbon, and Gibraltar" (61). In an argument with her brother, Captain Wentworth, she argues against his claims that women should not be on board a ship. She insists that for her, ships are as comfortable and as indulgent as Kellynch Hall, a landed estate worthy of a Baronet (60). Not only are the middle-class values of Mrs Croft apparent in this statement, she also denies the comfort of the domestic realm. She directly goes against the norms set by those like More and Hemans. When Captain Wentworth denies the propriety of women being on board a ship, she answers: "But I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days" (60). This is a very bold critique of the notion that women should be confined within the private sphere. She argues that women, just as "rational" as men, should be able to venture into the public sphere as they please. In presenting women as rational creatures, Austen argues against her contemporaries' association of women with emotional and spiritual characteristics. Mrs Croft argues that women are as rational as men, maybe even more so if one regards Captain Wentworth's irrational denial of women boarding a ship.

Like Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, Admiral and Mrs Croft find domesticity in the public arena. Mrs Croft admits that the happiest part of her life is spent on board a ship. Apart from the usual first twenty-four hours, she is always in excellent health, partly because she is always with the Admiral. Ironically though, the only time she fancies herself unwell is not at sea but at Deal, a seaport on the coast of Kent. Her separation from Admiral Croft, who is in the North Seas, is partly the cause. It can be inferred that Mrs Croft's domestic happiness is not tied down to a house or landed estate but to her relationship with the Admiral. In short, the domestic

sphere follows the Crofts everywhere because they have a mutual understanding and respect for each other. Even in a space as crowded and as public as a ship, they still have their domestic bliss. Mrs Croft acts as Austen's mouthpiece for social criticism. As Roger Sales has argued, Mrs Croft's "partnership with her husband is not so much an accurate account of life on the quarter-deck during the Napoleonic Wars, as a potentially radical proposal about how it ought to be organized in the future" (qtd.in Rohrbach 742).

The term "radical", though loaded, is not entirely off the mark. Austen was by no means a female advocate to radicalism like Mary Wollstonecraft¹ or Mary Hays². She did not write doctrines on the equality of women or called for equal opportunities of female occupation. However, she was not the idealistic Victorian woman that her brother, Henry Austen, described in the "Biographical Notice" prefacing the posthumous edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. In the "Biographical Notice" Henry Austen described his sister as "faultless...as nearly as human nature can be..." and "thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature" (qtd.in Butler 96-97). According to Marilyn Butler, several key literary figures such as Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth contributed to the reinvention of Austen as the ideal Victorian woman (Butler 98). However, careful inspection of her private letters, specifically those to Cassandra, her sister, shows that she is sarcastic, witty and critical. One of many examples is in a letter to Cassandra talking about Revd Henry Hall of Monk Sherborne, whose wife "was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, owing to a fright. – I suppose she happened unawares to look at her husband" (*Letters*, 17 qtd. in Butler 70). Austen often made jokes, sometimes mean and crude, of her neighbours and friends. Her juvenilia are also filled with strong, shrewd and outspoken females who outwitted their male counterparts. Butler argues that Henry Austen's note about his sister set the tone for her contemporary's view of Austen as a virtuous and conservative Christian woman (Butler 97). This view of her was the pervading norm until her private letters were published in 1932

¹Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was an English writer and advocate for women's rights. One of her most famous works is *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) which argues for the women's right to higher education.

²Mary Hays (1759-1843) was an English novelist and feminist, and a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft.

and when they did, they were met with a lot of disappointment from the general public as to her character (Butler 96). Austen was not strictly conservative as generations of critics have often thought. Her female characters show a wide array of emotions, wit, and often, superiority to male characters. A likely explanation as to why Austen continues to be viewed as “conservative” is her subtlety. Although some of her characters defy social norms, they are usually portrayed in a comic and light-hearted way rather than outwardly opposing social norms.

Mrs Croft is one of those characters who oppose social norms. She is significant for her equality to the male characters and is portrayed as a smart, open and quick lady. These characteristics would probably have been condemned by lay writers of domesticity, such as Hannah More, but for Austen, they are clearly positive qualities. Mrs Croft is content with being a sailor’s wife and constantly moving. She is able to find domestic bliss within the busy, public sphere. One can imagine that she probably takes charge of her relationship with the Admiral. She is learned in finance and law – subjects that are attributed only to the male understanding. Mrs Croft in the novel is first described by Mr Shepherd. More than just being present during the time the matters about the lease of Kellynch Hall are discussed, she “asked more questions about the house, and terms, and taxes, than the admiral himself, and seemed more conversant with business” (24). While Austen’s contemporaries tended to be wary of such a knowledgeable woman in economic affairs, Austen’s admiration is clear in Mr Shepherd’s remark: “And a very well-spoken, genteel, shrewd lady, she seemed to be...” (24) Mrs Croft’s ability in economic affairs and knowledge about contract agreements contribute to her characteristics as an equal of Admiral Croft. It was the norm at the time to believe women to be incapable of rational knowledge such as this; however, the description of Mrs Croft variably leads the readers to imagine her as the decision maker of the family. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Crofts’ style of driving. Once, when the Admiral is holding the reins and they almost run into a post, Mrs Croft takes control by “coolly giving the reins a better direction herself”:

[T]hey happily passed the danger; and by once afterwards judiciously putting out her hand, they neither fell into a rut, nor ran foul of a dung-cart; and Anne, with some amusement at their style of driving,

which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs, found herself safely deposited by them at the cottage.
(78)

It seems, in their relationship, that Mrs Croft takes control whenever she finds that things get out of hand. Admiral Croft is by no means displeased at her interruption because they have an understanding and an ease that make their relationship happy. The Crofts are the only couple in all of Austen's novels to have a happy long-term marriage. Other older couples such as the Bertrams of *Mansfield Park*, the Allens of *Northanger Abbey*, and the Bennets of *Pride and Prejudice* are couples that merely tolerate, if at all, each other's presence and no longer remember their youthful happiness. Even in Austen's personal life she seems to have an aversion to marriage and childbearing. She often makes fun of them in her letters. For instance, she says about Mrs Tilson, one of her acquaintances: "Poor Woman! how can she be honestly breeding again?" (qtd. in Butler, 48) Therefore, in order for a marriage to work, the couple needs the kind of understanding that the Crofts have.

It is interesting to note that there are strong women in Austen's life. In her childhood, Austen was close to her older cousin, Comtesse Eliza de Feuillide who was familiar with the court of the Versailles. Eliza loved acting and theatrics, of which she brought the taste with her to Compton, Austen's childhood home. Plays with "vigorous and intelligent" female roles were acted out and scenes of flirtations were witnessed (Butler 14). Moreover, like Mrs Croft, Eliza was a woman of tireless mobility, living in London, Compton and Paris. Another key person, and one remarkably like Mrs Croft, is Frank Austen's wife, Mary Gibson. Like Mrs Croft, she was a sailor's wife and constantly followed Frank Austen to sea. They were a happy couple, moving from place to place, undeniably reminiscences of the Crofts (Butler 72).

In contrast to Mrs Croft, Lady Elliot is described as the perfect embodiment of a domestic wife. She is portrayed as a moral influence to Sir Walter Elliot and seems to be the only factor that keeps their family from falling apart. Her death leads to Sir Walter Elliot's and Elizabeth's extravagance and spending spree, which consequently leads to the squandering of their property. After her death, they seem to lack

domesticity in the household. Anne Elliot becomes alienated from her family and none of the family members, except Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth, seem to communicate. While she lives, Lady Elliot makes sure that Sir Walter Elliot is well behaved: “She had humoured, or softened, or concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability for seventeen years; and though not the very happiest being in the world herself, had found enough in her duties, her friends, and her children, to attach her to life...” (10). Moreover, she takes care of the household and keeps accounts like a dutiful wife: “there had been method, moderation, and economy, which had just kept him within his income; but with her had died all such right-mindedness, and from that period he had been constantly exceeding it” (14). It is clear that there are no failings on Lady Elliot’s domestic duty. She takes care of the house and the people in it. She keeps Sir Walter Elliot in check. However, she is portrayed as having made one mistake on her part, that is, to marry Sir Walter Elliot: “Lady Elliot had been an excellent woman, sensible and amiable; whose judgment and conduct, if they might be pardoned the youthful infatuation which made her Lady Elliot, had never required indulgence afterwards”(10). Even though she finds out after marriage that Sir Walter Elliot is nothing more than the embodiment of vanity, she still persists in fulfilling her domestic duties. Portrayed as a perfect housewife, Lady Elliot’s good sense and wisdom are wasted in her entrapment within Kellynch Hall. At the start of the novel, none but Anne and Lady Russell seem to remember her. She is not missed or talked off within the family circle. Neither her memory, her household standards, nor her example survives her in the mind of her husband (March 84). Unlike the traditional belief that women should be happy in the private sphere, Lady Elliot is not. As Gilbert and Gubar explain, Lady Elliot lives invisibly and unloved within Sir Walter Elliot’s house (176).

Austen’s criticism of domestic entrapment is not only limited to the character of Lady Elliot. Lady Elliot fulfils her duty admirably but is unloved, unhappy and forgotten. On the other hand, her daughters, Elizabeth and Mary are also portrayed as a result of the failure of the domestic ideal. Even though they superficially adhere to the traditional domestic norms, upon closer inspection, they fail to suffice. Elizabeth’s succession to Lady Elliot’s title as the mistress of Kellynch Hall is, on the surface, in accordance with the social norms on domesticity. She is described as

“presiding” and “directing” the affairs of the home “with a self-possession and decision which could never have given the idea of her being younger than she was” (12). This description, to an outsider, would probably have meant that Elizabeth has fulfilled her domestic duties admirably and in a similar way to those of her mother’s. However, it is clear that her idea of domestic duties is superficial. Apart from “laying down the domestic law at home,” her duties include “leading the way to the chaise and four, and walking immediately after Lady Russell out of all the drawing-rooms and dining-rooms in the country”, “opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighbourhood afforded” and travelling to London with her father (12). To Elizabeth, being the mistress of Kellynch Hall means pride and prestige. She suffers none of the domestic hassles that her mother endures during her lifetime. She neglects her real domestic duties for the superficial elements that come with the title “mistress of Kellynch Hall”.

Mary, Elizabeth’s sister, is another example of failed domestic duties. Mary is the mistress of her household and the mother of two young boys. Austen’s description of her as a housewife and mother might fit the ideal domestic qualities. However, she fails in fulfilling her duties on anything more than a superficial level. When her elder son encounters a nasty fall, she is in hysterics. Her worries and disapprobation are so much so that upon Charles’s return, he has to take care of his wife instead of his son (48). However, the readers later discover that her concern is just an emotional outburst with no deeper meaning. In short, she feels worried because it is a mother’s duty to do so. As soon as she has the chance, she burdens the charge of child caring with Anne and goes off to dinner at the Musgroves’. She excuses herself by saying: “I hope I am as fond of my child as any mother – but I do not know that I am of any more use in the sick-room than Charles, for I cannot be always scolding and teasing a poor child when it is ill” (50). Mary is more concerned about skipping the dinner party at the Musgroves’ than taking care of her sick child. She desperately wants to go to the party and constantly complains about Charles going and leaving her behind. When Anne finally suggests for her to go, her eyes brighten and she eagerly accepts Anne’s offer to take care of her son. She has no scruples in leaving her sister behind to take care of her son while she goes off partying.

Moreover, Mary's child-rearing method has also been commented by several of the characters in the novel, including Mrs Musgrove, Charles Musgrove and even Anne herself. Mrs Musgrove and Charles constantly complain that Mary's way of raising her children is to spoil them. Anne acknowledges this idea when she cannot control her nephews. Mary agrees that her children do not listen to a word she says. Mary's domestic duties are clearly deficient in this aspect. Like Elizabeth, she only embraces the superficial attributes of a wife. She constantly complains about Mrs Musgrove not giving her precedence. In Lyme, she complains about this issue again because Mrs Harville does not know that Mary is actually a baronet's daughter and, therefore, has higher status than Mrs Musgrove.

In short, Austen admires characters that are able to transcend the domestic sphere into the public arena. These are the characters that enjoy domestic bliss even in social gatherings and the public scene. Domesticity is not linked to any landed estate or literal home. A person can be without a home and still fulfil his/her domestic duties. On the other hand, those that are presented in the literal domestic setting are either entrapped and unhappy, like Lady Elliot, or embracing only the superficial charms of domesticity and failing in all the core elements, like Elizabeth and Mary. Therefore, Austen tends to lead her heroine from the domestic setting – a strong critique of the entrapment of women within the public sphere. Women do not need to literally be within the domestic household to fulfil their domestic duties. They can venture out, both literally and metaphorically. Metaphorically, they can be outspoken, have knowledge in what is considered as masculine duties, and fit in well in different discussions and situations.

More than just establishing women who venture out of their designated domestic sphere to create a more equal relationship with their male counterparts, Austen gives strong and decisive attributes, when in courtship and marriage, to her characters. In courtship women are not necessarily passive. The norms dictate that women cannot initiate the courtship. They can only wait for a suitor to come by or have their male kin drop hints to their prospect husband. The only choice they have in courtship is to either accept or deny the proposal that is thrust upon them. In Austen's earlier novels, this social norm is reinforced. None of the heroines in her previous novels initiate the courtship. Even after they realise that they love the hero,

they do not take action to forward the relationship. Two of Austen's most forward heroine, Emma Woodhouse in *Emma* and Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* also adhere to these social codes of conduct. After Emma realises her love for Mr Knightley, she waits for him to make the first move. Elizabeth, likewise, in realising her love for Mr Darcy, does not make contact with him even when she believes they will never be together again. They both submit to their destiny and the readers wait patiently for faith and the author to make them reunite. When it comes to Austen's more passive heroines, it is therefore extremely unlikely that they will initiate courtship. This idea is reinstated in Fanny from *Mansfield Park* when she says: "No, indeed, I cannot act" (149). In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen sarcastically sums up this norm:

[A]s a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her.
(17)

This is different in *Persuasion*. In numerous instances the female characters use smart maneuverings and plans to initiate the first move. This is seen, for instance, in Henrietta Musgrove's and Charles Hayter's attachment. At the beginning of the novel, Henrietta and Charles are already attached to each other, he being her favourite cousin and she being his. However, when Captain Wentworth is thrust into their circle, Henrietta and Louisa favour him more. Henrietta neglects Charles Hayter causing him to withdraw from their household. Upon realising her mistake, she sets upon a long walk with the purpose of going to see him and renewing their mutual affection. Louisa is the principal arranger of this plan and when Henrietta becomes hesitant, Louisa walks a part of the way with her to Charles's house while the others wait for them uphill. Because Henrietta reaches out to Charles, they renew their attachment. Unlike Austen's other female protagonists who would just merely regret their past actions, Henrietta chooses to take action and reinitiate the courtship.

Louisa should also be given a particular notice in this plan to reunite Henrietta and Charles. Although she is acting out of concern for the happiness of her sister, she also has something to gain from Henrietta and Charles getting back together. Both of the sisters are very much in love with Captain Wentworth. This is even before Captain Wentworth courts either of them. The narrator comments that, when two pretty and young women who are extremely agreeable become interested in a man, that man cannot help but be flattered and persuaded by the attention he has received. This differs from the social norm in that Austen is portraying women initiating the courtship:

The Miss Hayters, the females of the family of cousins already mentioned, were apparently admitted to the honour of being in love with him; and as for Henrietta and Louisa, they both seemed so entirely occupied by him, that nothing but the continued appearance of the most perfect good-will between themselves, could have made it credible that they were not decided rivals. If he were a little spoiled by such universal, such eager admiration, who could wonder? (62)

Captain Wentworth is flattered by the evident admiration from the sisters and unknowingly courts them by giving them his full token of attention. Therefore, Louisa is the one to gain from Henrietta's reattachment to Charles Hayter because "everything now marked out Louisa for Captain Wentworth..." (76). Her sisterly plan to help Henrietta win Charles back can also be viewed as a plan to knock out the competition and give her more chance to win Captain Wentworth.

Anne also creates her own opportunity in her relationship with Captain Wentworth. Anne silently chastises Captain Wentworth for his indifference to her and for not coming back to renew their engagement after his fortune is made. She makes it clear that if the tables are reversed, she would have definitely come back as soon as independence is found (51). Later on in the novel, Anne is able to prove that she is indeed capable of initiating the courtship and renewing their engagement. After Anne realises that Wentworth is no longer attached to Louisa Musgrove – "...Captain Wentworth unshackled and free...she had some feelings...they were too much like

joy, senseless joy!”(136) – and as soon as she is certain that he still has feelings for her, she loses no time in getting his attention and trying to communicate her feelings to him. In the scene of the octagon room, despite the ominous presence of her father and sister, Anne deliberately steps forward to speak to Captain Wentworth, who is initially only inclined to pass by. She feels it necessary to talk to him in front of her family in order to boldly state her stance that she no longer cares what they think and can no longer be persuaded. After the conversation ends with the entrance of Lady Dalrymple and her daughter, Anne concludes from the remarkable change in Captain Wentworth that “he much love[s] her” (150). Knowing this, she schemes to talk to him again before the end of the night to give a sign of encouragement. With a “little scheming of her own” (153), Anne is able to manipulate the seating arrangement and finds herself near the end of the bench. With a little more luck, the seat next to her becomes available because her neighbours retire early for the night. Again, when Captain Wentworth approaches her, she is “anxious to be encouraging (154).” She puts herself out of her way to show him that she cares and still very much attaches to him.

Upon realising Captain Wentworth’s misunderstanding of Anne’s feelings towards Mr Elliot, Anne tries her best to convince him otherwise. She chooses her answers in conversation with other characters to directly communicate with Captain Wentworth. When Charles Musgrove’s plan of taking his family to attend a play coincides with a gathering at the Elliot’s, Mr Elliot is brought up in a conversation between Charles and his wife. Charles announces that he does not care about pleasing Mr Elliot and Anne is glad of the “opportunity it gave her of decidedly saying”(181) that she does not care about her family’s engagement and if it is up to her she would rather go to the play with them. Knowing that Captain Wentworth is intently listening to her answer, Anne indirectly tells him that Mr Elliot does not interest her in the least. Even more forward, Anne announces to Captain Wentworth that she is “not yet so much changed” (181). Even though they are in the guise of talking about how Anne disliked playing cards in the past and Captain Wentworth interjects by exclaiming that people change and Anne could have changed her preference for cards, Captain Wentworth immediately realises that the statement is a profession of attachment on Anne’s part.

Stefanie Markovits explains in her essay, “Jane Austen and the Happy Fall” that nowhere is Anne’s manipulation of her own faith clearer than in her “climatic conversation” with Harville on whether men or women love the longest (792). Masking the declaration of her constant love in a conversation with Captain Harville, Anne boldly directs her message to Captain Wentworth whom she knows is listening to their conversation. Her bold banter on male and female constancy does indeed get Captain Wentworth’s attention. Her scheme is rewarded with a letter from Captain Wentworth, given to her hastily on his way out. His letter reveals to the readers that it is because of Anne’s initiation that Captain Wentworth dares to pronounce his love to her:

I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something that overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others. (191)

Anne, on the other hand, has penetrated his feelings. She realises his attachment to her and encourages him by initiating a conversation in front of her family. She realises his jealousy towards Mr Elliot and, thus, declares her constancy. She does not only see through him but she also knows how to work towards her goal while maintaining her modesty.

Domestic Qualities in Men

It is not only women that Austen portrays as distanced from their socially assigned sphere, men are also depicted as extending outside their masculine ideal. While women in *Persuasion*, as have been illustrated, are expanding their perimeter out into the public domain and not as traditionally restricted within their private sphere as social norms designate, men are pulled in closer to the feminine world of domesticity. The feminine qualities that some of the male characters in the novel possess are not presented as flaws or weaknesses. Unlike aristocrats in the eighteenth century who dabble only in entertainment and the jollities of life, and unlike the ideal

gentlemen of the nineteenth century who are mainly associated with the public sphere, a lot of male characters in *Persuasion* are admirable in their domestic qualities. They are able and willing to embrace their femininity, which is portrayed in a positive light. The navy is a very significant and important occupation in *Persuasion*. Although in Austen's previous novels occupations are never given any importance, in *Persuasion* the navy is of great influence and the naval occupation is portrayed in both sympathetic and approving light. More specifically, in *Persuasion*, the navy is portrayed as the embodiment of the gentlemen. In Austen's time, the British navy was the pride of the nation. The naval men were a prestigious new breed that boasted strength, courage and manliness. During the Napoleonic Wars, the British navy saw a huge reform in their naval practice and logistic managements. Instead of the aristocratic-type battle that characterises earlier wars in which fighting to the death was rare, the navy became more professionalised and efficient (Cohen 350). In consequence, many British naval historians such as Roger Morriss, Peter Padfield, and Dudley Pope maintain that the Napoleonic Wars were won at sea before they were won on land (Cohen 350). It is therefore not hard to imagine the navy as the embodiment of masculinity, strength and steadfastness. However, in *Persuasion*, Austen does not choose to emphasise these qualities in naval men. She chooses instead to associate them with domesticity and femininity. Their biggest virtue, she claims, is their close association with the private sphere.

In associating a profession that is otherwise considered as manly and strong with the feminine sphere of domesticity, Austen pulls the men in her novel much closer to the home front. It is likely that Austen chooses the navy because of its paradoxical qualities. At a glance, the navy may seem like a profession that is as far removed from the domestic sphere as possible. It deals with mainly a group of strong and able young men disconnected from the safety of the home. The setting of their profession is cramped spaces in ships where there are only men and none, or a few women. Their workplace is the sea. However, upon closer inspection, despite their external qualities, Austen links sailors with domestic qualities. As Cohen argues in her study "Persuading the Navy Home: Austen and Married Women's Professional Property," the naval reform during the Napoleonic Wars deals with domestic concerns (350). One of the most important men behind the naval reform is Sir John Jervis, or

later known as Lord Saint Vincent (Cohen 351). Among his many practical introductions, he emphasised bookkeeping, economy and recycling. He attended to the navy's quotidian life. He made changes to the soldier's clothing materials, improved ship's ventilation, stressed the importance of cleanliness, and scheduled regular fumigation. He also set details on the management of vessels and the specialisation of duties. All in all, what Sir John Jervis did was similar to those of a domestic housewife overseeing her family. The most significant changes he made were not the tactics or battle related details but were small daily routines. However, according to historians like C. Northcote Parkinson, those domestic modifications were what changed the nature of the English navy into an institution. Jervis's focus on the health and well-being of his sailors also ensured that when battle time came, all the sailors were in good health and ready to fight. As Cohen puts it, "there is a touch of the heroine about Jervis" (352).

It is probably no coincidence then that Austen, having brothers in the navy, chooses to portray the navy as brimming with domestic virtues. She portrays only their ingenious dealings with domestic details, not the professional side of the navy and their dealings with battles and enemies. Because her sailors embrace their feminine qualities, they become socially acceptable and are considered gentlemen. Captain Wentworth, for example, is portrayed very similarly to Cohen's description of Sir John Jervis. Captain Wentworth, the hero of the novel, is gallant and every bit a gentleman. Less obvious, but nevertheless as much emphasised, is his participation in domestic concerns. The first time the readers get a glimpse into Captain Wentworth's life as the captain of a ship is from a letter written to Mrs Musgrove by her son, Dick Musgrove. The readers learn that Wentworth is a fastidious ship captain. However, it is not his talents as a sailor or his martial tactics that are pinpointed. It is his managerial position. Under his influence, Dick writes the only two letters to his parents that are not applications for money. Wentworth makes sure that Dick's conduct is acceptable and oversees his education. According to Dick, he is "...two particular [sic] about the school-master" (47). Wentworth, as the captain of the ship, acts as a surrogate care-provider for those under his care. He is especially strict about their education, which they would receive if they were at home. Therefore, in making those under his care write letters to their parents and making

them study, Wentworth reinforces the familial affection and ideal. His role as captain is also a role of a surrogate parent.

Later on, in Wentworth's conversation with the Musgrove sisters, his domestic duties are emphasised over the actual workings of his profession. In talking about the navy, their main concerns are not the battle adventures that Wentworth has encountered, but the mundane details of domesticity:

[M]anner of living on board, daily regulations, food, hours, &c; [sic] and their surprise at his accounts, at learning the degree of accommodation and arrangement which was practicable, drew from him pleasant ridicule, which reminded Anne of the early days when she too had been ignorant, and she too had been accused of supposing sailors to be living on board without any thing to eat, or any cook to dress it if there were, or any servant to wait, or any knife and fork to use. (55-56)

Rather than recounting the heroic tales of triumph or defeat, of which he surely has many because he comes back from the war a rich man, the group discusses quotidian life. As Cohen points out, Wentworth's description of a ship is not different from a home. In a ship, "not only are there cooks, servants, silverware present, but Wentworth seems to take a great deal of pride in their assembly" (362).

Coincidentally, the only adventure anecdote that Wentworth recounts has hardly any action to it. The tale that he tells his listeners is about a great storm at sea – one that he luckily avoided – and not a tale of enemy encounters or battle. Therefore, no actual war stories are recounted in their conversation. Instead, the climax of Wentworth's story is when everyone in the room shudders at the thought of seeing his burial in a newspaper tabloid. Here, Austen distances the navy from the actual martial actions and draws it closer to the domestic circle. Wentworth's death, as Cohen has pointed out, is imagined as how it would be represented to the readers at home and not of the actual events and actions that lead to his imagined death (362).

Although the navy as a profession is prestigious and heroic, the sailors in the novels are almost idle in that they have nothing to do. They have a profession, but

they are not needed to work as the war is over. The qualities of the naval men in *Persuasion* are therefore linked to domestic issues. The experience that the characters have gained from their lives at sea allows them to become better house-keepers and landowners. Their naval practice allows them to have domestic bliss. Captain Harville, for example, is a lame naval officer who stays only at home enjoying the domestic sphere. The way Harville organises his home is seen to be from the influence of his habits at sea and his ingenuity in contriving the best use of small and cramped spaces:

Captain Harville was no reader; but he had contrived excellent accommodations, and fashioned very pretty shelves, for a tolerable collection of well-bound volumes, the property of Captain Benwick. His lameness prevented him from taking much exercise; but a mind of usefulness and ingenuity seemed to furnish him with constant employment within. (83)

Even without the war, sailors still make excellent additions to the household. They are no strangers to the domestic duties and they are good with their hands. Harville's domestic activities and apparently his leisure can be considered very feminine:

He drew, he varnished, he carpentered, he glued; he made toys for children, he fashioned new netting-needles and pins with improvements; and if every thing else was done, sat down to his large fishing-net at one corner of the room. (83)

All the activities described are done within the boundaries of the home. Moreover, many of them are also domestic activities typically done by women. Sewing is essentially a female chore. Here, not only does Harville sew and do domestic works but he apparently enjoys and feels relaxed by his activities.

Here, the barriers between male and female labour and the distinction of gender roles in marriage are blurred. While Mrs Croft "drives the gig" in her

marriage, Captain Harville shares his domestic duties with Mrs Harville. While Mrs Croft feels comfortable in overseeing her family's legal and financial dealings, Admiral Croft is no less uncomfortable about dabbling in domestic issues. Like Captain Harville, Admiral Croft is also influenced by his naval career in his domestic dealings. He too makes use of small spaces even when living in a large estate such as Kellynch Hall. His small shaving set-up tucked away within the grand master bedroom is described positively. Having once been captain of various ships, he is no stranger to the domestic dealings on board that invariably come with the job description. Therefore, the Admiral, like Captain Harville, feels comfortable in overseeing and intervening in household matters. This can be seen in the scene when he moves the umbrellas from the butler's room to a more sensible place by the entryway. He repairs the laundry door himself and gets his wife to help him move the mirror out of the master bedroom. The fact that both the Admiral and Mrs Croft feel comfortable in the mild interchange of the domestic and public duties makes Anne confess that she feels that the house is in "better hands" and that they are more deserving of the estate than her own family, the actual owners (102).

On the contrary, the men in the novel that are flawed or criticised are those with a lack of domesticity. While characters like Admiral Croft, Captain Wentworth and Captain Harville are commendable and honourable precisely because of their close ties with domesticity, those that lack such qualities are either portrayed as useless or evil. The novel opens with the financial crisis of the Elliots'. It is clear that their economic predicament is due to the loss of "method, moderation, and economy," (14) the qualities which are imposed strictly by the late Lady Elliot. It is Sir Walter Elliot's inability to manage his household that plunges the family into jeopardy. In other words, failed patriarchy is a result of the characters' failure to embrace feminine duties. This is why at the beginning of the novel, the stately estate of Kellynch Hall is seen as no longer formidable; instead, it represents the failure of patriarchal figures to partake domestic duties.

Not being able to fix the problem he has caused, Sir Walter Elliot calls upon his closest allies, Mr Shepherd, his lawyer, and Lady Russell. Mr Shepherd, although apt in the art of persuasion, is like Sir Walter Elliot in his lack of the feminine domestic instinct. He "begged leave to recommend an implicit deference to the

excellent judgment of Lady Russell” (15), the only matriarchal figure within Kellynch. The lack of “feminine” qualities in him means that he has to depend on a surrogate wife and mother figure. Lady Russell is Lady Elliot’s replacement to Kellynch Hall. Ever since Lady Elliot’s death, Lady Russell mothers the three Elliot children and now, she is called in to help them resolve their financial issue. She “drew up plans of economy, she made exact calculations” and she marked out “the scheme of retrenchment” (16).

Moreover, it is Sir Walter Elliot’s misconception of domestic duties that causes the economic downfall of the Elliots and a source of ridicule throughout the novel. He is portrayed as absurdly adhering to the importance of rank and status. To Sir Walter Elliot, domesticity and the duties in the private sphere means to maintain a good, respectable and lavishing lifestyle. For him, falling into a huge amount of debt is not a loss of dignity if he is still able to keep up a good front for others to see. Not only does he misunderstand outward appearance as domestic and paternal duties, his idea of kinship is also twisted. To him, domestic relationships within the family circle have nothing to do with emotional ties. He neglects his daughter, Anne, because she is not as pretty as Elizabeth. He does not think much of his younger daughter, Mary, either. To him, keeping family ties is instead connected with those family members that he can socially gain from. The Dalrymples, not even the least interesting or animating, are his best familial ties. This is because they have the highest rank in the novel. Also, he highly values his connection with his heir, the future Sir William Elliot, neglecting to see through his false exterior. For him, Mr Elliot is a highly valuable companion because of his charm, his good looks, and his being well-known and admired in Bath. Sir Walter Elliot’s failure in parenthood and as head of the household is a result of his inability to fully comprehend the extent of domestic duties. Like his eldest daughter, he lacks the feminine finesse and takes his duty for only the fame and status they give him. He only accepts the superficial side of the domestic duties and lacks any core responsibilities.

Likewise, Mr Elliot’s failings are in what is commonly thought, in Austen’s time, to be feminine qualities. The female characteristic for building and maintaining a close network of kinship, friendship and family ties built a network of informal influence and power (Davidoff and Hall 279). Part of the domestic duties of a woman

was to keep close contacts with family and friends. This is illustrated in the novel by the death of Lady Elliot, Anne's mother, which cuts off all ties with the Dalrymples. It is Mr Elliot's disregard for his family and friends that bothers Anne the most. Anne distrusts her cousin because of his lack of attachment to his late wife: "this is a man whose wife has been dead for only seven months, yet who is steadily courting another woman" (130). Anne observes, most likely correctly, that Mr Elliot, similar to her father, will not sufficiently value his wife.

Near the close of the novel, Anne's new knowledge of Mr Elliot given by Mrs Smith repels her. Mrs Smith tells Anne that Mr Elliot is married to his deceased wife because of her money, that he cheats Mrs Smith out her inheritance, and that he often belittles Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth. His sincere courtship for her does not in the least make up for his past disrespect of her father and her sister. Likewise, she is very disgusted by his unwillingness to act as the executor of Mrs Smith's will. The neglect of friendship ties thrusts his characters so low in Anne's esteem that she overlooks Mrs Smith's fault in initially hiding the truth of Mr Elliot's character from her. Therefore, Mr Elliot's biggest flaws are not his deceit or lies but his neglect of domestic duties and lack of respect for kinship.

It is the norm for Austen's contemporaries to believe that men are stronger both physically and mentally than women (Davidoff and Hall 323), this idea is explicitly summed up by Captain Harville:

I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental;
and that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of
bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather. (187)

Captain Harville argues that because men are physically stronger than women, they are emotionally stronger as well. However, the men in the novel are shown to be fickle and inconstant. Even the gallant Captain Wentworth deviates his attachment from Anne to the Musgrove sisters. His attitude towards Henrietta and Louisa brings confusion to onlookers about the objective of his courtship. Only when he is disillusioned by Louisa's fall and realises Anne's constancy does he declare his attachment to Anne.

Other male characters also betray the sign of inconstancy. The very character that evokes Captain Harville to utter his claim for male constancy is Captain Benwick. However, in less than a year of his fiancée's death, Captain Benwick falls in love with Louisa Musgrove after nursing her back to health. Likewise, Mr Elliot courts Anne and proposes to her in less than a year after his wife's death. However, it is most likely not Austen's intention to condemn the fickleness of her male characters because, with the exception of Mr Elliot, they are portrayed in a very understanding light. Captain Wentworth, it seems, has always loved Anne but his pride convinces himself otherwise. On the other hand, Captain Benwick is consoled by the presence of Louisa. They live in close quarters while both of them are most vulnerable. Anne deems it only natural that an attachment between them will incur. As Kelly A. Marsh explains in "The Mother's Unnarratable Pleasure and the Submerged Plot," to Captain Benwick, Louisa is a mirror image of the late Fanny Harville (91). Captain Benwick probably sees the sick Louisa as a version of his beloved Fanny coming back to life. The miraculous recovery of one lady allows him to let go the death of another.

It can also be argued that both Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove show signs of inconstancy, the former having already been encouraged the courtship from a cousin but is led astray by the appearance of another man while the latter seems to prefer the companionship of Captain Wentworth but decides to marry Captain Harville. It is likely, though, that Austen's intention is not to give superior qualities to one sex while attributing faults to the other. Instead, Austen argues against her contemporaries' belief that men are mentally and physically superior to women. She declares that both sex have virtues and faults in themselves and therefore should be judged from an equal footing. It should also be noted, that Anne Elliot, the novel's heroine and also the most moral character, never waivers her love for Captain Wentworth despite the two proposals from seemingly very eligible men.

In *Persuasion*, Austen's view of courtship, marriage and the relationship between men and women are portrayed. At first glance, Austen's novel may seem to be a traditional courtship novel that endorses the social division of gender roles, the importance of a proper marriage, and social class. However, *Persuasion* does not only reflect the changing norms and values of the early nineteenth century, but it also presents Austen's own view on domesticity and female roles. The traditionally

assigned roles of the domestic female and public male are disrupted in the novel. Both sexes in the novel are portrayed as venturing outside their presumed social roles. The women are not restricted within the domestic sphere as wife, mother or daughter. On the other hand, the men are not only portrayed outside the domestic sphere and in the public arena. However, in the cases when the characters act according to their socially assigned roles, they have obvious flaws that make them unappealing, annoying or even evil. As Sodeman suggests, it is not often recognised that “domestic fiction interrogates, disrupts, and resists conservative injunctions placing women at the center of the modern household” (788). When one side ventures out into the public sphere while the other ventures closer to the private, an equal footing between the two is established, especially in the form of courtship and marriage. The balance between the public and private spheres aids the courtship and marriage of the characters because it enhances their full understanding and acceptance of one another. A good relationship, Austen seems to say, is a mature relationship in which the lovers simultaneously embrace both their feminine and masculine properties.

CHAPTER III

CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE* – A TALE OF POWER STRUGGLE, REVERSAL OF GENDER ROLES, AND SEARCH FOR BALANCE BETWEEN EXTREMES

By the time *Jane Eyre* was written, Jane Austen was already considered old-fashioned, rigid and too didactic for Charlotte Brontë and her contemporaries. Charlotte Brontë once rejected a suggestion for her to read Jane Austen's novels because she found her too much like a "carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers" (qtd. in Showalter 84). By the mid-nineteenth century, Austen had already become a synonym for the restrictive feminine ideal with a rational and carefully planned literary style as opposed to the passionate and spontaneous style of the Brontës. During the 1840s, another female literary figure emerged and became instantly more inspiring, daring and rebellious than Austen. This was the French writer, George Sand (Amandine Aurore Dupin). Her notorious lifestyle, scandalous smoking habit and famous love affairs all culminated into making her an enigmatic and rebellious real-life heroine. Female literary figures at this period were roughly divided into two schools: the Austen school (which championed calculated and rational literature) and the Sand school (which produced passionate, romantic and spontaneous literature). Charlotte Brontë rejected Austen when she said that her intention was to write about "what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life," (qtd. in Showalter 85) indicating her place in the Sand school. However, whether calculated or passionate, rational or impulsive, both Austen's and Brontë's novels are infused with different forms of female empowerment through courtship and marriage. Strikingly different, the two novelists explore the meanings of femininity and domesticity through their own forms of writing.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the ideas of the "separate spheres" and women's role as the "angel in the house" were an established norm rather than a novelty and it was reinforced with stricter severity than ever. While the female and

male duties were only starting to have a clear separation, as seen in *Persuasion*, Austen's reaction towards this changing norm was a suggestion for a better alternative of the integration between male and female roles. Austen suggests that harmony in society could be achieved if men and women transcend their designated sexual roles and move away from their "separate spheres". However, when sexual roles and the idea of the "separate spheres" became a firm fixture in society – when the working place and the domestic home had been successfully separated (Davidoff and Hall 398) – a stronger struggle against the social norms can be seen. In *Jane Eyre*, the heroine struggles to free herself from the constant restriction that different parts of society impose upon her. From the bourgeois grasp of the Reeds family, the sadistic measures of Mr Brocklehurst, the passionate restraint of Rochester, and the religious fervor of St John, Jane rejects all the different kinds of imposition that try to dominate the female race. Brontë uses courtship as a tool for Jane to empower herself by finding her worth, her independence and balance between passionate love and subdued rationality. Because of the different forms of courtship that she faces and consequently runs from, Jane is able to identify what she truly wants without giving in to the patriarchal forces that surround her. At the end of the novel, most of Rochester's superiority is stripped from him. Unlike *Persuasion*, which ends with Captain Wentworth and Anne finding a common ground and becoming each other's equal, *Jane Eyre* shows a stronger resistance to the stricter social norms by endowing the heroine with more power and, in some aspects, making her the hero's superior.

Social and Gender Restrictions in Mid-Nineteenth Century England

Women were considerably more restricted in the mid-nineteenth century than in earlier decades of the century. Numerous texts and conduct books from that period reflect the norms and ways of thinking. It was expected that women were born to serve their family and they were raised for a life of self-denial and sacrifice. Their sole purpose of living was to please others and be useful to those around them. Sarah Stickney Ellis, one of the most popular writers on the subject of domesticity and female conduct, observed in *The Daughters of England* (1845) that it was taken for granted that her female readers had already been determined that they would not live for themselves so much as for others (qtd. in Dyhouse 174). Later in the period,

Ruskin wrote in his essay *Of Queen's Gardens* (1865) that a woman should be educated “not for self-development, but for self-renunciation” (174). These were the prevalent notions of the period. During this time, domesticity and womanhood were no longer attached to the Christian ideal and Evangelicalism. Rather, the concept had already established itself firmly into people's way of life and women born during this period lived a life of sacrifice, passivity and servitude.

While the Evangelical revival in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries was aimed as a revolt to the idleness of the upperclass, class struggle in the mid-nineteenth century, specifically the 1840s, dealt more with the effects of industrialism and capitalism. During this time, it was not the upper class that threatened the middle class' lifestyle and ideals, it was what the middle class saw as the androgyny of the lower class that threatened to permeate into their circle and destroy their social and gender structure. The effects of industrialism and capitalism contributed to the blurring of gender realms in lower-class labourers. In Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's 1843 book, *The Perils of the Nation: An Appeal to the Legislature, the Clergy, and the Higher and Middle Classes*, the poor working condition in mining factories was emphasised. Tonna is preoccupied most with the lack of distinction of gender identities in the working class. She wrote that “men, women, and children worked in mixed company in the mines, wearing little clothing because of the heat, and created an androgynous workplace where the notion of separate spheres and often gender differences themselves did not exist” (qtd. in Godfrey 855). Tonna stated further that “the dress of these young labourers of both genders is the same: from seven or eight years of age to twenty and upwards they may be seen, naked to the waist, and having a loose pair of ragged trowsers [sic], frequently worn to tatters by the constant friction of the chain” (qtd. in Godfrey 855). She described these conditions of the workers as a “depraved” situation. It is clear from Tonna's work that the English middle class was clearly offended by these gender ambiguities found in the working condition of the Victorian miners. What further highlights the middle class' fear and disgust is that Tonna warned the reader later on in her study that these “gross depravities of the mine” could cause “contamination” (qtd. in Godfrey 855) to all sides, including the middle class and the higher classes.

Similarly, Friedrich Engels made observations about gender ambiguities in the working class. In his *Condition of the Working-Class in England: From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources* (1845), he presented the working atmosphere in the factory: “this condition, which unsexes the man and takes from the woman all womanliness without being able to bestow the man true womanliness, or the woman true manliness – this condition degrades, in the most shameful way, both sexes, and through them, Humanity” (qtd. in Godfrey 855). Again, Engels showed a similar notion to those of Tonna’s since Tonna described the mining worker’s situation as “depraved” and Engels described them as “degrading”. More importantly, these two writers came to the same conclusion; while at that time, the “depraved” and “degrading” conditions were specifically contained in the labourers of the lower class, they would eventually spread and infect other classes, especially the middle class. The examples of writings from these two Victorians illustrate increasing worries that the middle class had against issues of gender identities. Thus, the more lax the gender identity in the lower class became, the more rigid the social conduct and the social norm the middle class upheld. To respond to the ambiguity regarding gender identities, the feminine and masculine constructions that were practiced by the middle-class Victorians were pushed to the extreme – an idea that is portrayed in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

Jane’s Childhood at Gateshead and Lowood

Like *Persuasion*, *Jane Eyre* reflects changes in gender norms of the time. Jane Eyre, hardly a member of the middle class due to her status as an orphan, can be identified as closer to the working class by her genderless state. At Lowood, Jane’s and the other girls’ existence is exactly like Tonna’s mineworkers – genderless. Brocklehurst, the man in charge of the school, sees to it that the girls’ feminine traits are subdued into a practical and economical androgynous appearance. All the girls are dressed alike in “brown stuff frocks, of quaint fashion and long Holland pinafores” (50). Their hairs are all “plain locks combed from their faces, not a curl visible” (51). Jane describes the uniform on the girls as ill-fitting, giving “an air of oddity even to the prettiest” (51). Brocklehurst orders that all the girls’ hair is cut short, especially for those with naturally curly hair to avoid excess of appearance.

The girls are uniformed and identical. Their personalities are not allowed to shine through their uniform and their uniqueness cannot be distinguished. Brocklehurst says of one girl's naturally curly hair: "Naturally! Yes but we are not to conform to nature: I wish these girls to be the children of Grace" (75). He does not allow finery or adornments in the girls. However, his children and wife can be seen gracing the halls of Lowood covered in velvet, silk, ostrich plumes, furs and elaborately curled hair. Unlike the orphans of Lowood who are considered a burden to society, the middle class is allowed to enhance and flutter their femininity. They can afford to indulge and highlight their sexuality. Brocklehurst's idea corresponds, to a certain degree, with Tonna's and Engels' idea of the lack of gender distinction in the lower class of Victorian England. Even though technically the girls are not part of the lower class, they are considered on the edge of society; they are a burden on the community and survive on people's goodwill. Although Brocklehurst keeps the girls' appearances simple, he makes sure their androgynous state does not permeate the middle class by compensating with harsher restrictions that he imposes upon them. Their appearances may be kept to a minimum according to their social status, but they are educated according to the norms of the middle class; they are taught subjects such as drawing and French.

Even after arriving at Thornfield, Jane's appearance is kept to a minimum. The only piece of finery that she has in possession is a small brooch given to her by Miss Temple. It is noticeable that her dresses are always plain and mostly black. Her plain appearance is starkly contrasted with the visitors of Thornfield who are firmly established in the middle-class gentry. They are portrayed as brighter and more adorned with finery. Even after her engagement with Mr Rochester, she still feels uncomfortable in new and expensive clothes. She feels herself a dependent of Mr Rochester and that he continues to be her master (she often uses the term in reference to him). Despite their proposed marriage, she takes on the role of a governess and does not feel that it is proper to dress like a member of the middle class and proudly show off her femininity.

Jane's earlier life documents the social process of feminisation. It traces how society slowly manipulates and changes the vivacious and wistful little Jane into a social product of womanhood and female restraint. Jane starts out as a little girl who

is filled with passion. She often has strong feelings and knows what she wants. Because of her qualities, she is bullied by her cousins and is disliked, among other reasons, by her aunt. According to her aunt, Jane has an “incomprehensible disposition,” “sudden starts of temper,” and a “continual, unnatural watching of one’s movements” (277). However, a series of passionate outbreaks from Jane, both in the incident of the Red Room³(17) and when she stands up to Mrs Reed ⁴(41), result in her expulsion from Gateshead into the hands of Brocklehurst. Brocklehurst’s role is to shape and model Jane into a socially acceptable being. Whatever elated feeling Jane has from her last conversation with Mrs Reed (“Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt” (41)) is extinguished by her first encounter with Mr Brocklehurst at Lowood. During her first day at Lowood, the start of a period of stunned passivity and tolerance, she is singled out by Brocklehurst and called a liar in front of her classmates and her teacher. She is forced to stand on a chair while being slandered. Mr Brocklehurst warns the students about Jane’s evilness:

My dear children...this is a sad, melancholy occasion; for it becomes my duty to warn you, that this girl, who might be one of God’s own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently and interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. Teachers, you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinize her actions, punish her body to save her soul... (78)

³The famous Red Room incident **happens** because of a fight that Jane **has** with her cousin. It **ends** up with her being locked into her deceased uncle’s bedroom (the Red Room). Within the Red Room, Jane is haunted by the thought of her dead uncle’s ghost lurking the chambers. Jane screams and asks for help from her aunt. The scene ends with her fainting out of exhaustion and fear. The Red Room is a scene that will haunt her throughout her life.

⁴Jane defends herself by talking back to Mrs Reed; Jane blames Mrs Reed for her harsh treatment. She feels elated for speaking her mind to her aunt.

From various forms of abuse, Jane's passions are stunned into passive acceptance of her fate. In short, she has become the ideal Victorian woman – passive, subdued and submissive.

Even though in the earlier part of her stay at Lowood she still shows signs of her childhood passion and rebelliousness, through processes of humiliation and idealisation (she idealises Helen Burn's passivity and Ms Temple's femininity), they are eliminated. This is a period in Jane's life that reflects society's rigid control of women. Lowood, as a representative of society, enforces the patriarchal ideal of the submissive and abiding female. At Lowood, one of the two of Jane's alter egos is found. Helen Burns is the ideal Victorian woman. She is submissive, subdued and passive. Unlike Jane, she does not question social restrictions that are forced upon her. She dutifully submits to her fate and accepts hardship. She tries pitifully to become what is expected of her. No matter how much she is blamed and scolded, she submissively accepts the accusations and thrives to become better, all the while waiting for her ultimate happiness with God. Even when Helen Burns answers all the difficult questions correctly, she is still flogged for her carelessness (65). She is often criticised for her lack of attention and tidiness, no matter how hard she tries. On the other hand, she is never praised or encouraged for her industry and diligence. The readers realise the pitiful state that Helen Burns is in. She blindly accepts her fate and believes that she is at fault. Jane idealises Helen Burns greatly and befriends her. For Jane, Helen is the epitome of the ideal submissive female. While Jane is constantly denounced for her rash behaviour, Helen is passive. Jane, who is constantly scolded, envies this quality in Helen. Jane initially sees that Helen Burns is wronged and that her acceptance of her state is pitiful. She too gradually accepts her fate and thrives to better herself according to social expectation of a "lady". However, as Jane will later learn when she leaves Lowood, passivity and submissiveness, while they help gain social acceptance, do not bring happiness.

The death of Helen Burns signals a turning point in Jane's life. She has fully embraced the social norms of feminine passivity and tolerance. After Helen Burns's death, Jane becomes what Helen Burns was – a product of social shaping, a passive and accomplished young woman ready to serve patriarchal society (Leggatt 170). Helen Burns's death signals the expulsion of Mr Brocklehurst from Lowood, but

more importantly, it signals the start of the next eight years in which Jane spends her life in accordance with society's expectation of a passive, feminine and domestic woman. In short, Jane has been molded into Helen Burns. When Bessie comes to visit Jane at Lowood, she finds her "quite a lady" (111) since Jane has been educated according to social standards of an accomplished woman. To be more specific, her education consists of French, piano, drawing and sewing – all of which are the required knowledge for an eligible lady of the middle class and none of which makes her economically capable for anything other than being a governess.

Miss Temple's leaving the school has another profound effect on Jane for Jane finally awakens from her stunned state of passivity and tolerance. Jane calls herself an "inmate" of Lowood (101) and that while Miss Temple was with her, she "had given in allegiance to duty and order; [she] was quiet; [she] believed [she] was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to [her] own, [she] appeared a disciplined and subdued character" (101). With Miss Temple leaving the school, Jane's acceptance of her position is gone. Miss Temple "had taken with her the serene atmosphere that [she] had been breathing in her vicinity" (102). Jane realises that what she needs is "liberty" and freedom. When she moves from Lowood to Thornfield, Jane encounters another extreme, one of passion and emotion – a courtship that will fully awaken her to her real desires and finally lead to self-respect and independence. Her courtship with Rochester shows that the feminine and domesticated life that society expects from a woman cannot fully fulfill one's desire for independence, love and self-respect. From this part of the novel onwards, Brontë uses extremes of courtship as a tool for Jane's awakenings from her subdued acceptance of leading a life that society typically expects of a lady – passivity, submissiveness and domestic happiness.

Jane's Passionate Awakening at Thornfield

At Thornfield, Jane's former childhood passions and individuality are awakened. Her arrival at Thornfield and her first conversations with Mrs Fairfax foreshadow the passion and the tumult of emotions that will permeate Thornfield. Mrs Fairfax tells Jane that Mr Rochester has his "peculiarities" (127) and that his family was once a "violent" (128) one. Jane and Mr Rochester's first encounter also

signals the tone of the rest of the novel – a struggle of power. This includes the struggle between individual characters and also Jane’s struggle to find a balance between the extremities of different ideologies that threaten to engulf her.

Jane’s first encounter with Rochester marks the beginning of her passionate and emotional future with him. In this scene, a struggle for power between the two main characters and a reversal of sexual roles are portrayed. The struggle for power between the two paves the tone of their courtship and the reversal of sexual roles foreshadows and mirrors their married life at the end of the novel. The description of their chance encounter is fairy-tale and dream-like: “On the hill-top...sat a rising moon; pale yet as cloud, but brightening momentarily” and the moon “looked over the Hay, which, half lost in trees, sent up a blue smoke from its few chimneys” (135). The place was all quiet except the “the thin murmurs of life” (135). The scene is very mythical, quiet and illuminated. All of a sudden, the sound of Rochester’s horse bursts into the scene. However, this addition to the scene does not destroy the mythical atmosphere but rather heightens it. Jane is reminded of a North-of-England spirit called the “Gytrash” which “sometimes came upon belated travelers” (137), a myth she has heard of from Bessie as a child. Rochester is described as a man in a “riding-cloak, fur-collared, and steel-clasped,” with “a dark face...stern features and a heavy brow” (137). The way Rochester is described likens a romantic hero; the way he dresses and his physical features play a part in helping set up a mythical and dream-like scene. So far, Brontë has set the scene with the atmosphere and circumstances for a fairy-tale meeting between the future lovers. However, the mythical element is broken by a series of abrupt events: “a sliding sound and an exclamation of ‘What the deuce is to do now?’ and a clattering tumble...man and horse were down...the dog came bounding back...the horse groan[s]” (136). These brusque and fast-paced events starkly interrupt the narrative and descriptive language that first sets the scene and, thus, having the effect of waking Jane up from a trance-like state that she has been living at Lowood. At Lowood, all of Jane’s passion has been stunned and she has lived a life of robotic submissiveness to the strict regime of Brocklehurst. Indeed, as Godfrey remarks in “*Jane Eyre*, from Governess to Girl Bride”, that Rochester’s first introduction into the novel fails to suffice to the heroic ideal of Victorian masculinity (864). Contrary to the usual hero who courts the

“damsel in distress”, Rochester is the one who needs aid. After his fall, Jane helps him limp to his horse. This curious scene shows a clear reversal of gender roles and foreshadows the married life of Jane and Rochester. Brontë starts by setting the scene as a mythical realm in which the lovers first meet. However, she does not end it traditionally but instead, twists the norm of gender roles and presents Rochester, the physically and socially stronger of the two, as an injured weakling. On the other hand, Jane, the normally weaker lover, is given the role of help and aid. In this scene, she is physically stronger and seems in control.

An undercurrent of power struggle is, however, brewing beneath the surface. While this first encounter can be viewed as a romantic way of reversing gender roles – the heroine helping the injured hero back to his horse – there is obvious evidence that Rochester does not want the help. When Jane asks him whether there is anything that she can do, Rochester does a series of dramatic actions to show that he can manage on his own: “he rose, first to his knees, and then to his feet...and began a heaving, stamping, clattering process, accompanied by a barking and baying...(136).” However, Jane keeps her determination and “would not be driven quite away till [she] saw the event” (137). Narratives, concerning Jane insisting to help and Rochester determining not to receive them, pursue. Strangely, Jane’s determination is fed by the fact that Rochester is not handsome or amiable: “Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked” (137). At the end of the scene, Rochester manages to gain some control and orders Jane to hurry to the village and hurry back to Thornfield. He also gains advantage by knowing who she is before she knows him and makes sure to omit the information – of him being the master of Thornfield – from her. It is clear that in their first meeting, they are already establishing ground as to who will control the situation and who will have his/her way.

The determination to help Rochester and gain control of the situation is seen again when Jane saves Rochester from perishing in the fire set by Bertha Mason, Rochester’s mad wife that he is locked up in the attic. At the beginning of the scene, it is obvious that Jane is in control of the situation. She discovers and puts out the fire, saving her master’s life. However, as soon as Rochester wakes up and takes in

the situation, the first thing he does is to try to take over Jane's position of control. It should be noted that in both the first encounter scene and the fire scene, he never once thanks Jane for helping and saving his life. Every time she tries to help or be in control, he finds measures to strip her off the controlling position and give orders. After Jane wakes Rochester up, she suggests that she will go to get the candle outside. He, in an attempt to gain some control over the situation, orders her to get some dry garments first. Later, after he has better assessed the situation, he gains full control and orders Jane to keep the situation a secret. It is important that, again, Rochester chooses to conceal crucial knowledge of the situation. He realises that the fire is set by Bertha, his wife, but refuses to tell Jane. Moreover, he leads her into believing that the arsonist is Grace Poole. By not allowing Jane to know the whole circumstance, he regains power over her by inflicting the sense of uncertainty and curiosity upon her, as Jane is confused and wary over the situation in the house and the way the servants act like nothing has happened.

Similarly, on the night of Mr Mason's assault by Bertha Mason, Rochester enlists Jane's aid to secure his autonomy over her. Jane has the power to deny looking after Mr Mason or exposing the incident to the other inhabitants at Thornfield because even though she does not know who Mr Mason actually is, she knows that Rochester does not want to see him and does not want anyone to know about the assault. Even when this is the case, the situation is not entirely in her control. Rochester ingeniously balances out the power by once again keeping Jane in the dark and choosing not to reveal the entire circumstances to her. He deliberately keeps part of the crucial information from her by not telling her the real identity of Mr Mason or his attacker and by not correcting Jane's mistaken belief that Grace Poole is the person responsible for the fire. Because of this, she feels uncertain, insecure, greatly confused and, thus, not in the position to fully endanger Rochester's power even though she can very easily do so by notifying others of the incident. Moreover, to further agitate and embitter Jane, Rochester falsely claims to be in love with Blanche Ingram and that he intends to marry her: "...you have noticed my tender penchant for Miss Ingram: don't you think if I married her she would regenerate me with a vengeance?" (263). To further implicate things, he also secures Jane's promise to stay up with him on the eve of his marriage to Blanche (263) in order to keep him

company. By doing so, he secures Jane's confidence. He unnecessarily torments her when he probably knows that she has feelings for him seeing from her facial expressions and reluctance to answer.

Moreover, when Rochester feels his power and his control slipping away, he blames it on the mysterious and evil power Jane possesses. He tries to convince himself that her power over him does not stem from herself, a young and powerless woman, but from an unknown, dark force. He later admits to Jane that when they first met, he initially thought she bewitched his horse into stumbling, causing the accident. He says to her: "when you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I...had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse" (148). Again, it is his first instinct to blame her action and control in putting out the fire to some dark and evil force within her. One of the first words that are spoken as he wakes up are: "In the name of all the elves in Christendom, is that Jane Eyre?...What have you done with me, witch, sorceress?... Have you plotted to drown me?" (180). He does not suspect the far more obvious cause of the accident – his deranged wife. Instead, he questions Jane because he cannot accept that he is in her control. He tries to retake control by reducing her power.

Not only does Rochester try to empower himself by concealing crucial information from Jane, he also often uses disguises to fool her and anticipate her reactions and thoughts. In these cases, Rochester's real self does not suffice and in order to control or influence Jane, he feels the need to put on a disguise. Disguise is a way of regaining control over the situation as well as a useful tool of manipulation. An example is when Rochester disguises himself as an old and ugly gypsy fortune teller. At first glance it may seem as if his primary goal is to brighten up the mood in the house and cause a miniature scandal to fuel the conversation among the residents; however, upon closer inspection, it is clear that his goals are not as innocent as they seem to be. In a way, Rochester's scheme is rather sinister. He uses what he knows about his guests' habits, interests, and hobbies against them. What initially starts out as harmless fun, in Blanche Ingram's case he clearly uses his disguise to his own purpose. What he says obviously troubles her as Jane observes:

I watched her for nearly half an hour: during all that time she never turned a page, and her face grew momentarily darker, more dissatisfied, and more sourly expressive of disappointment. She had obviously not heard anything to her advantage: and it seemed to me, from her prolonged fit of gloom and taciturnity, that she herself, notwithstanding her professed indifference, attached undue importance to whatever revelations had been made to her. (233)

The reader later finds out that Rochester discourages Blanche Ingram from liking him. Disguised as a gypsy, he falsely tells her that his fortune is not as large as it seems. He recounts this to Jane:

I know she considers the Rochester estate eligible to the last degree; though (God pardon me!) I told her something on that point about an hour ago, which made her look wondrous grave: the corners of her mouth fell half an inch. I would advise her black aviced suitor to look out: if another comes, with a longer or clearer rent-roll, – he’s dished —. (240)

Before her meeting with the gypsy, Blanche Ingram is very much in control of her relationship with Mr Rochester. She is described as overt in her interest in him and can be very controlling in her relationship towards others. She continuously manipulates conversations and expresses her opinion freely and strongly. For example, she always insists on pairing with Rochester whenever activities are in the house. Another example is when she frankly expresses her opinions about governesses: “I have just one word to say of the whole tribe; they are a nuisance” (213). Her free expression of self does not conform with the gender norm of “passive femininity” and the only way that Rochester can control her, or suppress her is to disguise himself as a woman and use her weakness for him to put her under control.

Rochester’s main goal in his charades of disguises, however, is not Blanche Ingram but Jane. After meeting with all his female guests, he sends a message through one of the servants that the “gypsy fortuneteller” refuses to leave without

meeting the last young lady, which is, Jane. Jane, who has been ignoring him and his company throughout the whole night, is summoned by his orders: Sam says to Jane, “[i]f you please, Miss, the gypsy declares that there is another young single lady in the room who has not been to her yet, and she swears she will not go till she has seen all. I thought it must be you: there is no one else for it” (234). He refuses to leave without seeing Jane and this proves that she is his main goal of this charade. She is only the governess and is barely noticed by any of the other residents. Each night, she is forced by Rochester to sit by the guests throughout their intercourses and games. However, she is hardly ever spoken to or noticed by the other guests. This is taken to the extent that Blanche and her mother insult the “race” of governess (213) in front of Jane without caring the least whether she is listening or not. By refusing to leave without first reading Jane’s fortune, Rochester shows that Jane is his objective of the gypsy guise.

A struggle of power between Rochester, disguised as the fortuneteller, and Jane is apparent. When Jane is summoned to meet the “fortuneteller”, unlike the other ladies in the house, she does not show fear or weariness. She insists on going alone and refuses Sam’s insistence of waiting for her outside the room the gypsy Rochester is put in. As soon as Jane enters the room, she shows a clear refusal of being controlled or influenced by the gypsy. She states assuredly that she does not believe in the gypsy: “I don’t care about it, mother; you may please yourself; but I ought to warn you, I have no faith” (235). What follows is Rochester trying persistently to lure Jane into his bait while Jane wards off his approaches by predetermining that the “gypsy” cannot be believed. It is obvious that the two are struggling once again to attain control over the situation. Afterwards, Rochester reveals his true intention for the gypsy charade. After saying that there is nothing to worry about Mrs Poole since she is an honest person, he begins to indirectly question Jane’s feeling towards himself. He tries to find out, rather directly, whether Jane is jealous of his flirtations with Blanche Ingram: “Nothing to you? When a lady, young and full of life and health, charming with beauty and endowed with the gifts of rank and fortune, sits and smiles in the eyes of a gentleman you...perhaps, think well of” (238). When Jane refuses to acknowledge such a person in her life, he continues to persist in the same direction by saying that the gentleman that he (disguised as a gypsy) is talking about

is “not at home” (239). The only person not at home at that moment is obviously Mr Rochester. After persistently clinging to the point, Jane finally takes control and cuts him off by saying, “I did not come to hear Mr Rochester’s fortune: I came to hear my own; and you have told me nothing” (240). It is clear that Jane is not to be easily controlled by an unknown force, thus, making Rochester’s scheme a failure. Moreover, she finally sees through his disguise and recognises him as Mr Rochester. A struggle of power is clearly going on in the scene, resulting in Jane’s victory.

It is clear that Thornfield and Rochester have fully awoken Jane from her submissive state that she is temporarily stunned into at Lowood. Her passion is revived through her initial encounter with Rochester and it is continuously strengthened through the course of their courtship. Their unusual form of courtship does not comprise romantic gestures but, rather, passionate exchanges of emotions and various forms of struggle for power. This culminates into their proposal of marriage. It happens after Jane visits her childhood home at Gateshead. Gateshead is where Jane’s childhood passion burns – her strong sense of self, her refusal to be taken advantage of, and her determination are reignited. Her childhood strength and stubbornness are reawakened after her encounter with Mrs Reed. She is once again reminded of the abjection and cruelty she suffered. She also fully realises how much Thornfield and Mr Rochester mean to her. She sees Thornfield as the only home she has and Mr Rochester embodies the happiness of Thornfield. After coming back to Thornfield, there is visible strength in her character which coincides with Rochester’s proposal. Instead of directly asking her like any other Victorian heroes would normally do, he starts out by professing his love towards Blanche Ingram and describes to Jane his plan of marrying Blanche. Clearly, he is “disguising” himself as Blanche’s fiancé. The only explainable motive behind this scheme is his desire to control Jane and make her profess her love for him before he does. There is no other motive for wanting her to believe that she has to take up a governess post in Ireland. By deceiving her into thinking that she is going far away and will not see him ever again, he pushes her to profess her love for him. Jane, with the newly reignited strength and fervour, confesses: “I have known you, Mr Rochester; and it strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you forever. I see the

necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death” (305). This then leads to Rochester revealing his real intention of marrying her.

After their engagement, the continual struggle for power between Rochester and Jane does not end. On the contrary, their constant exertion of power heightens. The morning after their engagement, Rochester takes Jane out to town to adorn her with clothing and jewellery. Despite their love, there is still an underlying sense of battling for control. Before they leave the house, Jane asks Rochester if Adèle is allowed to go with them. The readers get the feeling that one of the reasons that Jane wants Adèle to go is because she does not want to be alone with him after listening to Mrs Fairfax’s warning. When Rochester refuses with force saying that he wants no “brat” to go with them, Jane admits that she realises that she “half lost the sense of power over him” (321). However, Jane finally gets her way once Rochester sees the look of discontent on her face.

As Jane and the readers realise later on in the shopping scene, Jane’s control over Rochester does not last very long. At Milcote, Rochester takes Jane in and out of shops with the intention of adorning her with silk dresses, jewels and other fine goods. Although this is Rochester’s way of showing love, it should be noted that he drags Jane from one fine shop to another without considering whether it is what she really wants. From the first day of their engagement, Rochester forces his values and wants upon Jane. There is a noticeable lack of communication during the time up until their engagement, considering that they live in the same house. Once they are engaged, Rochester still neglects Jane’s desire and forces his upon her. Jane, rather than basking in the attention that she is given, feels annoyed: “The hour spent at Milcote was a somewhat harassing one to me. Mr Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk warehouse: there I was ordered to choose half a dozen dresses. I hated the business...” (323). She fights back by varying degrees of manipulation: “By dint of entreaties expressed in energetic whispers, I reduced the half-dozen to two...”, “I told him in a new series of whispers, that he might as well buy me a gold gown and a silver bonnet at once: I should certainly never venture to wear his choice”, and “with infinite difficulty, for he was stubborn as a stone, I persuaded him to make an exchange in favour of a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk” (324). No matter how she may deter him, he persists on making her do what he wants her to. After the silk

shop, he continues to drag her to the jeweler's shop. To this, she vents that "the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (324). Jane clearly feels that she is being objectified and domesticated. Jane is highly distressed of the situation that makes Rochester in control and she foresees that it is likely to continue to be so after her marriage. After marrying Rochester, she may have less ability to force him to do something or force him out of doing something she dislikes. She probably knows that it is almost impossible to avert this kind of situation in the future but she does try to lessen the impact of it as much as possible by immediately deciding to write to her uncle, Mr John Eyre, to ask him for her claim of the inheritance so that she would at least be financially independent. Jane refuses to submit to Rochester's designated superiority of class, age, sex and economy. She strives to become, in the very least, his equal.

Bertha Mason – Jane's Alter Ego

While Helen Burns acts as Jane's submissive and domesticated alter ego, Bertha Mason is Jane's passionate one. Unlike Helen Burns, the culmination of the domestic ideal, Bertha Mason is rebellious and passionate up to the point that she is considered a madwoman. Many leading critics, notably Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Elaine Showalter view Bertha as a rebel against the patriarchal society and authority. To them, Bertha is defiant of social rules to a point that she has to be subdued. Gilbert and Gubar explain that Bertha functions as "Jane's dark double" and her appearances are associated with Jane's experience or repression of anger (360). In short, Bertha embodies and acts out Jane's anger on society and patriarchal rule. Similarly, Showalter describes Bertha as a dominating force that is physically as strong and big as Rochester. Showalter explains Bertha's death as a path to Jane's "fuller freedom" because she represents another aspect of Jane (97). It is at Thornfield that the mysterious and enigmatic character of Bertha Mason is introduced. This is after Jane has been stunned by social measures of feminisation. Bertha Mason is introduced into the novel just when Jane is about to reenter a world of passionate emotions as opposed to the restrictive negation of Lowood. Bertha Mason, in her own right, is a significant but unknown force in Thornfield. Her marriage to Rochester, however disastrous it maybe, is the exact opposite of the ideal nineteenth-century

marriage. Although she is caged up in the attic and has no real power of her own, her existence is arguably the most important controlling force in the novel and a restrictive force for Rochester. Her power over the other characters is also very ominous and apparent. Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife, is presented as crazy, unpredictable and dangerous. However mad she may seem, her power over Rochester is still as apparent in the novel as it was when he married her more than a decade ago. The fact that he feels the need to lock her up, hire Grace Poole to look after her, and keep her existence a secret, proves that he is threatened by her presence. Rochester himself acknowledges to a certain extent the power she has over him. His admittance comes at a time when Jane's and Rochester's marriage is cancelled because Jane's uncle sends a representative to expose the fact that Rochester is already married. In a desperate plea to restrain Jane, he finally admits to the story behind Bertha Mason. He complains about how she restricts him and curses his entire existence. She makes him "approach the verge of despair (371)". She makes his life "hell" and turns it into a "bottomless pit" (372). She also "abused [his] long suffering...sullied [his] name, blighted [his] youth (373)". Rochester claims that her existence tortures him so much that he was once on the brink of committing suicide. However, he decides upon the contrary, and being unable to live in Spain, where he married Bertha, he travels to England, describing the journey as "a fearful voyage I had with such a monster in the vessel" (373).

Once in England, he locks her up at Thornfield and travels the world. Even when Bertha is locked up, Rochester continues to feel entrapped by her existence and cannot stay long in one place. He has to keep travelling to places where no one knows his past. Staying at Thornfield, although his estate, reminds him too strongly of the wife he has locked up. Thornfield is not his realm any longer for it is fused with the air of Bertha Mason. Her existence, though unknown to most others, is a harsh reality and as apparent to him as ever. Because of her, he has to continually run away, in vain, from the past. After all the years that Mr Rochester tries to escape from his past, of all the distance he travels, he finally realises that he cannot escape from his past deed or from Bertha. On the day of the scheduled marriage between Jane and Mr Rochester, influence triggered by Bertha causes the disruption of their marriage and the revelation of the truth. People as far away as John Eyre and Richard Mason know

of the marriage and travel to Thornfield to terminate it. Once again, Bertha Mason's influence on Rochester's life is apparent. It is because of his marriage to Bertha Mason that he loses his chance of happiness.

No matter how strong Bertha Mason's power over Rochester is, it is clear that using overt opposition towards the patriarch is not acceptable in Victorian society and will most likely be met with force. Before Bertha goes mad, it is clear that she is determined not to be under Rochester's power or control:

“...I found her nature wholly alien to mine; her tastes obnoxious to me; her cast of mind common, low, narrow to anything larger...when I found that I could not pass...a single hour of the day with her in comfort...because whatever topic I started, immediately received from her a turn at once coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile...I perceived that I should never have a quiet or settled household, because no servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders...” (369)

Thus, when obvious opposition towards Rochester is shown, Rochester, claiming she is mad, locks her up in the attic giving her meager living space and no freedom. However, as is shown above, no matter how much Rochester tries to limit Bertha's ability, she continues to haunt him for many years and indirectly, but forcefully, limits his freedom as well.

It can be viewed that Bertha Mason and Jane are each other's foil. While Jane uses subtle manipulation and resistance, Bertha is overt and obvious. Jane and Bertha both have a lot of influence on Rochester and are the reason behind each of his actions and decisions. Bertha is the embodiment of Jane's repressed fear and anger. Even though Jane claims that she loves Mr Rochester, her dreams and her worries suggest otherwise. Jane superstitiously believes that dreaming about children is a bad omen and this proves to be the case. When her aunt dies, Jane dreams of a child for seven days in a row. Before her wedding, she dreams of holding a baby while pursuing an unknown and deserted path. It suggests that she secretly fears marrying him and being

imprisoned by the marriage. Jane does not overtly act out the fear or the rage; it is projected upon Bertha Mason. For example, Jane's dream clearly shows that she is scared and does not want the marriage. On this same day, Bertha Mason tears up the wedding veil the moment Jane wakes up from her awful dream. It is because of Bertha Mason's existence that the marriage is cancelled. Bertha is therefore the action while Jane is the thought. Later on in the novel, when Thornfield comes to represent a state of servitude and submission for Jane and a place where her morals and identities are to be compromised if she stays, Bertha Mason burns it to the ground. Bertha Mason can therefore be translated as Jane's passionate alter ego while Jane herself has to be kept in check. Bertha Mason acts out Jane's fear, rage, and other strong emotions in a way that Jane, as a respectful woman, cannot. This is due to the fact that Jane, born and raised according to the norms of the British society, needs to be submissive and passive. However, Bertha, a Creole raised in the colonies, is not subjected to the same social rules as Jane. Because Bertha is less restricted, she acts as Jane's emotional mirror.

From March End to Thornfield: Jane's Search for Balance between the Rational and Passionate Forces

Successfully avoiding the extreme of passion, Jane faces another type of extreme, rationality. After Jane's fear is realised and she successfully averts her faith as Rochester's domesticated housewife, Jane deserts Thornfield despite Rochester's passionate entreaties and pleadings. She flees Rochester's extreme passion and rage, leaving her alter ego, Bertha behind. Although Thornfield and Rochester play a large role in reawakening Jane's inner passion and fire, she does not give in to extremities and refuses to compromise her beliefs. It is clear that this courtship has helped Jane to grow and strengthen her resolution to stand up for what she believes in. Her flight from a place of extreme emotion and feelings is met by yet another extremity, one not unlike the extreme emotional stunt she met at Lowood. She flees the prospect of a passionate but domesticated marriage to face an extremely rational courtship of St John, her cousin. Yet this rational courtship does not offer her any more freedom than the one she will have faced if she is married to Rochester.

From the first description of March End, St John River's residence, that Jane coincidentally finds after running away from Thornfield, it is possible to deduce that it is a typical nineteenth-century household that takes seriously the socially designated sexual roles. Hanna, the servant, sits by her mistresses' side while they are passively reading and waiting for the patriarch of the house to arrive back from work. In adherence to the values of the ideal nineteenth-century woman, the occupations of the female residents are almost always confined within the house. They cook, clean, read, mend clothes and draw. The way the women stay at home while St John is the only one who ventures out of door reinforces the idea of the "separate spheres" in their household and in the society as a whole. Although Diana and Mary also work, they, like Jane, hold the position of governess in wealthy homes. It is believed that governesses are the embodiment of the ideal nineteenth-century women because their duty is to educate the children of wealthy families and make them desirable and fit for society by their abilities (Godfrey 858). The only character that goes out and about is St John, the only male figure of the household. He also views that female characters are fragile and mild. Rosamond, the woman that he loves, is not fit to be his wife because she is not made to be "a sufferer, a labourer, a female apostle...or a missionary's wife" (451). All the same, she is loved and cherished by him because of her female attributes – she has "all the intensity...of a first passion, the object of which is exquisitely beautiful, graceful and fascinating" (451). Her womanly traits do not make her fit to suffer the harsh life that she would have to encounter if she accompanies him to India. Because St John loves her, he does not want to commit her to all the "unwomanly" tasks that would come with being a missionary's wife.

If the marriage with Rochester means that Jane will have a passionate marriage in sacrifice of her honour, integrity and principle, the marriage with St John means that she has to live a life with principles but without passion. Indeed, St John is a cold and an unwavering man who never backs down once he makes a decision. He is always decisive and adheres strictly to principles. Like a true patriarch, St John controls the lives of his sisters and Jane. He finds a teaching position for Jane, running a charity school for girls in the town of Morton. He also dictates Jane's free time and her choice of studies. He makes her give up learning German to learn Hindustani with him. As time goes by, St John gradually exerts greater influence on

Jane. It is clear that he is preparing her for India to become a missionary's wife – his wife. His extreme rationality tells him that Jane will make a good missionary and he decides to act upon the notion, by grooming her likewise without asking or telling her his plan. At last, he asks her to marry him, even after she declines on the grounds that she does not love him. He insists upon the marriage by trying to reason with her and pressuring her. He reasons that the refusal of his proposal is equivalent to the denial of Christian faith and duty. St John only considers Jane as a tool for his cause and not as a lover. He is the exact opposite of Rochester. Jane, after escaping the passionate but immoral entreaties of Rochester, is now faced with the rational persistence of St John. Through both kinds of courtship, she learns that the extremes of either are impractical and do not lead to true happiness, but to a life of tolerance and submissiveness. Only when Jane learns this, when the extremes of courtship have taught her to be true to herself, does she have an epiphany that she must follow her heart.

After experiencing the two extremes of courtship and life, Jane returns to the man she loves after she makes sure that she will not be entreated into a marriage where she is to be trapped and manipulated. Now Jane, learned and independent, has grown from the naïve orphan who looks in awe at Rochester's experience, age and wealth to a confident and able young woman. She knows how to find a healthy balance between extremes. She has learned to be happy with herself and knows how much she can accomplish on her own. She is no longer a dependent of Rochester. On the contrary, Rochester is now very much humbled – he is old, crippled, blind and insecure. Jane realises that she is not going back to him as the young and innocent girl she once was. She is now an adult that has advantages over him. Yet, before giving herself to him, she makes sure that he knows this too. She taunts and teases him almost to a point of cruelty. At Fearn Dean, after her first glimpse of him, she admits that she “had no difficulty in restraining [her] voice from exclamation, my step from hasty advance” (519). Contrary to the expected action of hurriedly running to greet Rochester, three more pages of a contemplating and descriptive narrative continue before the two lovers meet.

The tables are reversed when Jane meets Rochester after their separation and after some scheming and planning, Jane takes control of the situation. First, she tells

Mary, the housekeeper, to tell Rochester that he has a visitor. However, she does not allow Mary to mention her name. She wants to surprise him herself but before she does that she makes sure that she delays admitting to Rochester that it is herself and, thus, enhances the suspense to the extreme. Next, she carries in a tray with a glass of water and candles. Clearly, she is very excited about their first meeting: “the tray shook as I held it; the water spilt from the glass; my heart” (521). Eventhough she is very excited and nervous, she never lets the situation out of control. Upon entering the room, she describes first the state of the room and then Pilot, Rochester’s dog. This is significant because up until now, Jane’s life has been dictated by patriarchal society – by Brocklehurst, by Rochester, and by St John. Now, Jane is the teller of her own story, the dictator of her own life. By choosing to prolong the suspense, not only for Rochester, but for the readers as well (by describing every particular detail before the one the readers want to hear the most – Rochester), Jane takes her life into her own control. She has the power to move at her own pace and describe in the length she pleases.

The scene that follows shows how manipulative Jane can be and also illustrates the usual power struggle that has been underlying their relationship since Thornfield. She triggers Rochester’s suspense till he can no longer stand it. First, she stays quiet until spoken to and when she speaks, she speaks as if she is Mary (“will you have a little more water, sir? ” (522)) and ignores his desperate pleas to tell him who she really is. When she finally admits to him that she is indeed Jane, she still creates further suspense in refusing to answer all his questions and deliberately raises his worries and jealousies. Esther Godfrey comments that the “startlingly torturous display” is Jane playing with “Rochester’s insecurities in a manner that parallels Rochester’s early games with her” (867). Jane, a young woman, can be as manipulative and as sly as Rochester, an experienced, rich and older man. Moreover, it is true, that Jane’s display of delaying information and twisting the truth to cause Rochester uneasiness parallels those scheme that he plays on her when he manipulates her into believing his love for Blanche Ingram and their fast-approaching marriage. When Rochester observes to her that “you are young – you must marry one day,” her replies were “I don’t care about being married” (525). The answer is very significant because it intentionally leads him to believe that she does not want to marry him. In

fact, he does interpret it that way: "...if I were what I once was, I would try to make you care..." (525). Like Rochester from their earlier days, Jane deliberately leads him to believe that she has already met a man (St John Rivers) that she is presumably in love with.

Jane revels in Rochester's uneasiness and frustration. She is probably having as much fun as Rochester has when he is taunting her. She admits to the readers that when "he relapsed again into gloom...[she], on the contrary, became more cheerful, and took fresh courage" (525). She even delays relieving him of the information he wants by claiming that she is tired after three days of travel and is going to bed. She frets him even more by refusing to answer his one last question before going to bed: "Just one word, Jane: were there only ladies in the house where you have been?" (528). By refusing to answer him, she marks an even more suspicious note in his mind. The next sentence that follows makes it even clearer of her intention to manipulate Mr Rochester for her amusement: "I see I have the means of fretting him out of his melancholy for some time to come" (528).

Even though Jane knows that she holds the power, she still does not relent in teasing Rochester and invoking jealousy. Again, the following morning, Jane deliberately enters quietly into the room so that she can observe him before he realises that she is there. This very much mirrors the scene from the night before. She notices that he is extremely mournful and expectant. Because of this, she plans her greeting to accustom her observation. As soon as he hears her voice, "his features beamed" (529). She knows full well what her presence means to him and takes pride in it: "I had wakened the glow" (529). She knows her power: "the water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence: just as if a royal eagle, chained to a perch, should be forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor" (529).

The events that follow are almost a replay of how Rochester willingly leads Jane to believe his love in Blanche Ingram. Jane's techniques are to answer as little as possible to Rochester's urgent questions, thus, leading him to read too much into the relationship between her and St John. Rochester's misunderstanding and Jane playing the part to lead him on continues for a remarkable five pages until Rochester is in utmost despair. Only then, does Jane admit to him that she does not love St John in any other way than as siblings and he, the same.

It is interesting that at the end of the novel, Rochester's opinion and manipulation, once constantly prevalent, are now curiously muted and missing. Jane's autobiography is presumably written during her middle-age years and it is written without any assertion from Rochester. She writes about their marital bliss and Mr Rochester's health. Her writings seem rather detached from Rochester. Even the time before their marriage is written about with much more force and passion. Now, it seems that he is hardly relevant. No words or thoughts can be deduced about him or that can be claimed to be his. It is as if she has taken absolute control.

Another important detail to note is Rochester's maimed condition. At the start of their acquaintance, Rochester is superior to Jane in every way – age, knowledge, experience, wealth, and of course, sex. Jane has been a dependent of Rochester; she lives in his house and is supported, economic-wise, by him. At the end of the novel, however, the tables have turned. Not only is she economically independent, she is physically stronger. Rochester, on the other hand, is a cripple, living in a place of isolation and solitude, away from society. He is emotionally dependent on Jane and needs her presence to escape from despair. He cannot physically survive on his own without aid because he cannot see. As Jane explains:

I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature – he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town river, cloud, sunbeam – of the landscape before us; of the weather round us – and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. (544)

Even though the novel ends with marriage, the symbol of the heroine's submission to patriarchal control, the marriage empowers Jane, socially and economically, allowing her to climb the social ladder. Brontë ends her novel by giving her heroine full power over the hero. More than just becoming emotionally and mentally stronger during the course of the novel, she has fully grown to empower her male counterpart. Whether consciously or not, Jane plays the part of Rochester's superior and caretaker. Brontë ends the novel with a reversal of gender roles.

It can be concluded that courtship and marriage in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* does not serve as a social tool to control and manipulate women, but is used as a tool to empower and teach them. It is only through courtship that Jane realises her true self and desires. Only after she faces two extremities of rationality and passion does she learn to balance the two. In the process, she unknowingly becomes empowered by her experience and is thus awarded with independence and respect. She is given an inheritance and a husband that respects her and is dependent on her.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH* AND THE AUTHOR'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE FEMALE PROTAGONIST'S DOWNFALL

In relation to the subject of female empowerment through courtship and marriage, George Eliot takes a different approach from the portrayal of female characters in Austen's *Persuasion* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre*, the heroines are content with their roles and condition as a wife and a mother. What they are not content with, however, is the submission to the social designation of their womanly status as contained within the domestic sphere and entrapped in their role as the "angel in the house". In turn, the heroines of both novels employ different approaches to overcome the submissive role society expects of them. In Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), whilst many of the minor female characters portray the same kind of approaches to negate the social passivity expected from them, Dorothea, one of the main focusses of the novel, displays an ambition not seen in the female protagonists in either of the two previous novels. Her aspirations transcend those previously assigned to the feminine ideal. She wishes to make her mark in the world and make a difference in the lives of others. Nevertheless, I argue that the author's obvious portrayal of Dorothea's marriage to Ladislaw as a failure can be seen as Eliot's critique of Victorian patriarchal society. By setting her novel a few generations prior to her time, Eliot is depicting a mirroring society that is similar to her own period in its political anxiety and sense of change⁵. However, it is far away back in the past enough for the readers to be able to criticise the *Middlemarch* society unaffectedly, without feeling a reserve which would naturally occur if it was set in the readers' own time. The readers would be able to take a step back and criticise society of their elders and realise its restriction on women and the frustration it causes. This chapter will first start with an overview of the social background during the time the

⁵ Both periods of time faced political turmoil; during the 1830s people were distracted by the Reform Bill while the 1860s saw emerging advocates for women's rights and rights of the poor.

novel was written. Next, there will be an explanation of how some of the female characters in society use courtship and marriage as a tool of empowerment employing similar methods to those of the characters in *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre*. Finally, the problematic heroine, Dorothea Brooke, will be discussed. This chapter will argue that Dorothea is a tool utilised by Eliot to illustrate the social restrictions women faced and the social condemnation they might encounter if they dared to aspire for positions outside of the feminine realm.

Social Context

Realist Fiction

One of *Middlemarch*'s prominent features is the panoramic vastness of the novel. It encapsulates an entire society, depicting minutiae details of the lives of its inhabitants, the social circumstances of the town, the political condition, and the anxiety of the time the novel took place. Most impressive of all, it creates a web of network that ingeniously connects the characters within the novel. A work on such a scale is no doubt influenced by the realism movement that originated in France during the 1850s. Realism in literature concerns a writer's attempt to depict ordinary life as it would be, not as it should be. This is opposed to the romantic tradition or other anti-realist approaches. This movement quickly rose to prominence in England, in which Eliot and her lover, George Henry Lewes, were great advocates. In an essay in the *Westminster Review* (1856), Eliot wrote that "art is the nearest thing to life" (qtd. in Purchase 185). In another essay also published in *The Westminster Review*, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856), Eliot ridiculed typeset female novelists, contrasting good writing with several clichés employed by women writers. She explained extensively on the clichés that were often employed by these writers:

Writers of the mind-and-millinery school are remarkably unanimous in their choice of diction. In their novels, there is usually a lady or gentleman who is more or less of a upas tree: the lover has a manly breast; minds are redolent of various things; hearts are hollow; events are utilized; friends are consigned to the tomb; infancy is an engaging period; the sun is a luminary that goes to his western

couch, or gathers the rain-drops into his refulgent bosom; life is a melancholy boon; Albion and Scotia are conversational epithets.

Eliot wrote about realism to show her admiration to “great writers, who have modestly contented themselves with putting their experience into fiction, and have thought it quite a sufficient task to exhibit men and things as they are...” It can be seen from her argument that she favours the realist tradition and *Middlemarch* is clearly influenced by this favoured literary style.

Eliot’s realist approach, however, does not mirror the realist fiction that emerged in the 1840s, which was mainly used as a tool to expose social problems, particularly about class and economy, in England. These types of realist fiction during the 1840s largely focus on the lower class and their hardships. Such literary works include Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1839), Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848). These novels usually have happy endings which are gained by various coincidences and good luck. I categorise Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) as one of these novels. In *Jane Eyre*, the patriarchal oppression on women and the desire to escape from its grips are genuinely depicted. The struggles of the lower-middle class women, the plight of the governess and the condition of charity houses are all portrayed very realistically. However, Jane’s final overpowering and overcoming of social oppressions is made possible through a series of miraculous and unlikely incidents – something clearly inspired by the literary romance tradition. Moreover, the constant mysterious force of the mad first wife that looms over the heroine clearly evokes the Gothic tradition⁶. *Jane Eyre* is filled with mysterious sounds, night terrors, mysterious incidents, and unexplainable noises which the readers later finds out that they are made by the hero’s imprisoned wife. In order for Brontë to empower her heroine, she has to deter from the realist tradition and incorporates the romantic and Gothic literary fiction, something which Eliot does not do. Brontë inserts miraculous incidents such as when Jane has her supernatural epiphany or when the mad wife, Bertha Mason, burns down Thornfield Hall and dies.

⁶ Gothic fiction is a literary genre that combines elements of horror, suspense, mystery, and sometimes romance. Gothic fiction often subsumes the use of hidden motives, supernatural forces and the theme of family secrets.

Eliot, on the other hand, does not employ literary romance techniques, such as the Gothic element, to empower her heroine. Instead, she does not waver from the realist tradition and portrays her characters as they would be under social influence and control. Realism in *Middlemarch* does not only set out to portray society as it really is but also to venture into the psychology of its characters and explore the different dimensions of the depths of one's thoughts and actions. While *Middlemarch* is influenced by the realist fiction, it is important to note that Eliot's literary style can also be classified as "determinism" – a characteristic of nineteenth-century naturalism utilised by other novelists such as Thomas Hardy and Leo Tolstoy. Determinism believes that an individual is not in complete control of their free will. They are, on the contrary, controlled and limited by multiple outside sources, namely social expectations, culture, the environment and historical forces (Quinn 285). When *Middlemarch* is read within the pretext of its understood literary form, it is then understandable why the novel encapsulates such a wide variety of characters that succumb, on different levels, to the forces of society, especially Dorothea Brooke. The determination to portray society as realistically as possible, especially within the strict social demarcation of sexual sphere during the 1830s, plays an important role in shaping Dorothea's life. Dorothea, a member of the upper class, cannot possibly fulfill her wishes of transcending her designated female role. Also, Eliot presents, in varying degrees, the empowerment of women in courtship and marriage within the realistic forces of each of their social classes, backgrounds, values and education.

The Emergence of Advocates of Women

Advocates calling for women's rights and education emerged towards the mid and the end of the nineteenth century, the time when Eliot published most of her works. In the mid-nineteenth century, there were women like Harriet Martineau and Caroline Norton who spoke strongly against the genteel sexual division apparent in the first half of the century. Caroline Norton, who wedded an abusive husband and was stuck in an unhappy marriage, became an active advocate for the change in the British Matrimonial Law in 1857. During the 1850s, a group of women started to meet regularly in Langham Place in London. The purpose of their gathering is to discuss the need for women to present a united voice to achieve reform. Their group

was then known as “Ladies of Langham Place” (Poovey 21). In 1855, Barbara Bodichon, one of Eliot’s most intimate friends, petitioned for a change of the law that stipulated that once married, a husband became the sole owner of all property of his wife. This, however, did not succeed until 1870 (J. Brown 73). Men also started campaigning for an increase of women’s rights. Liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill wrote in *The Subjection of Women* (1869): “what is now called the nature of woman is eminently an artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others” (qtd. in Dolin 72). Mill and his wife, Harriet Taylor, were two of the most prominent figures who campaigned against women’s legal and social disadvantages. One of their most notable ideas was the calling for female suffrage.

More than just women’s legal equality, the main argument of female advocates was the rights to education. Increasingly, women wrote to support the right of female higher education. A change in society was taking place and gradually, some colleges were starting to offer courses to women. In the midst of these growing reforms, Eliot was a strong supporter of female education. In an 1867 letter to Clementia Taylor, a women’s advocate, Eliot sympathised “most emphatically in the desire to see women socially elevated – educated equally with men, and secured as far as possible with every other breathing creature from suffering the exercise of any unrighteous power.” She concluded that “on the whole [she was] inclined to hope for much good from the serious presentation of women’s claims before Parliament” (*Letters*, iv. 366 – qtd. in Dolin 148).

Eliot’s strong belief in the need for women’s education is also shown in an 1855 essay on Margaret Fuller⁷ and Mary Wollstonecraft. Kathleen Blake explores Eliot’s essays in her article, “*Middlemarch* and the Woman Question” (1976). Blake claims that the essay “anticipates the concerns she takes up in *Middlemarch*: women’s natures, their need for work, men’s presumption of superiority, and its destructive consequences” (287). In her essay, Eliot comments on Fuller that “some of the best things she says are on the folly of absolute definitions of woman’s nature and absolute demarcations of woman’s mission” (287). Eliot continues, quoting Fuller’s writing

⁷ A nineteenth-century American journalist, critic, and women’s right advocate.

on female occupation: “I think women need, especially at this juncture, a much greater range of occupation than they have, to rouse their latent powers” or otherwise they will have to endure “the ‘ennui’ that haunts grown women” (qtd. in Blake 287).

Eliot’s idea on the education and occupation of women marks the ground for the writing of *Middlemarch*. Many of those concerns are addressed in the form of the female characters’ “ennui”, their frustration for the lack of occupation, and their need to feel useful. Tim Dolin states in *Author in Context: George Eliot* (2009) that Eliot, rather than outwardly advocating for women’s rights in “public action”, uses art (148). As Dolin explains, “Art, [Eliot] believed, was a better instrument of social change, which worked not through ‘legislative enactments’ but the gradual evolution of enlightened individuals and institutions” (148). Eliot’s method of voice in fiction teaches, through the art of literature, the effects and damages that socially designated norms forced upon women. Eliot educates the readers by juxtaposing two types of women, one being those who are content with their role of domestic keeper and empower themselves through the limited activities they have in marriage and the other being those who feel an underlying need to transcend their domestic position but are restricted and eventually subdued into full passivity.

Eliot’s Life and Background

Eliot was by no means a typical Victorian woman that was contained within the domestic sphere. She was lucky enough to have a father who understood the importance of education. He invested in her education, the kind not usually given to women. Moreover, she also had access to the library of Arbury Hall, in which her father was the manager. Her education of the classics, her access to the philosophy of the thinkers of her time, and her connection to the intellectual circle are proof that she could not have possibly condoned Dorothea’s fate. On the contrary, Eliot illustrated, realistically, the way society shaped women and designated their lives.

Eliot became close to many progressive free-thinkers of her time, notably, Charles and Cara Bray. The Brays opened their home to radical thinkers and held debates on subjects frowned upon by other “respectable” Victorians. Some notable people who Eliot had the chance to meet included Robert Owen, Herbert Spencer, Harriet Martineau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. She was also introduced to liberal

views of theology by writers such as David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach. One of her most intimate friends who stood by her during her most scandalous times whilst her family deserted her was Barbara Bodichon, a well-known feminist. Indeed, Eliot surrounded herself with strong and intellectual women, one of them being Edith Simcox, a "brilliant intellectual, trade union activist, and social reformer", who wrote, as Dolin puts it, "a study of women and property rights in ancient civilizations" (36). In 1850, moreover, Eliot became involved in a left-wing journal *The Westminster Review* of which she became assistant editor to John Chapman, who she also openly lived and had an affair with (Dolin 17-18). Although she was assistant editor, Eliot did much of the editing and running of the journal. Her mixture in the predominantly male circle was scandalous to some people.

Indeed, Eliot was in no way a woman of her time. Opened to a circle of liberal and radical thinkers, her life was a scandal to most people. At one point, she was disowned by her brother and threatened to be disowned by her own father. Unlike Dorothea, she did not submit to the female containment normally experienced by other women of her time. As a lover, she was very straightforward and outspoken. Once, having fallen in love with Herbert Spencer, who worked for *The Economist*, she wrote him an unusually forward love letter:

I suppose no woman ever before wrote such a letter as this – but I am not ashamed of it, for I am conscious that in the light of reason and true refinement I am worthy of your respect and tenderness, whatever gross men or vulgar-minded women might think of me.
(qtd. in Dolin 65-67)

Her most notorious affair was with George Lewes, a successful novelist, dramatist, poet, actor, linguist, critic, and philosopher. Although Lewes was a married man, he lived openly with Eliot as a married couple and they referred to each other as husband and wife. Eliot even adopted his last name and became known as Mrs Marian Lewes.

One of the most crucial arguments against the claim that the ending of *Middlemarch* is a failure on Eliot's part, lies in her own biography and background. It

does not seem likely, after exploring her life and experiences, that George Eliot, or Mary Anne Evans, intended to portray a happy ending to *Middlemarch*'s main character by making her realise that what she really longs for is a strong husband and family and the only satisfying outlet for her passionate energies is to devote herself to the servitude of her husband and children. More likely, Dorothea is used as a tool for the author's own purpose of illustrating a point that women who venture outside of their designated feminine role do not stand a chance in Victorian society. Equipped with no special education and expected to be confined to the domestic sphere, they simply cannot succeed no matter how determined they started out.

Female Empowerment in *Middlemarch*

Class Interplay

Class difference plays a very important role in shaping *Middlemarch* and the relationship between the town residents. Most other novelists only focus on a single character, whether the hero or heroine, and limit their acquaintances to those in their social class or those slightly above or below them. Usually these novels end up with the heroes or heroines ascending the social ladder at the end of the novel. However, in *Middlemarch*, Eliot attempts to give an encapsulating picture of the relationships and interconnectedness of the middle class as a whole – ranging from the landed gentries and titled baronets down unto the lower rung of the ladder which includes the skilled labourers of the lower middle class.

One must be able to distinguish the characters' social class so that they can understand to the full extent the male and female relationships in the novel. As Julia Prewitt Brown explains, the nineteenth-century social class is largely separated into the upper, middle, and lower; or the "ruling class, bourgeoisie, and working class" (6). She goes on further to explain that the distinctions are between those "who do not have to work for a living and those who do, and between those who possess some property and those who possess no property and support themselves 'hand to mouth,' through manual labour" (6). According to these criteria, the Brookes, the Chettams and the Casaubons are the gentry, or the upper class. The Bulstrodes and the Vincys are part of the middle class; at the beginning of the novel, the Bulstrodes are on the highest level of middle-class families because of their economic prosperity. The

Garths are the lowest of the middle class because they have the least property and they earn their living through manual labour. Tertius Lydgate, on the other hand, was born into the upper class but since the beginning of the novel has descended the social scale due to his choice of profession as a surgeon, which at that time was not a profession suitable for a landed gentleman.

Within the traditionally designated convention of a heterosexual union, class plays a somewhat distinctive role. As illustrated in the previous chapter, during the period of the industrialisation, the middle class became increasingly aware of the sexual ambiguities found in the lower-middle or the lower class people. In *Middlemarch*, families from the lower-middle class have a much more lenient view of gender roles and sexual identities, thus, giving women a much more liberal view of marriage and a much larger room for voicing their opinion within the family. This can be seen in the Garths family and in the eventual union of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth. Unlike other couples, Mr and Mrs Garth's marriage and Fred's and Mary's courtship are filled with open communicative opportunities on both sides, resulting in less misunderstanding and displeasure.

On the other hand, Lydgate's marriage to Rosamond is different from that of Mr and Mrs Garth and that of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth. Although Rosamond is no less determined and self-willed than Mary Garth, her actions are restricted by her middle-class status, her education at Ms Lemon's finishing school, her moral upbringing, and her determination to climb the social ladder. In imitating people from the upper classes, she is contained within the limit of persuasion, motivation, and other outwardly passive means to influence her husband in order to get her way. She is always extremely cautious not to appear unladylike or improper.

Dorothea and Celia Brooke, however, are quite safely contained within their role of the modest women of the upper class. Dorothea's vivacity and tendency to impulsively speak out her mind is seen as strange and dangerous by her friends. Celia, for example, "used to think of [Dorothea] as the dangerous part of the family machinery" (865). Although Dorothea gets her way somewhat in her decision to marry Edward Casaubon, throughout the novel, her friends including her uncle, Sir James Chettam, the Cadwalladers and her sister, continuously dictate her decisions and usually consider her wishes as rash and unfeminine. Their expectation of her is to

enjoy her status of a lady of the landed gentry and enjoy activities such as riding, sitting around in her boudoir, and out strolling in the fresh air; in other words, to enjoy the upper class jollities of life without venturing into the “masculine” public sphere. Various ambitious achievements of hers are quickly checked by her patriarchal friends, until finally her vivacity fades away into a mere passive endurance of her state.

Difference between Generations

The difference between generations also contributes to the noticeable difference in class. As in Austen’s *Persuasion*, children in *Middlemarch* see in their parents a simple kind of vulgarity that hinders them from climbing the social ladder. This is illustrated clearly in the case of Rosamond Vincy. In *Persuasion*, the older generations, such as the Crofts and the elder Musgroves, are altogether more outspoken within their household than Mrs Bulstrode or Mrs Vincy in *Middlemarch*. The difference can be attributed to the Bulstrodes and the Vincys trying desperately to appear more genteel than they actually are. They adhere strictly to the social codes of the “separate spheres” and the ideology of female passivity. The 1830s was also a time where class difference and sexual arrangements were clearer cut than during the time of *Persuasion*. Nevertheless the difference in education between generations was still apparent.

Mrs Vincy, the daughter of a rich innkeeper, was in no way born into the upper-middle class yet she tries to keep up the appearances of her family as being so. Their family status is considered important in *Middlemarch* because Mr Vincy’s position as town mayor and their ties to the Bulstrodes, the family of a rich and influential banker. However, they are not as affluent as they seem; the Vincys are in debt and cannot afford to help their children out of financial crises. One of the ways they try to advance their social status is by giving their children the education of a “genteel’ youth”. Fred Vincy is sent to a gentlemen’s university while Rosamond is sent off to Mrs Lemon’s finishing school. In some ways, Eliot ridicules Rosamond’s education and the Vincys’ meaning of an “accomplished young lady”. This is clear when the narrator explains the nature of Rosamond’s education: “She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs. Lemon’s school, the chief school in the county, where the

teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female – even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage” (101). This is the kind of superficial education that middle-class families send their girls to in the hope that their marriage prospect will widen and their behaviour will be a ticket into a higher social class.

To that respect, Rosamond’s education backfires, making her ashamed of her mother’s outspokenness and her brother’s playfulness. This is exhibited when her mother speaks to Mr Lydgate about the possibility that his uncle, Sir Godwin, will give the married couple money. After the incident, Rosamond begins to realise that her family is not as cultivated as herself and needs to be kept away from Lydgate’s friends:

Mamma had a little filial lecture afterwards and was docile as usual. But Rosamond reflected that if any of those high-bred cousins who were bores should be induced to visit Middlemarch, they would see many things in her own family which might shock them. Hence it seemed desirable that Lydgate should by and by get some first-rate position elsewhere than in Middlemarch; and this could hardly be difficult in the case of a man who had a titled uncle and could make discoveries. (379)

Her education has made her look down on her family and their social position while it fills her with false hope and illusions about the life she is about to lead with Tertius Lydgate. In short, her education gives her discontentment in her present state but does not really prepare her for the real life ahead. This is in accordance to Brown’s explanation about the changes in social class in the nineteenth century: “Often in one generation, new families learn to dress, speak, and behave according to the customs of their new class” (13). Even Lydgate notices the difference between the two generations of the Vincys when he thinks to himself that “the tinge of inoffensive vulgarity in Mrs Vincy gave more effect to Rosamond’s refinement, which was beyond what Lydgate had expected” (168).

However, these social changes seem to have little implication on the the Garth

family. The Garths are affected less because they are in a lower social position than the Vincys and are content with themselves. They do not feel the need to climb the social scale so there is no need for their children to educate themselves in the form of unnecessary finishing schools like the one that Rosamond Vincy goes to. Their education is solely for the purpose of making a living. Both Mrs Garth and Mary Garth are therefore content with each other and are similar in the ways that they are outspoken, decisive and dare to take charge. Mary Garth has no reason to feel ashamed of her parents simply because she is not brought up to feel ashamed of her family's social position. Quite the contrary, she is brought up to be a proud daughter of a shrewd mother and an honest and hardworking father.

Different factors influence the way a relationship pans out. As will be illustrated in the next section, class plays a role in the shaping of relationships. Because gender demarcations are less strict in the lower-middle class, women have more say and power in a relationship compared to couples in the higher classes. The Vincys who are concerned with keeping up appearances, strictly adhere to sexual demarcations, prohibiting the Vincy ladies to outwardly oppose their husbands. Generation differences also affect relationships. With the separation of gender roles being clearer and stricter, women of the younger generation use a different form of empowerment. The generation of Rosamond Vincy use passivity as a tool of empowerment since they are restricted by their expected submissive femininity. Rosamond uses her position as the "weaker sex" to control Lydgate. Her methods of manipulation are tears, subtle influences and negation.

Couples and Relationships in *Middlemarch*

The Garths

The portrayal of Mr and Mrs Garth's relationship reflects the idea that Austen touches upon in *Persuasion* – the openness between couples and the crossing of ideal gender boundaries. Newton explains that "the influence of women on men is a significant theme in several of Eliot's novels" (137). *Middlemarch* greatly touches upon this theme. Mary Garth and Fred Vincy, having known each other since they were children, speak openly to each other, especially on Mary's part. She is not afraid to be critical of him and speak openly of her disapproval of his lifestyle and his choice

of career. She makes it clear that she refuses to marry him if he keeps up his frivolous lifestyle. Even though her social status is clearly lower than his, she is not afraid to speak out her mind nor is she shy of trying to lead him in the right direction. She clearly disapproves his father's choice for him to join the church and dares to say it. Mary's statement is repeated by Mr Farebrother: "You said, according to him, that he would be one of those ridiculous clergymen who help to make the whole clergy ridiculous. Really, that was so cutting that I felt a little cut myself" (432). Mary Garth is one of the strongest female characters in the novel. She is shown to be honest and outspoken. Unlike Rosamond, she is not shallow nor does she care about keeping social appearances when it contradicts with her sensibility:

"I could not love a man who is ridiculous," said Mary, not choosing to go deeper. "Fred has sense and knowledge enough to make him respectable, if he likes, in some good worldly business, but I can never imagine him preaching and exhorting, and pronouncing blessings, and praying by the sick, without feeling as if I were looking at a caricature. His being a clergyman would be only for gentility's sake, and I think there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile gentility." (550)

If it is not for Mary's strong disapproval of Fred entering the church and her contempt of his frivolous lifestyle, he would not have been able to choose a career that he would excel in or be happy with.

Eliot is perhaps suggesting that without the influence of women in men's lives their "negative egotistic tendencies", as K.M. Newton puts it, would have reigned and they would not turn out as good, both socially and personally (138). It is the power of women that influences men to make something of themselves. In Mary Garth's case, it is also her openness with Fred Vincy, something other couples, apart from her parents, lack thus making their marriage not as happy. There are no secrets between the young couple and Mary's strong character counteracts Fred's flimsiness. Caleb Garth, Mary's father also reflects on how she can make Fred better and steadier: "...if you and Fred get married' – here Caleb's voice shook just perceptibly – 'he'll be

steady and saving; and you've got your mother's cleverness, and mine too, in a woman's sort of way; and you'll keep him in order” (880).

The relationship between Mr and Mrs Garth are another example of how a woman can beneficially influence a man and keep him steady. Like Mary and Fred, Mr and Mrs Garth's relationship is an open one. They discuss all matters, including business, and Mrs Garth makes most of the decisions. Also, when Mr Garth puts the family into debt because of Fred's loan, it is Mrs Garth and Mary who pay the debt. It is clear from the novel that Mr Garth has great respect for his wife and often feels that she puts up with him a good deal and that she has more sense than her husband. Often, it is Mrs Garth that has to keep her husband in order and make him work for money.

Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate

Unlike Mary and Fred, Rosamond's and Lydgate's relationship is full of undisclosed feelings and misunderstandings. While Lydgate's point of view is expressed more often, making the readers sympathise with him, it is also his egotistical view of himself and chauvinistic view of women that eventually leads to his humbleness and his submission to Rosamond. On the other hand, Rosamond, despite her outward passivity, is very self-willed and determined to achieve whatever issues she sets her mind on. However, she is in no way as outspoken as Mary Garth or Mrs Garth. This is due partly to Rosamond's education and her belief in the “proper conduct” of a ladylike person. She is the daughter of an aspiring middle-class family who tries hard to keep up appearances by holding dinner parties, acquainting themselves with only the best Middlemarchers and giving their children the “best education” fit for a gentleman and a lady despite their financial difficulties.

Indeed, even in her passivity, and being “from morning till night her own standard of a perfect lady,” (177) Rosamond is accustomed to getting what she wants, even before she has been married to Lydgate. For example, when Mr Vincy tries to dissuade Rosamond's conviction to marry on the claims that Lydgate's “profession is a poor one” and Rosamond is not “fit to marry a poor man...,” “Rosamond looked down and played with her reticule. She was not a fiery young lady and had no sharp answers, but she meant to live as she pleased” (317). Again when Mr Vincy's

determination to end the engagement becomes even stronger after the reading of Mr Featherstone's will, Rosamond refuses to submit to her father's patriarchal order and tells her mother that she will handle her father in her own way. As the narrator explains:

Mrs. Vincy's belief that Rosamond could manage her papa was well founded. Apart from his dinners and his coursing, Mr. Vincy, blustering as he was, had as little of his own way as if he had been a prime minister: the force of circumstances was easily too much for him, as it is for most pleasure-loving florid men, and the circumstance called Rosamond was particularly forcible by means of that mild persistence which, as we know, enables a white, soft, living substance to make its way in spite of opposing rock (367).

It is clear that behind her passive and submissive façade, Rosamond knows very well the art of manipulation. However, she cannot be as outspoken and as outwardly forceful as Mary Garth. In explaining about Victorian middle-class women, Brown remarks:

Emulation of the gentry increasingly required them to cultivate themselves as ornaments....Industrious in sketching her landscapes, practicing her music and needle-work, and cultivating her appearance and dress, Rosamond keeps busy until her marriage...The 'perfect lady' of the Victorian Age was completely leisured, ornamental, and dependent, with no function except inspiring admiration and bearing children. (72)

Rosamond is the exact embodiment of Brown's description. Being the Victorian ornament as she is, Rosamond never breaks away from her outward passiveness, even after her disappointment in marriage. Even Farebrother, one of the most sensitive and intuitive person in the book, thinks that Rosamond's and Lydgate's marriage is a happy one: "It did not occur to him that Lydgate's marriage was not delightful; he

believed, as the rest did, that Rosamond was an amiable, docile creature, though he had always thought her rather uninteresting..." (681)

It is notable that the Lydgates hardly ever break into any emotional fights, at least not on Rosamond's side. Lydgate's bursts of anger are frequent, however, and despite the streams of tears here and there, Rosamond always remains calmly reserved on the outside, especially in the company of others. After the marriage has started to disintegrate due to their financial crisis and Lydgate's refusal to listen to Rosamond's suggestion, in one of the Vincys' usual evening parties, Rosamond is described as a "sculptured Psyche modeled to look another way"; while Lydgate betrays anxiety, Rosamond is "perfectly graceful and calm" (682).

While one tends to side with Lydgate on his solution to the couple's financial crisis and disapprove Rosamond's manipulative and secretive acts behind Lydgate's back, it is likely that Eliot's motive is to introduce the problem with female education popular among middle-class girls in the period. As the story shows, Rosamond is naïve and ill-equipped to deal with the problems that she will eventually face in life. In their initial courtship, Rosamond finds it unnecessary to

...imagine much about the inward life of the hero or of his serious business in the world; of course, he had a profession and was clever as well as sufficiently handsome, but the piquant fact about Lydgate was his good birth, which distinguished him from all Middlemarch admirers and presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people... (176).

Even after being warned by her father of Lydgate's poor profession and the fact that she will not have much dowry, Rosamond fails to recognise the plight she will be getting herself into. This is basically what Eliot has always argued about on the education of women. Because Rosamond is educated only to be refined and ornamental, she fails to see the consequence of marrying a poor man. Instead, she continues to live inside her fantasy.

While Rosamond's view of marriage is naïve, Lydgate, on the other hand, has

a condescending view towards women. He sees Rosamond as exactly what she has learnt to be, an “ornament”. To Lydgate, Rosamond has the kind of “intelligence” desirable in a woman – “polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence” (174). Upon seeing Rosamond for the first time, he decides that if he were to marry, “his wife would have that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music, that sort of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure delicate joys” (174). In short, Rosamond is determined to become an ornamental being and Lydgate is as determined to have one as a wife. This leads them to the tumultuous realisation after marriage that what they have imagined in the other person is not what he or she really is. This is contrasted with the relationship between Mary Garth and Fred Vincy, in which their companionship and, consequently, their courtship have always been open and straightforward. They know from the start what the other person’s positive and negative attributes are.

Indeed, Lydgate pays the price for his opinion that “one of the prettiest attitudes of the feminine mind” is “to adore a man’s pre-eminence without too precise a knowledge of what it consist[s] in” (285). After their marriage, Rosamond continues to live a life of extravagance – one that Lydgate clearly cannot afford. Lydgate, in turn, constantly gives in to her feminine persistence, and spoils her. Even after it is clear that they are on the verge of bankruptcy, Rosamond refuses to accept the circumstances and continues living her life as usual. Her naivety and the way she refuses to understand any of Lydgate’s affairs lead to the couple’s downfall. Although Lydgate is pitied after he is defeated by Rosamond’s “studied negation” and “inward opposition” to him, it is also apparent that he is, according to Lucie Armitt, “paying the price for his patriarchal view of women” (36). Ironically, Lydgate is attracted to women because of the “delicate poise of their health both in body and mind” (690) but he is ultimately mastered by Rosamond, who uses determined subordination as a tool for power. As Armitt further suggests, “the Lydgate marriage is thus a grotesque parody of the romantic ideal that requires the absorption of the woman’s life in the man’s” (36).

Lydgate’s preference for the passive and “ornamental” female is clear from his

initial dismissal of Dorothea. Upon their first meeting, Lydgate thinks Dorothea a “troublesome” kind of girl because “they are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste” (98). However, in the next paragraph, Eliot foreshadows Lydgate’s fatal marriage: “Lydgate was less ripe and might possibly have experience before him which would modify his opinion as to the most excellent things in woman” (98). He prefers Rosamond, of whom he thinks marriage to her will make little alteration to his life apart from hastening his academic researches because she will provide for him some pleasant relaxation after the serious labours of the day. However, as he and the other male characters in the novel will eventually realise, women play an important role in redirecting the courses of their lives, both positively and negatively (Newton 141). In Lydgate’s case, as Newton puts it, his “vulgarity of feeling entangles him with a woman who destroys him” (141). His insensitivity to women and the superficial ways he judges them leads him to marrying the ornamental Rosamond, who will eventually destroy his dream of making discoveries that will change the medical world.

In an 1855 review published in the *Leader*, comparing Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Women*, Eliot wrote:

Men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in women. The precious meridian years of many a man of genius have to be spent in the toil of routine, that an ‘establishment’ may be kept up for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room like a doll-Madonna in her shrine. (qtd. in Nazar 308)

This argument, I believe, is the precursor idea to the creation of the Lydgates’ marriage because Lydgate is indeed paying “a heavy price” for his egotistic and patriarchal view of women. At the end of the novel, although he is considered by most as a successful surgeon, he considers himself a failure because of his inability to control his life and his subordination to Rosamond’s will.

No matter how “ornamental” Rosamond is, it is clear that she has full control over the Lydgates’ future. Rosamond frequently goes behind Lydgate’s back to deal with business outside the home and even writes to his uncle asking for a loan. Even in small family issues, Rosamond refuses to submit to Lydgate’s pleas or suggestions. For example, while Rosamond is pregnant, Lydgate prohibits her to go out riding but Rosamond is “determined not to promise” because she “had that victorious obstinacy which never wasted its energy in impetuous resistance. What she liked to do was to her the right thing, and all her cleverness was direct to getting the means of doing it” (620). This way of thinking is the approach Rosamond has to all issues of her life. She is obstinate and she is certain of her rightfulness. She sees no use in arguments, not only because outward opposition is inconsistent with the middle-class ideal of femininity, but also because she views Lydgate as incompetent and irrational.

Ultimately, Rosamond’s frequent passive-aggressive attitude wears Lydgate down. Although outwardly comforting Rosamond after their financial blow, Lydgate secretly wonders at his “sense of powerlessness over Rosamond” (621). He soon comes to realise that his

[s]uperior knowledge and mental force, instead of being, as he had imagined, a shrine to consult on all occasions, was simply set aside on every practical question. He had regarded Rosamond’s cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. He was now beginning to find out what that cleverness was, what was the shape into which it had run as into a close network aloof and independent. (621)

Little by little, just as Rosamond realises her mistake about Lydgate, Lydgate also realises his mistake in idealising women. For Lydgate, “the shallowness of a watermixie’s soul may have a charm until she becomes didactic” (691) and didactic is what Rosamond has become in regards to their financial crisis and to Lydgate’s running of his clinic. However, his indignation grows less and less as time goes by and finally, he admits to himself, that “she had mastered him” (710).

In the end, Lydgate does not only realise his foolishness in the pleasure he

finds in a nymph-like, Rosamond, but he also comes to appreciate the inquisitiveness and sensitiveness of another kind – attributes he previously disregarded as ignorance. Dorothea, though unable to achieve anything on the scale of Saint Theresa of Ávila as she originally aims for, still plays a crucial role in the lives of the Lydgates. She becomes the sole believer and savior of the family. Her future is described as a sad diluted version of her former passion in which it is absorbed into her second marriage. However, unlike Dorothea, Rosamond is described as very happy with her second marriage. This is because Rosamond, from the very beginning, is content within her sexually designated role. She is the more pleased by it only because she has her own way in marriage and life and also in controlling her husband.

Women: The Benevolent Link

Not only are women empowered in their relationships with men in *Middlemarch*, they also act as an important link in the lives of those around them. It is historically accepted that women have played a major role in weaving social ties and keeping connections. Though usually unofficial and unrecorded, women play a huge role in influencing and manipulating both familial and social decisions made by men (Davidoff and Hall 279). This is illustrated in *Middlemarch*. Women play an important role in influencing the decision of men, especially concerning reconciliation, generosity and kinship.

Mrs Bulstrode, for instance, played a major role in influencing Mr Bulstrode to help the Vincys in their financial crisis. Also, because of the guilt that Mr Bulstrode feels toward Mrs Bulstrode for making her move out of *Middlemarch* away from her friends, he gives Fred the rights to the management of Stonecourt:

[H]e made no objection to Mr Garth's proposal, and there was also another reason why he was not sorry to give a consent which was to benefit one of the Vincy family. It was Mrs Bulstrode, having heard of Lydgate's debts, had been anxious to know whether her husband could not do something for poor Rosamond, and had been much troubled on learning from him that Lydgate's affairs were not easily remediable and that the wisest plan was to let them “take their

course". Mrs. Bulstrode had then said for the first time, "I think you are always a little hard towards my family, Nicholas. And I am sure I have no reason to deny any of my relatives." (736)

Another instance of female influence is when Sir James disowns Dorothea as his sister-in-law. It is Celia, who is then married to Sir James, who finally talks him into seeing her again and accepting her into the family:

Such being the bend of Celia's heart, it was inevitable that Sir James should consent to a reconciliation with Dorothea and her husband. Where women love each other, men learn to smother their mutual dislike. Sir James never liked Ladislav, and Will always preferred to have Sir James's company mixed with another kind; they were on a footing of reciprocal tolerance, which was made quite easy only when Dorothea and Celia were present. (889)

Women play a large role in keeping ties and friendships. They also have a lot of influence on their male counterparts. Not only do they serve as a benevolent link for those around them, they are also able to influence their family to what they deem right by using means of passive persuasions.

The Exception – Dorothea Brooke

Critiques on Dorothea Brooke

Although many of the female characters in *Middlemarch* are strong and assertive, especially if they are in the lower-middle class, in which they are not as pressured by the society which continuously dictates the role of women and restricts them within the private and the domestic sphere, Dorothea Brooke, one of the main focusses of the novel, is an exception. Many critics have dismissed Eliot's genius as a mere anti-feminist work and the acquiescence to the workings of patriarchal society which tries to contain women with "ardour" and "passion" within their designated roles of a passive wife and a mother. The ending of the novel, in which Dorothea remarries Will Ladislav, is severely criticised by many critics as Eliot's failure to pull

through with her original portrayal of Dorothea's passionate longings for a future similar to Saint Theresa's. Her "spiritual grandeur" has, by the end of the novel, diminished to a mere shadow behind her new husband, Will Ladislaw.

Blake lists criticisms that were made against Eliot on how she fails as a feminist writer. One of the earlier critics viewed Dorothea not as a feminine character at all, but a masculine version of a woman, and therefore, Eliot was not seen as voicing against society's restriction of the female lot but merely depicting an anomaly of the male character (285). In 1873, Frederick Napier Broome wrote that *Middlemarch* was not after all "some special impeachment of the fitness of the present female lot" because "unsatisfied ambitions are masculine rather than female ills" (qtd. in Blake 285). Blake illustrates another explanation of Dorothea's final faith in the criticism made by John Halperin in 1974. Halperin views the ending as a happy one. It is Dorothea's discovery of her own womanhood and needs. He explains that "[w]hat she really needs as an object of devotion is a genuine husband and a family;" the ending is a "discovery of her own nature and her real needs as a woman and a wife" (qtd. in Blake 286). Blake goes on to list this type of criticism of *Middlemarch's* ending – feminist critics view the novel a failure because of Dorothea's marriage while other critics uphold the ending as a happy one due to Dorothea's realisation of her real calling: womanhood and motherhood.

Lee R. Edwards, in "Women, Energy, and *Middlemarch*" (1972), discusses the energy in the characters of the novels, especially Dorothea Brooke. However, like many critics, she sees Dorothea's faith as the novel's "final failure" (223). In explaining the history of strong and forcible women in novels, she explains that women with power are always condemned or viewed as "uncontainable" because this power, more often than not, lies in their sexuality. Edwards explains that women like Dorothea "who is endowed with energy which is not primarily sexual and who, not wishing to hurt others nonetheless aspires to live, and more importantly, to work in that world which is normally called 'man's', is diminished even as she is created" (227). Edwards continues to identify these types of female characters in novels: "She is made, and thus seen, as either amusing, because indelicate or naïve, or alternatively, pitiable and finally contemptible because of her confused assumptions about her own nature and that of the world" (227). Thus, she concludes that the ending is a "lesson

Dorothea Brooke Casaubon learns” (227). Finally, her naivety is checked by reality, she learns that she cannot possibly achieve her dreams and so she finally submits to marrying Will Ladislaw, accepting her role of a wife and nurturer. K.M. Newton, in *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist: A Study of the Philosophical Structure of her Novels* (1984) has similar notions. He writes in favour of Dorothea’s energy and temperament, and views that her final marriage to Ladislaw is due to the controlling force of society. He admits that many critics “generally” regard “the relationship between Dorothea and Ladislaw...as one of the artistic weaknesses of *Middlemarch*, primarily on the grounds that Ladislaw is too idealised or too lightweight to be worthy of Dorothea” (134).

Despite many criticisms against the ending of *Middlemarch* and against Eliot’s decision to have Dorothea marry Will Ladislaw, this thesis will argue that it is probably Eliot’s intention to portray social controlling and numbing forces on women rather than her conformity to social norms of femininity. Eliot’s goal is probably to portray the domination of the individual by society and how society is much more powerful than an inspiring individual can defy. Dorothea’s final submission to her domestic role which puts her in a position impossible to achieve her goals of building a communion, is Eliot’s way of illustrating to her readers the sad circumstances women were forced into every day. At the expense of her main character, Eliot clearly uses Dorothea as a tool to show how women are unfairly made to submit to the shaping of society and how Dorothea, a character with so much “ardour” finally submits to her expected role and disappears behind the “ardent public man”, Will Ladislaw.

Dorothea Brooke

While other female characters in *Middlemarch*, who are from the same generation as Dorothea, have more or less power in both their courtship and marriage, as illustrated earlier, Dorothea, in both of her marriages, has considerably less power than these women. One of the reasons could be attributed to her being an upper-class woman. She is more confined in terms of her social circle. She is more restricted in terms of mobility and will. As already discussed, Dorothea’s social circle is limited to those that her uncle deems fit; the Chettams, Casaubon, and the Cadwalladers.

Having a limited group of people to socialise with and along with the lack of education, Dorothea makes a mistake in marrying Casaubon.

Another reason that Dorothea cannot gain as much power as other female characters in the novel is because she yearns for more than what society expects from her. From the beginning, she would not merely submit to the happiness and contentment of being a good wife. As naive as she is, “her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there” (6). Moreover, Dorothea longs for a key to help her understand the rules that governs society around her. Newton explains that Dorothea “desires a form of knowledge and sense of truth which will be superior to subjective feeling” (125). This desire stems from the fact that Dorothea does not trust her own instinct and passionate outbursts because she is fully aware of her lack of education and understanding of the world due to her limited knowledge and experience. Therefore, distrusting her instincts, Dorothea longs “for a binding theory which could bring her own life and doctrine into strict connexion [sic] with that amazing past, and give the remotest sources of knowledge some bearing on her actions” (90). Further evidence which shows that Dorothea views her strong emotion, a quality normally associated with women, as a weakness is when she felt “humiliated to find herself a mere victim of feeling, as if she could know nothing except through that medium” (212). To her, society’s association of women with passion and feeling is something to be ashamed of. For Dorothea, in order to understand the grasp of order within the world, she needs to be objective:

Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly. As it was, she constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance: how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory? (66)

Because of her lack of classical and “masculine” education, she cannot explicitly express what it is that she would like to achieve, just that she wants to achieve something on a “grand scale”. To her, the needed sources of authority and rationalism that will allow her to achieve her unclear goals are hidden in the knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and in the study of antiquity (Mackie 55). Even her dress and her self-denial attitude are of archaic manners.

It may seem surprising to some that while Dorothea yearns for the type of masculine knowledge that will allow her to understand the world surrounding her, she decides to achieve that goal through marriage. However, it becomes understandable when one considers the social expectations from women. The only way to improve her position, she, along with most women during that period, is to marry. Marriage is the only path she knows off. So in her decision to marry, instead of choosing the younger and more eligible Sir James Chettam, Dorothea chooses to marry an older man who she deems wiser, more knowledgeable and worldly. The only way for a woman like Dorothea to achieve her expectations, is through someone else, a male. No matter how high her aspirations are, she only expects to be the supporter of somebody else’s epic achievement and not the actual achiever of it. Because of her naivety, she believes that in marrying the old bachelor, Casaubon, she will be able to make a difference to the world by being his help, like the daughters of John Milton and their contributions to his work. Dorothea herself explains, “...even when [she] was a little girl, ...it always seemed to [her] that the use [she] should like to make of [her] life would be to help someone who did great works so that his burden might be lighter” (388).

Considering Dorothea in this light, it is only natural that she should be attracted to Casaubon. His life’s aim, *Key to All Mythologies*, is to give a meaningful and complete explanation to the fragmented and incoherent world of the nineteenth century. The goal of his work is to explain, in the sum of his book, how scientific and technological advances fit into the concept of Christianity, God and the Bible, and they, in turn, sum up into one coherent religious truth: “all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed. Having once mastered the true position and taken a firm footing there, the vast field of mythical constructions became intelligible, nay, luminous with the

reflected light of correspondences” (23). Casaubon’s ambitions are compared to one of the greatest creators of synthesis, Thomas Aquinas. He poses for a painting of Aquinas when in Rome. He defends Aquinas when Mr Brooke comments that his works are outdated. Mrs Cadwallader also openly refers to him as Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, Dorothea’s expectation from her marriage with Casaubon is to be given a glimpse into and hopefully understand the “masculine” wealth of knowledge that before now, she was denied access to. In her expectation to help Casaubon with his life’s work, she will also be able to view the world from an objective and more understanding point of view rather than the subjective view she is so ashamed of.

Dorothea’s doomed marriage can be anticipated from Casaubon’s marriage proposal letter to Dorothea. Like Lydgate, Casaubon views Dorothea as an instrument which will help him achieve his ends:

Our conversations have, I think, made sufficiently clear to you the tenor of my life and purposes: a tenor unsuited, I am aware, to the commoner order of minds. But I have discerned in you an elevation of thought and a capability of devotedness which I hitherto not conceived to be compatible either with the early bloom of youth or with those graces of sex that may said at once to win and to confer distinction when combined, as they notably are in you, with the mental qualities above indicated. (44)

Casaubon’s wish to marry Dorothea is not because he loves her, but because he deems her suitable for him. Her “devotedness” is useful in helping him complete his master project. As Marks puts it, “upon closer inspection, it seems that Casaubon wants a highly educated dog...” (31) Dorothea meets his specifications and this idea does not occur to Dorothea, as the narrator questions, “[h]ow could it occur to her to examine the letter, to look at it critically as a profession of love?” (45) However, as the chapter has earlier shown, Dorothea can also be seen to view Casaubon as a tool to achieve her goal. She expects that through him, she will be able to grasp the full extent of the world surrounding her in a systematic and unified way.

Casaubon, though, is no Thomas Aquinas, a fact that Dorothea is quick to realise after their honeymoon in Rome. With the rapidly changing and advancing British society, they are no longer in a period in which one can encapsulate the world into one unified truth. As Newton points out, even if Casaubon managed to finish his *Key to All Mythologies*, it would only create a “closed system, incapable of being either proved or disproved, and so able to appeal only to the converted” (129). This belief is conveyed by the narrator when he/she comments that his theory is “a method of interpretation which was not tested by the necessity of forming anything which had sharper collisions than an elaborate notion of Gog and Magog: it was as free from interruption as a plan for threading the stars together” (509). In short, Casaubon’s project may seem elaborate and magnificent in theory, but it is just an illusion and implausible in practice.

Dorothea’s expectation of an ideal marriage with Casaubon comes abruptly to an end when she recognises that her hope in the existence of a religious order in the world is misconceived. In Rome, Dorothea recognises that her narrow religious principles cannot conciliate with the disorder of the world. Her narrow education, consisting of outdated history books, such as Herodotus, and narrow religious books that are considered appropriate for young women such as Pascal and Keble’s *Christian Year*, do not prepare her for the world at large. Dorothea’s restricted world view does not allow her to comprehend the complexity and the juxtaposition of Rome as an ancient empire and Rome as a papal city. She is overwhelmed by it for she only has the notions of “a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meager Protestant histories and on art chiefly of the hand-screen sort...” (206). To her, Rome is unintelligible – a mixture of superstition and religion, by-gone past and present grandeur.

The crisis she suffers in Rome along with the revelation of her unhappiness and her disillusionment with marriage life allow her to view Casaubon’s works critically. This critical view of Casaubon’s ambition is also further enhanced when she is informed by Will that Casaubon’s research is already outdated and far behind studies in theology done by German scholars. Her awakening to the chaos and the incongruity of Rome and the inducement by Will to Casaubon’s flaw make her lose faith in both Casaubon and his works. It further undermines her once firm religious

world-view. However, if all these aspects have not come into play and Dorothea's faith in Casaubon's superiority has not been shaken, "her tottering faith would have become firm again" (230). Nevertheless, she eventually realises that the fragments of worldly and theological knowledge that he tries to piece together is futile and irrelevant. To her, it is "a theory which was already withered in the bud like an elfin child" (509). She finally realises what her friends have known from the start; Casaubon's entire life has "shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalment of knowledge" (210). Even before his premature death, Casaubon has been plagued with writer's block and as seen throughout the novel, his hours of work are uncreative and unproductive (Mackie 57).

After the uneventful but enlightening honeymoon in Rome, Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon proves a numbing of the sensation. Dorothea spends her time in fear of displeasing her husband while at the same time suppressing her emotions and anger towards her husband, of which she is ashamed of. The only way she knows to proceed is to continue living with her husband and devotes her time to keeping him content and happy even though she knows that with him, she can never gain the knowledge or the fulfillment that lures her into the marriage in the first place. In a way, Dorothea's naivety is understandable. As Hina Nazar explains in her article, "Philosophy in the Bedroom: *Middlemarch* and the Scandal of Sympathy" (2002), *Middlemarch* and Victorian society are "dictated by the understanding that marriage is the only real site for exercise of female agency" (306). Therefore, unlike Rosamond, Dorothea's marriage can be viewed more as a restriction than an opportunity. In marrying Casaubon, Dorothea is attempting to circumvent that demarcation. However, her reaction to her disappointment in marriage is natural. It is simply to make the best of her situation by acting according to the norms and expectations of society. In some ways, this period in Dorothea's life, I believe, is not unlike Jane's life during Lowood in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. All the passionate desires are repressed into the inner self of the characters. Both Jane Eyre and Dorothea Brooke are transported into a period of their lives when they are stunned into passivity and tolerance. Jane Eyre, as I have illustrated in the previous chapter, struggles between extremes of passion and restraint, sensuality and rationality. As she moves from place to place, she switches from one to another different extreme until at

last she finds a middle ground in which she reigns as the female of her household and as a controlling force over her once dominating husband. Similarly, Dorothea switches from religious and passionate ardour at Tipton Grange to a restraint and suppressive life at Lowick Estate where she lives in fear of displeasing her husband and represses her longings deep within her soul. Dorothea has always desired a fuller selfhood but succumbs to the feminine role that is deemed suitable and acceptable by society. She surrenders to “self-abnegation” and wrongly views it as a means to “self-gratification” (Marks 33). Amidst the “self-abnegation”, Dorothea still once in a while shows signs of her former self, like Jane Eyre did whilst she is emotionally stunted at Lowood:

Dorothea had gathered emotion as she went on and had forgotten everything except the relief of pouring forth her feelings unchecked, an experience once habitual with her, but hardly ever present since her marriage, which had been a perpetual struggle of energy with fear. (415)

Even though Dorothea has not lost her individuality and sensuality, they are constantly repressed and subdued because of her marriage to Casaubon.

Towards the end of their marriage, although Dorothea still lives in perpetual fear of displeasing and causing harm to her husband, his disregard of Will Ladislav evokes a new feeling in her. After years of living in a stunned state of self-repression, Dorothea’s former ardour has slowly begun to reemerge. Strong feelings from childhood have begun to creep back into existence. After, realising her position of impotence and her inability to do anything useful for anyone, except helping her husband, she sees in Will Ladislav, and then again in Lydgate, a cause that she can be beneficial to. In Will Ladislav, she believes it is unfair that his mother was cut off “from the family protection and inheritance only because she had chosen a man who was poor!” (396) She strongly feels that Will Ladislav has a right to a portion of what will be her inheritance. When she tries to persuade her husband about her monetary plans for Will, her proposal is received with cool silence and a reproachful reprimand. Because of his severe jealousy of Will Ladislav, he becomes blind to his

wife's well-meaning action and because of this, Dorothea once again starts to resent her husband and his flaws. Unlike the Garths or Mary Garth and Fred Vincy's relationships, the lack of understanding and openness in the Dorothea's relationship is taking its toll on her:

And just as clearly in the miserable light she saw her own and her husband's solitude – how they walked apart so that she was obliged to survey him. If he had drawn her towards him, she would never have surveyed him – never have said, 'is he worth living for?' but would have felt him simply a part of her own life. Now she said bitterly, 'It is his fault, not mine.' In the jar of her whole being, pity was overthrown. Was it her fault that she had believed in him – had believed in his worthiness? And what, exactly, was he? She was able enough to estimate him – she who waited on his glances with trembling and shut her best soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits, that she might be petty enough to please him. In such a crisis as this, some women begin to hate. (455)

Still, Dorothea submits to her husband's wishes and never brings forth the subject again.

Another change for her to pursue her ambition of servitude to mankind arises when Lydgate asks for her donation to aid his fever hospital. It gives her the opportunity to help others and helps dissolve her feeling of uselessness. This is clearly seen in her reply to Lydgate's request: "I am sure I can spare two hundred a year for a grand purpose like this. How happy you must be to know things that you feel sure will do great good! I wish I could awake with that knowledge every morning" (467). Her small act of charity affords her a sense of usefulness and purpose.

Although Casaubon gives her permission to do what she likes with her money, he does not care or share her enthusiasm. Dorothea, always trying to please her husband and adhere to his wishes, never has the pleasure of indulging in what she takes delight in: "[t]he thing that she liked, that she spontaneously cared to have,

seemed to be always excluded from her life, for if it was only granted and not shared by her husband, it might as well have been denied” (505). Casaubon realises her disappointment in him even though she tries her best to please him. For Casaubon, she has become the worst kind of wife he could have wished for, one that penetrates and sees through his constant fear of failure and impotence:

[I]t seemed like a betrayal: the young creature who had worshipped him with perfect trust had quickly turned into the critical wife, and early instances of criticism and resentment had made an impression which no tenderness and submission afterwards could remove. Through his suspicious interpretation Dorothea’s silence now was a suppressed rebellion; a remark from assertion of conscious superiority; her gentle answers had an irritating cautiousness in them; and when she acquiesced it was a self-approved effort of forbearance. (446)

Nevertheless, Casaubon constantly tries to control her actions and her future. Knowing full well her loss of love and loss of faith in him, he tries to contain her even in death. Realising his impending death, he passes on to Dorothea the burden that even if he lived forever, he would not likely finish. He asks her to promise that she will continue his work for him. Dorothea is shocked by the request and knows that if she acquiesces, her whole life will be toiled away in a never-ending task that she knows is futile and fruitless. In this sense, Dorothea’s view of *Key to All Mythologies* is more accurate than her husband’s; when she envisions a life tied down by that futile work, she sees an endless struggle and bondage:

The poor child had become altogether unbelieving as to the trustworthiness of that key which had made the ambition and the labour of her husband’s life. It was not wonderful that, in spite of her small instruction, her judgement in this matter was truer than his, for she looked with unbiassed comparison and healthy sense at probabilities on which he had risked all his egoism. And now she

pictured to herself the days, and months, and years which she must spend in sorting what might be called shattered mummies and fragments of a tradition... (508)

Up to this point, although Dorothea detests what Casaubon asks of her, she has lost all hope and decides to “say ‘yes’ to her own doom” because “she was too weak, too full of dread at the thought of inflicting a keen-edge blow on her husband to do anything but submit completely” (511). Her former passions for the greater good are completely obliterated by her spiritually oppressive marriage. Dorothea fears for the time when she will be officially committed to a dead man’s project. She forestalls the promise for as long as she can.

In Dorothea’s marriage to Casaubon, Eliot displays how conventional marriage, society’s shaping of women, and the social expectation of the feminine ideal can emotionally tear down a person. Stuck in a marriage, Dorothea is unable to do anything that goes against society’s idealism of femininity. Although exceptionally full of vigour and passion, her childhood teachings and social shaping do not afford her the strength to reject what she knows is wrong. To her, she has no choice but to suffer under the binding promises entreated by her husband: “...she dreaded going to the spot where she foresaw that she must bind herself to a fellowship from which she shrank” (512). However, as providence would have it, Dorothea is saved from making her fatal promise because Casaubon dies before her word can be given.

Similar to Jane Eyre when she steps out of the restrictive Lowood into the passionate Thornfield Hall, Dorothea regains her former passion and ardour. She becomes emotionally free from the prison of Casaubon. After the initial shock, Dorothea once again decides to take her own life into her own hands. Instead of becoming the grieving widow, Dorothea decides to go back to Lowick Estate and sets things in order, including organising her husband’s documents and overseeing the well-being of the residence in her parish. Now that she is left with a large amount of inheritance, she intends to make good use of it and better the lives of those around her. Despite the protests of her friends who want her to stay within their protection, she is determined to go back to Lowick Estate and rule over it: “There are so many

things which I ought to attend to. Why should I sit here idle?" (523) Her determination and detachment to her late husband is further fueled by her knowledge of his codicil to revoke her inheritance if she ever marries Will Ladislaw:

The grasp had slipped away. Bound by a pledge given from the depths of her pity, she would have been capable of undertaking a toil which her judgement whispered was vain for all uses except that consecration of faithfulness which is a supreme use. But now her judgement, instead of being controlled by a dutiful devotion, was made active by the embittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion. The living, suffering man was no longer before her to awaken her pity; there remained only the retrospect of painful subjection to a husband whose thoughts had been lower than she had believed, whose exorbitant claims for himself had even blinded his scrupulous care for his own character and made him defeat his own pride by shocking men of ordinary honour. (525)

For the first time since their marriage, Dorothea is able to see into the mind of her husband – his jealousy, his fear and his lack of confidence. Her husband no longer has lasting control over her life.

The two years of marriage almost change her attitude toward life. Dorothea acknowledges this when she compares her childhood years to her life as a married woman. This is shown when she explains to Lydgate: "Two years ago I had no notion of...the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak. I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I like, but I have almost given it up..." (578) She has not given up though, and this is seen in the symbolic scene in which Dorothea takes off her mourning cap. Celia remarks that after taking the cap off, Dorothea seems like herself again "in more ways than one...[she] spoke up just as [she] used to do when anything was said to displease [her]" (583).

The death of Casaubon wakes Dorothea up a little from the trance-like state of submission that she was in during her marriage. As soon as she gets back to Lowick Manor, she starts to settle her late husband's documents and, notably, disregards the "Synoptical Tabulation" that her husband left her. Even though she realises that her husband expects her to revise and most likely to have it published, she refuses to adhere to his final request, especially because the request was not binding or part of the will. Instead, she writes a superstitious note to him, saying that she will no longer be stuck under his dominance. Moreover, Casaubon's death gives her back some powers over her own life and gives her the decision to influence or help others. Notably, she makes some changes to her estate. She appoints Mr Farebrother to take over her parish instead of the uptight Mr Tyke who is favoured by Mr Bulstrode, a friend of her uncle's. The appointment of Mr Farebrother comes through because of Lydgate and because of Dorothea's desperate need to help others. She is prepared to overlook Farebrother's biggest flaw – his gambling habit; Lydgate attributes his shortcomings to his lack of money and his need to support his widowed mother, his spinster aunt and sister, and not to mention his interest in entomology. Another reason Dorothea gives the position to Farebrother is that she realises she would be making a significant difference in Farebrother's life, hence allowing her to feel worthwhile. Next, she appoints Mr Garth to help her take care of her estate and the people living within it.

At this point, Dorothea seems to be filled with invigorating feelings and plans. She takes up her plans of building cottages and communes – a plan and a vigour that she has lost since her marriage. Her enthusiasm in the plan is clear to all. Once again, released from her troubled and restrictive marriage, Dorothea is free to dream and set her own goals in life. Fully realising that a religiously self-restrictive life is not the answer, Dorothea starts to have plans of her own and even starts to ride horses again – an activity she previously enjoys but renounces. Even her speech has evidently changed, from a mild and uncertain way of speaking into one with eagerness and energy:

“I have delightful plans. I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it, and make a little colony where everybody should work,

and all the work should be done well. I should know every one of the people and be their friend. I am going to have great consultations with Mr. Garth; he can tell me almost everything I want to know.” (583)

Even though Dorothea’s plan may sound a little naïve and optimistic, we do know that when she sets her mind to it, her abilities and sensibilities are actually better than she thought them to be. Classical knowledge, like the one Casaubon is learned in, is not necessary for one to become a rooted and successful philanthropist. We know that Dorothea’s plans are not dreamlike and childish as her uncle, her sister, or even Sir James Chettam suppose. Sir James continues to build Dorothea’s cottages in his own parish even after he stops courting her. Although at first he is only interested in her cottage plans because he aims to marry her, after she becomes engaged, he realises that he enjoys her companion and that her plans are actually good, sensible and will improve the lives of his tenants. Dorothea’s ability is reaffirmed by one of the novel’s most hard-working and sensible man, Caleb Garth. After a day of accompanying Sir James and Caleb Garth on a ride over their two estates and sharing her plans with Caleb, she greatly impresses him for her head for “business”, so much so that he repeats his observations to his wife:

‘Most uncommon!’ repeated Caleb. ‘She said a thing I often used to think myself when I was a lad – ‘Mr. Garth, I should like to feel, if I lived to be old, that I had improved a great piece of land and built a great many good cottages, because the work is of a healthy kind while it is being done, and after it is done, men are the better for it.’ (585)

Even though Caleb thinks that Dorothea’s projects and yearnings are “most uncommon in a woman,” it is clear from his conversations with his wife that he admires her ability and her philanthropic cause.

However, Caleb’s exchange with his wife is ominous in the way he refers to her abilities as “uncommon” because she is a woman. On the contrary, if she was a

young man, like his future intern, Fred Vincy, he will probably have encouraged her even further on her projects and help her achieve them. Brown suggests in his study that in a way, women from the upper class have more liberty than women from the middle or lower-middle class because of their monetary independence (72). This is not the case for Dorothea, or for any woman who wishes to use their possessions in endeavours other than what is socially expected from their sex. They would be dissuaded by their friends:

“I have seven hundred a year of my own fortune, and nineteen hundred a year that Mr. Casaubon left me, and between three and four thousand of ready money in the bank. I wished to raise money and pay it off gradually out of my income which I don't want, to buy land with and found a village which should be school of industry; but Sir James and my uncle have convinced me that the risk would be too great.” (813)

Relatively speaking, Dorothea is now an economically independent individual. However, she is closely guarded by her friends who constantly discuss her future, including her marriage prospect, her suitable home, and her “plans”. Scenes are portrayed in which Mrs Cadwallader muses over Dorothea's prospect husband or when Sir James Chettam demands that Mr Brooke rid Middlemarch of Will Ladislaw to protect Dorothea from the backlash of Casaubon's codicil.

For a while, Dorothea is given the illusion that she can really achieve her dream. She even takes a trip with her uncle and Sir James in order to inspect a piece of land that she intends to purchase and start her commune, build her school and follow her dream. In the end, however, she comes back disappointed. Her uncle and her brother-in-law dissuade her from continuing her plan attributing to the reasons that it is an endeavour too much for a woman to undertake and that it will not be a wise investment. Dorothea soon comes to realise that even as an independent widow, she cannot do as she pleases. Free from the restrictive duty of a wife, other controlling forces are pushed upon her, forces that someone like Dorothea is not raised to be able to defy. Even her closest friend and sister, Celia, who knows well

her longings and passions, persuades her to submit to the patriarchal barriers around her:

“Now, Dodo, do listen to what James says,” said Celia, “else you will be getting into a scrape. You always did, and you always will, when you set about doing as you please. And I think it is a mercy now after all that you have got James to *think for you* (my emphasis). He lets you have your plans, only he hinders you from being taken in.” (782)

Celia claims that Sir James lets Dorothea have her own way throughout the novel. He allows her an amount of freedom as an independent woman; however, he dissuades all of her plans that are considered by her time “unfeminine”.

Another occasion for Dorothea’s pursuant cause comes up when Mr Bulstrode decides to leave the town because of the scandal that arises up against him. Mr Bulstrode asks Dorothea to take over his place in financially supporting the fever hospital managed by Lydgate. Dorothea, feeling that she already has too much money on her hands, seizes the opportunity to support the hospital and support Lydgate. Now that she cannot build her own philanthropic cause of her own design, she settles for a lesser alternative – granting monetary help to support a good cause that aims to help the poor. She brings herself to become content with the passive position she is put in. As Davidoff and Hall state, widows and women make up a large part of the money circulating social causes within the period, they often give away their money to the sick, the poor, and religious causes (279). This is what Dorothea settles for – a behind-the-scene benefactor. However, once again, her plans are ruined when Lydgate submits to Rosamond’s demands and also decides to leave Middlemarch to avoid his embarrassing ties to the Bulstrodes. In leaving, Lydgate will turn over the responsibility of the hospital and it will no longer need Dorothea’s help. The fever hospital, too, proves a futile project on Dorothea’s part. Without other options or ways to pursue her philanthropic wish, Dorothea submits to the social shaping, sexual limitations and the constant waves of people trying to control her – Sir James Chettam, Edward Casaubon, Mr Brooke, Celia, Mrs Cadwallader and the

others. To her friends, her ideas for “plans” and “work” are absurd for a woman and therefore, not plausible or sensible. Even Will Ladislav, who adores and idolises her, does not mention or support her on her plans. It is as if he simply disregards and ignores it. To him, the Dorothea he idolises and puts high up on a pedestal is not the Dorothea with a head for “business” and “plans” but rather, a maiden in distress who is stuck in a dead-end marriage with a person he despises. She is someone to be saved rather than encouraged, to adore rather than obey.

In the end, Dorothea submits to society’s expectation from a young widow – to remarry. She accepts Will Ladislav’s courtship, and in a final act of defiance that appalls all her friends, marries him. In marrying Will, Dorothea must act against the will of the world. However, she finds words and strength from another source that she can turn to in the midst of a difficult society where her actions and thoughts are not universally accepted (Marks 37). She is convinced as to the correctness of her actions. Ever since she was a child, she has disagreed with the notion of how women are treated with regards to issues concerning marriage, their individual decisions, and financial independence. Liberated and awoken from her stunting marriage with Casaubon, her passionate ardour and her strong will return. After failing in almost all endeavours, there is only one other option she knows off – marriage to a person she loves despite the fact that everyone around her disapproves him and their union.

Both Will and Dorothea are passionate people with energetic and idealistic plans that are unlikely to be achieved in the nineteenth century. Dorothea wants to develop her land and build a commune from which people can benefit. On the other hand, Will wishes to fight for social equality and political rights. However, as Marks argues, when they are together, “they temper and hone their ideals, which then become translated into useful actions in their worlds” (37). To an extent, this is true, but both their ideals are not suited for reality. Dorothea’s ideas and plans, which are less likely to be accomplished within the sexually restrictive society they live in, give way to Will’s future and career. Dorothea vanishes behind the public figure of Will Ladislav and his social career. As Sherry L. Mitchell argues in her article, “Saint Teresa and Dorothea Brooke: The Absent Road to Perfection in *Middlemarch*” (1997), “...despite her nobility and talented character, however, Dorothea remains imprisoned within the field of power relations dictated by the discourses of

femininity” (qtd. in Marks 38).

In the end, Dorothea ends up saving everyone around her except herself. Before disappearing behind the façade of a mother and a wife of an “ardent public man”, she beneficially affects numerous people. Her benevolence towards others causes her to help all those in need that she knows off. Upon hearing that Mr Farebrother has financial troubles, she appoints him the vicar of her parish. She is the only person who sticks by Lydgate in times of troubles while others, including Rosamond, have deserted him. She believes in him while others suspect him of taking bribes. Not only does she pay off his debt to Bulstrode, she tries to help clear his name and also talks to Rosamond, upon Lydgate’s request, in order to patch up their troubled marriage. However, it should be noted that even her innocent gesture of benevolence is at first hindered by her male friends. She is dissuaded from immediately contacting Lydgate after finding out about the scrape he is in:

“Surely, a woman is bound to be cautious and listen to those who know the world better than she does,” said Sir James with his little frown, “whatever you do in the end, Dorothea, you should really keep back at present and not volunteer any meddling with this Bulstrode business.” (782)

But it is her regards for the well-being of those around her that finally pushes Dorothea into doing something for Lydgare:

Dorothea waited for his arrival with eager interest. Though in deference to her masculine advisers...the hardship of Lydgate's position was continually in her mind, and when Bulstrode applied to her again about the hospital, she felt that the opportunity was come to her which she had been hindered from hastening. (808)

When the chance arises, Dorothea seizes the opportunity that allows her to make herself useful and because she is thinking of another fellow human being, she has the courage to ignore her friends’ warning.

Finally, by marrying Will Ladislaw, she saves him from his random wanderings and gives him direction and life goals. After marrying Dorothea, he stops dabbling in every artistic pursuit he could think of and focusses on his career as a public man. Before meeting Dorothea, Will wanders aimlessly around Europe practicing his hands on every artistic and philosophical doings that he finds niche. The conversation between Dorothea and Will in Rome about how futile and outdated Casaubon's works are also shows that Will only understands history and philosophy on a shallow premise. He cannot elaborate on the German thinkers he boasts of because he has not read them but only heard of them. This shows that before marrying Dorothea, Will's life is a continuous journey of aimless pursuits and shallow notions.

Dorothea's trials and failures, however, cause her to fall back on the only thing she knows – marriage. This time she marries a man that understands her passion and feeling of uselessness, even though he does not help her to pursue her dreams. Despite her passion and idealistic notions, by the end of the novel, Dorothea is once again restricted in a domestic role, giving wifely help to her husband. Compared to Eliot's other novels, *Middlemarch* by far proves the most powerful domination of an individual by society (Newton 134).

Some may argue that Eliot gave Dorothea Brooke the happy ending that Eliot herself experienced. Eliot ignored the disapproval of her friends and family and lived a happy life with Lewes, a married man. Similarly, Dorothea Brooke disregards her friends' hatred of Will and marries him because she loves him. However, the difference is, Eliot did not have to throw away her dream or her career to live with Lewes. For Dorothea, it is the multiple disappointments regarding her aspirations that make her accept Will's courtship. If she had her way in building her commune and was able to educate and better the lives of others around her, she would most likely not give up her inheritance. She would continue to use her fortune to help others – that is where her happiness and her true longings lie.

Eliot probably understood more than anyone else how Dorothea feels when she wants to be intellectually lifted by marriage to Casaubon. After their elopement, Eliot and Lewes travelled to Germany to pursue Lewes' research on Goethe. Lewes was a well-known intellectual by his contemporaries and her union with him allowed

her the pleasure of studying and pursuing her works as well. Dorothea, on the other hand, is less fortunate and Eliot probably made it so because she realised how hard and unlikely it is for a woman during her time, let alone during the 1830s, to be able to have the opportunity of a male's education and the liberty to undergo projects she wants.

While Lewes was supportive of Eliot's writings, his letters to Eliot's friend showed signs of his patriarchal standing. As he wrote to Barbara Bodichon, he forbade her to call his "wife" by her maiden name: "But, dear Barbara, you must not call her Marian Evans again: that individual is extinct, rolled up, mashed, absorbed in the Lewesian magnificence!" (qtd. in Michie 231) Just like Dorothea's anonymity after she marries Will, George Henry Lewes expected "Marian Evans" to be morphed into his life. However, ironically, more than a century later, the "Lewesian magnificence" is morphed into the magnificence of George Eliot. Then a distinguished intellectual, now he is mostly known as George Eliot's illegitimate husband. Even though she had a relatively happy union with Lewes, she probably knew all too well the feeling of restrictiveness, the consequences of a bad marriage choice, and also the feeling of being socially shunned.

Eliot, after her union with Lewes, was "an independent adult moving in metropolitan circles of free-thought and in the sophisticated cosmopolitan Europe of advanced culture..." (Dolin 39). However, she, at the age of 21, was almost disowned by her father for her outward refusal to religion. She once wrote to her father, "I could not without vile hypocrisy and a miserable truckling to the smile of the world...profess to join in worship which I wholly disapprove" (qtd. in Dolin 39). However, threatened by her father, she did in fact "truckle" to church to keep up appearances and to stop her father from disowning her. This is a good example of how Eliot was more than familiar with the influences of society and family on women. But as Eliot later remarks of Dorothea, "what else was in her power she ought rather to have done?" (887)

Eliot's Use of Dorothea as a Tool for the Author's Empowerment

Although Dorothea ends up marrying Will and disappears behind his shadow as Mrs Ladislaw, Dorothea's life and experiences can be explained as being part of

Eliot's presentation of the hardship and the unavoidable fate of women. In short, Dorothea's relationship and final doom is used as a tool to empower the author's message, that women are sexually dictated by the society no matter how hard they struggle against its shaping. Dorothea's failure to achieve her dream does not mean Eliot failed as a novelist – a point that is often disregarded or overlooked by critics.

Eliot's intention for Dorothea's fate is clear from the beginning of the novel – she intends for Dorothea's ambitions to be unfulfilled. This motive is clearly stated in the *Prelude* section. Wanting more than what society expects of herself, Eliot foreshadows Dorothea's failure and the role that society will play on her future. Eliot starts the *Prelude* by retelling the story of St Theresa and how, as a child, she "toddled" away from home to "seek martyrdom", stating that her "passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life" and that she eventually "found her epos in the reform of a religious order" (3). She comments on the numerous Theresa-like souls that emerge, souls that seem destined to lead an epic life but instead lead "only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion" (3). "Oblivion" is the keyword here. Souls, specifically women, who share the same qualities as St Theresa – ardour, passion and aspiration – have no outlet in the nineteenth-century society. They simply sink into oblivion and this is exactly what Dorothea's fate is by the end of the novel – she disappears behind the life of Will.

The reason for the failure of these "later-born Theresa[s]", as the narrator explains, is the lack of knowledge, education and opportunity: "With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement" but this is not possible because they are not helped by any "coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul" (3). The narrator goes on to explain that because of social restrictions, the possibility and the limit of a woman's achievement is unknown and those who are born with more potential or desire than others are sadly hindered from any exceptional and long-recognisable deeds. Here, it is no doubt that Eliot is paving the way for Dorothea's life story – a modern day Saint Theresa, unfueled by knowledge and support, who simply sinks into a life of oblivion. It cannot be clearer that Dorothea's disappointing

fate is intentional on Eliot's part.

In the *Finale*, the narrator emphasises again that the "determining acts of [Dorothea's] life were not ideally beautiful" (890). The narrator blames the outcome of Dorothea's life of "conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion" (890).

Although Eliot does not specifically mention that this kind of restriction falls solely on women, it is quite clear that she means so. In fact, this part of the *Finale* is revised by Eliot a few times; the first two versions explicitly state that womanhood is the issue at point. It is because Dorothea is born a woman and not a man, her dreams and aspirations have no other outlet than in marriage and her wish can only be fulfilled through others – specifically, through a man.

In the manuscript, Eliot wrote:

...struggling with imperfect conditions. Among the many criticisms which were passed on her first marriage, nobody remarked that it could not have happened if she had not been born into a society which smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age, and, in general, encouraged the view that to renounce an advantage to oneself which might be got from the folly or ignorance of others is a sign of mental weakness. While this tone of opinion is part of the social medium in which young creatures begin to breathe there will be collisions such as those in Dorothea's life, where great feelings... (902)

The first edition reads:

...struggling under prosaic conditions. Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighbourhood of Middlemarch that such mistakes could not have happened if the society into which she was born had not smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age - on modesty of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance - on rules of conduct which are in flat

contradiction with its own loudly-asserted beliefs. While this is the social air in which morals begin to breathe, there will be collisions such as those in Dorothea's life where great feelings... (903)

In the first two versions, Eliot explicitly states that this kind of fate and struggle is limited to women. In all versions, society is largely to blame for the shaping and restriction of a woman's life. Aspirations and dreams outside the domestic sphere will only clash with the norms and will eventually be distinguished into oblivion. Women with “great feelings” can only blame themselves for not cohering to the laws of society. One theme is apparent – the lack of education plays a role in governing the lives of the possible Saint Teresas. The belief in higher education for women has always been an issue close to Eliot's heart. This is clearly illustrated in *Middlemarch* – Dorothea's lack of knowledge makes her incapable of achieving her dreams and leading an epic life in the scale of Saint Theresa's. Society dictates that her feelings, her wishes, and her ardour are a sign of selfishness, recklessness and weakness. Although the latest and the accepted version of the *Finale* is toned down by Eliot and does not explicitly mention women, Eliot's agenda of social criticism on women could not be clearer. Dorothea's fate is obviously something to be saddened about and not something to be happy about, as some critics have argued.

In conclusion, not only does *Middlemarch* empower women within the domestic sphere by their interaction and power over men, Eliot also uses one of her main characters, Dorothea Brooke, to illustrate the power of society over women. At the expense of her character, Eliot empowers herself, as the narrator, to show her readers how a life with so much potential and so much aspiration can be shaken down into submissiveness by the overpowering and overarching control of societal expectations and patriarchal domination. Eliot uses multiple tools to achieve her goal as an author, she realistically portrays a complete society within *Middlemarch*, painting pictures and lives of characters all through the social scale while illustrating how women are treated differently and allowed different amounts of freedom according to their social status. Moreover, Eliot ingeniously paints a society forty years prior to the time the novel was written in order to distance the readers from the

norms in the novel and allow them to objectively view the flaws of societal shaping of women.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The three novels chosen, Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* chronicle the changes in social norms in Britain during the nineteenth century. The novels illustrate adequately the shifting values because they span the entire century. Upon tracing social values in regards to gender distinction within the novels, this thesis has shown that with increasing separations of gender roles, women novelists find different ways to subvert the gender norm of the time.

Starting from the late eighteenth century onwards, the middle class became more and more prominent in society. They dictated social codes of conduct. Coinciding with the emergence of the middle class was the revival of Evangelicalism. This suited well with the middle class as they needed a tool to endorse their recently gained social stature. When the codes of conduct set by the upper class began to trickle down the social scale in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the middle class eagerly embraced Evangelicalism to distinguish themselves, upholding strict moral codes and sexual restraint against the frivolity and fickleness of the upper class. With strict moral codes of conduct came a clear division of gender roles; a demarcation that was unlike others that have been set before. The workplace and the domestic sphere were clearly separated. Before the late eighteenth century, economic activities took place close to the home and women often helped out with the family business when needed. However, as the late eighteenth century progressed into the nineteenth century, the businesses and professions were drawn away from the hearth. Hence, women were physically and geographically restricted into the domestic sphere. Mobility was rare for women at this time in history. They were expected by society to be the "angel in the house"; they were seen as the upholder of morality, propriety and goodness.

Persuasion illustrates the changing norms of the period in regards to values of rank and gender roles. There is an apparent decline in the favour of rank and the aristocracy as portrayed in the novel. The Elliot's pride is seen to be ridiculous and

vain. Instead, the values that are generally considered favourable are those of diligence, industriousness and ingenuity. These values are inculcated in the naval profession. Characters that are in the navy are considered as the embodiment of a “gentleman”. Even though characters with rank, such as Sir Walter Elliot, disapprove of such changes in society, they have to eventually accept the strong emergence of the new middle-class values and norms. With the decline of rank, new definitions of gender roles are put in place. The new “gentleman” is one with a cultivated mind as opposed to landed estates. *Persuasion* is Austen’s only novel that the hero has a profession other than the landed gentlemen or clergymen. New definitions of femininity are also apparent in the novel. Mrs Croft’s mobility and forwardness in terms of speech is an exceptional quality for the women in the novel. The younger generations of women, including Anne, are in awe of her shrewdness.

However, Austen does not only document changes in social norms, but also infuses her own ideals of gender definitions. By pulling the two genders outside their designated social norm, she is bringing them closer together, giving them a sense of equality. The heroine in *Persuasion* is not entrapped within their domestic sphere. On the other hand, Anne feels alienated from her family and has no prospect home by the end of the novel. The heroine also clearly criticises the limitation of women with the domestic realm. Unlike Austen’s other heroines, Anne is not awarded with a landed estate, instead, her reward is a union with a man that is equal to her in terms of having a cultivated mind. The concept of the “homeless heroine” clearly illustrates Austen’s weariness of the separate spheres. Indeed, women in *Persuasion* are drawn outside the domestic sphere. Mrs Croft’s and Anne’s mobility are higher than any other characters found in Austen’s novels. Austen’s female characters are also creators of their own opportunity, choosing the suitor whom they deem worthy and who sees their worth. On the contrary, women in *Persuasion* that are willingly confined to the domestic sphere are portrayed as lacking in crucial characteristics that deduct their charm and likability. Moreover, it should be noted that all important events in the courtships of Anne and Captain Wentworth take place in the public sphere – a characteristic very unlike Austen’s other novels in which most of the actions are exclusive to the domestic sphere.

Men in *Persuasion* are also portrayed outside the private realm; they are drawn closer into the domain of the hearth and home. The navy is a very significant occupation in *Persuasion*. However, the portrayals of the naval men are not in their bravery or courage in war but in their ingenuity and their domestic qualities. The domestic duties of Captain Wentworth's occupation are discussed thoroughly and with concern by the other characters. Moreover, naval men such as Admiral Croft and Captain Harville are shown to be linked to domestic duties. They take great pride in organising their home – a duty usually subscribed to women. On the contrary, the men in the novel that are flawed or criticised are those who lack domesticity and are portrayed as useless or evil.

While *Persuasion* was written at a time when social values and gender norms were changing, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was written when these values and norms were already firmly fixed as an established part of society. While *Persuasion* seeks to create an ideal heterosexual relationship by taking men and women out of their socially expected roles to make them more compatible, *Jane Eyre* represents a clearer struggle against the established norms. In *Jane Eyre*, the heroine struggles to free herself from the constant restriction that different parts of society impose upon her. Jane faces different kinds of imposition that tries to dominate her. However, Brontë uses courtship and marriage as a tool to empower her heroine by finding her own worth and finally having control over the hero, both physically and mentally. By the end of the novel, the superiority of Mr Rochester is stripped from him and the table turns in favour of Jane.

While in the late eighteenth century it was the upper class that threatened the Evangelical ideals and social dictation of the middle class, by the time *Jane Eyre* was written, it was no longer the upper class that posed a threat. It was the androgyny of the lower class that threatened to permeate the middle class. Thus, the more lax the gender identity in the lower class became, the more rigid the social conduct and social norm the middle class upheld. *Jane Eyre* illustrates this fear in the embodiment of her heroine, Jane who is considered on the lower edge of the middle class because of her position as a dependent to the goodwill of society.

In *Jane Eyre*, the heroine faces different types of social constraint; she moves from her childhood of subservience and deprivation to passionate and romantic

extremes to religious restraint until she finally finds the right balance and empowers herself. At Gateshead and Lowood, Jane encounters a social process of feminisation. The novel illustrates how society slowly manipulates and changes the vivacious and passionate Jane into a social product of female restraint. Because of her strong feelings and wistfulness, she is bullied and disliked by her cousins and aunt. Even though at the beginning of her stay at Lowood she still shows signs of her childhood passion and rebelliousness through processes of humiliation and idealization, they are eliminated. At Lowood, her appearance is kept to a minimum and she lives a state of stunned self-restraint. Jane comes to idealise Helen Burns for her ability to always be submissive and feminine.

At Thornfield, Jane's desire for independence, love and self-respect is refueled. Jane's first encounter with Rochester marks the beginning of a passionate and emotional future at Thornfield. It also sets the tone for the struggle of power between her and Rochester. Throughout Jane's stay at Thornfield, she slowly learns how to once again speak her mind. Jane's passion is reawakened through her initial encounter with Rochester and it is continuously strengthened through the course of their courtship. Towards the end of her stay at Thornfield, Jane loses herself of her submissive façade at Lowood and declares her love for Rochester. However, after finding out about Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife, she refuses to submit to Rochester's designated superiority of class, age, sex and economics. Upon leaving Thornfield, Jane flees the passionate and romantic life because she refuses to be controlled by the patriarchal Rochester into an immoral union.

At March End, Jane faces another type of extreme, rationality. She is exposed to the patriarchal and unwavering demands of St John Rivers. St John controls the lives of his sisters and Jane since he dictates what they do, how they spend their free time, and what type of education they should receive. Here, Jane is courted into another type of marriage. St John's extreme rationality leads him to believe that Jane will make a good missionary and so he decides to propose. It does not matter to St John that Jane does not love him nor does he love her. Jane, after escaping the passionate but immoral marriage with Rochester, is now faced with the rational persistence of St John. This allows Jane to realise that both extremes of passion and

rationality are impractical. Only when she realise this, however, that she learns how to follow her instinct and empower herself.

At the end of the novel, Jane holds the power in her relationship. Once she realises how to be herself and fight in what she believes to be right, she can have happiness. She goes back to a now humbled Rochester who is physically weaker than Jane. Because he is crippled, he is no longer the strong patriarchal figure. Instead, he is a dependent of Jane, relying on her for his happiness and to a degree, his livelihood. In the end, his voice is muted from the story and it is Jane who is telling his story.

George Eliot, however, takes a different approach to female empowerment through courtship and marriage. While women in *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* are content in their roles of a wife and a mother, they are not content in the submission that they are socially designated to face. They find ways to empower themselves within their role of wife or mother. In Eliot's *Middlemarch*, whilst many of the minor female characters portray the same kind of approach to negate the social passivity expected from them, Dorothea, the heroine, displays an ambition that is not seen in *Persuasion* or *Jane Eyre*. Her aspirations transcend those traditionally assigned to the feminine role. She wants to play a part in shaping the world and helping others by becoming a philanthropist and building her own commune and housing. After several failed attempts to follow her dreams, Dorothea gives up her aspirations to marry into a submissive role within the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, closer inspection shows that the ending is a result of Eliot's portrayal of Dorothea's marriage as a direct criticism of the society's restriction on and repressiveness of women.

Apart from the heroine of the novel, other female characters are content in their role within the domestic sphere and find ways to empower themselves. The Garths, situated on a lesser social standing than other characters in the novel, give a clear example of female empowerment within courtship and marriage. Because the Garth family is a part of the lower middle class, the separation between the domestic and the public sphere is not as apparent as in the middle class and the higher middle class. Similar to the notions in *Jane Eyre*, the lower middle class is viewed to be more androgynous. The separation of roles between men and women are less distinct. Therefore, both Mrs Garth and Mary Garth are very outspoken and are not afraid to express what is on their mind. They are able to dictate and guide their male

counterparts. On the other hand, Rosamond Vincy, who is a part of the middle class, does not have the luxury to outwardly express what is on her mind as she has to conduct herself according to the middle class “norm”. Although she outwardly conforms to her expected role as “angel in the house”, she uses submissive negation to empower herself. She is never portrayed to be anything else but ladylike, yet in the end, Lydgate always ends up doing what she pleases. He admits, at one point, that he has no power over her at all.

Although many of the female characters in *Middlemarch* are strong and assertive, Dorothea Brooks is an exception. While other female characters have a degree of power in their courtship and marriage, Dorothea, in both her marriages, has considerably less power than these women. Dorothea first marries the elderly bachelor, Edward Casaubon, believing that he could lead her into a life of greatness. However, she is soon disillusioned by her marriage as it propels her into a life of submissiveness and restriction. After Casaubon dies, she endeavours to fulfil her dreams but that too, was stopped by her friends. Next, she settles as a donor and supporter of Lydgate’s fever hospital. However, when he decides to leave Middlemarch, the plans for the hospital dissipated with him. With all the failed attempts at achieving greatness, she marries Ladislav – an act that Eliot portrayed as a failure on her part.

By tracing three novels written at different periods throughout the nineteenth century, different forms of female empowerment can be seen. These forms change as social norms progress. A sense of equality that is seen in *Persuasion* is no longer applicable in mid-nineteenth century, as seen in *Jane Eyre*. As social norms became fixed and restrictions against women became firmer, clearer subversion of gender norms is indicated. In response to the strict societal norms pressed upon women, Brontë uses the novel, her literary tool, against society to create an ideal circumstance in which the heroine has control over the hero. In Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, another form of female empowerment through courtship and marriage can be seen. Eliot, in keeping with the realist tradition, portrays social restriction upon women as true to reality as possible. Therefore, Dorothea, the heroine of the novel, cannot be allowed to achieve her unrealistic goals of success in the masculine realm. However, it does clearly portray the dangers of social restriction upon women and the frustration it can cause.

Eliot uses her novel as a tool to empower herself rather than her heroine; she uses the sad fate of her heroine to send her message to the readers. Although the nineteenth century is a time widely regarded as very restrictive for women, unofficial records, including the novel, as the thesis has shown, reveal that women find ways to empower themselves and achieve their goals.

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VITAE

Ploi Phayakvichien was born on February 20, 1986 in Frankfurt, Germany. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English (2nd class honours) from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University in 2007. She was granted with a Chulalongkorn University Graduate Scholarship to commemorate the 72nd Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej to further her studies for a Master of Arts in English in the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.