AN INVESTIGATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCENTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS OF MATRIMONY ON WOMEN'S LIVES IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

JANE AUSTEN'IN ROMANLARI ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA: EVLİLİKTEKİ SOSYO-EKONOMİK GÜDÜLER VE KADIN YAŞAMINA ETKİLERİ

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Abstract

This article makes a thorough investigation of the prominent novelist Jane Austen (1775-1817)'s novels, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Sense and Sensibility, Persuasion, and Emma, to shed light onto the socio-economic incentives and implications of matrimony in women's lives in the early nineteenth century English society. As an acute observer of society and people around her, Austen's talent in depicting ordinary middle-class people in everyday life, namely her focus on domestic realism, in contrast to then fashionable romantic melodramas, render her works as an invaluable source of historical information on pre-Victorian culture and society. One such important issue that predominates Austen's narrative is marriage. As a never-married woman until her death at the age of forty-one, Austen's preoccupation with marriage market stands out as a vigilant author's descriptive interest in societal realities concerning the institution of matrimony, especially social and financial implications of marriage for women. Even though practice of coverture which as a legal practice compelled married English women to relinquish their property and legal rights under the guardianship of the husband, in other words helped solidify the patriarchal domination of men over women, marriage still stood as the ultimate determiner of class and financial status for women in an environment where female sex was relegated to the private sphere of the home, deprived of chances of career and financial improvements partially offered to the middle-class men. Considering the centrality of matrimony in nineteenth century English women's lives, this article will put forward a study of social and financial incentives of matrimony as well as its decisive role as a marker of class and status in society in light of the subject's treatment in Austen's novels. The argument of this study is that despite the given financial and legal limitations that being a femme covert— a married woman whose legal existence was subsumed under that of the husband— entailed, Austen's realistic treatment of motivations and subtleties involved in arrangement of marital unions in consideration of class and socio-economic status as well as status of wives and single women known as spinsters, provide us with invaluable information about women's view of the place of marriage in the early nineteenth-century English society.

Öz

Bu makale, ünlü İngiliz edebiyatı romancısı Jane Austen'ın (1775-1817) Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Sense and Sensibility, Persuasion ve Emma başlıklı romanlarında on dokuzuncu yüzyılın başında İngiliz toplumunda yaşayan kadınlar için evlilik kurumunun sosyo-ekonomik boyuttaki özendiriciliğine ve hayatlarındaki olası etkilerine ışık tutacak kapsamlı bir araştırma yapar. Toplumun ve insanların titiz bir gözlemcisi olarak, Austen'ın orta sınıftan sıradan bireylerin günlük yaşantısını tasvir etmedeki yeteneği, yani dönemin moda edebi yönelimi olan romantik melodramların dışına çıkarak ev-içi gerçekçiliğe odaklanması, eserlerini on dokuzuncu yüzyılın başlarındaki İngiliz kültürü ve toplumu hakkında paha biçilmez bir tarihi kaynak haline getirir. Austen'ın anlatımına egemen olan bu önemli meselelerden biri de evliliktir. Kırkbir yaşındaki ölümüne kadar bekar kalan Austen'ın, romanlarında evlilik konusuna bu kadar yoğunlaşması ve evlilik kurumunu çerçeveleyen toplumsal gerçekleri, özellikle de evliliğin kadın hayatındaki sosyal ve finansal getirilerini dikkatli gözlemleriyle sunması bakımından, yazarın toplumsal gerçekler konusundaki tanımlayıcı ustalığına işaret eder. Evli bir İngiliz kadınının kanun önünde mülkiyet ve yasal haklarını kocasının velayeti altına bırakmaya zorlayan resmi uygulama olan, coverture' e tabi tutulması sebebiyle erkeklerin kadınlar üzerindeki ataerkil egemenliğini sağlamlaştırılmasına rağmen, evlilik kadınların kamusal varlığının ev içine indirgendiği bir ortamda, orta sınıf erkeklere kısmen sunulan kariyer ve mali gelişme şansından da mahrum olmaları sebebiyle, kadınların mali durumu ve toplumsal sınıfının nihai belirleyicisi olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. On dokuzuncu yüzyıl İngiliz kadın hayatında evliliğin merkeziliğini göz önüne alan bu makale, Austen'ın romanlarında konunun işlenmesi ışığında, evliliğin sosyo-ekonomik bir teşvik ve ayrıca sınıfsal statü belirleme unsurları olması üzerine bir inceleme ortaya koyacaktır. Bu çalışmanın argümanı, evli bir kadının femme covert yani "zevcin himayesi" olması sebebiyle maddi ve yasal sınırlamalara tabi tutulmasına rağmen— kadının hukuki varlığının kocanın idaresi dahilinde sayılmasından ötürü—Austen'in evlilik birlikteliklerinin oluşturulmasında rol oynayan güdüleri ve ince ayrıntıları, özellikle sınıf statüsü belirleyiciliği bağlamında, gerçekçi bir şekilde ele alması kadınların on dokuzuncu yüzyıl başlarındaki İngiliz toplumunda evliliğin hayatlarındaki yeri hakkındaki görüşlerine dair önemli bilgiler sağlar.

Introduction

One of the recurrent plots in nineteenth century British novel is matrimony. As the most famous early-nineteenth century novelist, Jane Austen's preoccupation with marriage, manifest in her development of plots and subplots predominantly driven by the objective of finding a suitable match for unmarried British women, can be read as the reflection of and reaction to the social realities of her time[1]. As a woman writer, who had remained single till her death, Jane Austen's remarkable talent in writing about the intricacies of the marriage market could be better understood in the context of a pre-Victorian society in which gender specific restrictions concerning women's position and advancement locate marriage as the ultimate means to acquire economic stability and maintain class. While young English men had enjoyed opportunities to improve themselves economically and socially through education and consequently going into professions such as military, church and law, women of the middle and upper classes were not allowed to take up a profession, and therefore marriage remained the only "honorable profession" they can get in order to improve or secure their social and economic status. In addition to that, inheritance laws of the nineteenth century England which privileged first-born sons to the rest of the children of the family, rendered marriage vital for women's economic survival. Another reason why marriage, as a motif, plays a strong role in Jane Austen's fiction is the fact that it helps to preserve class hierarchy by comparing and maintaining social ranks. Moreover, Jane Austen uses marriage as tool to distinguish good characters from bad ones by looking at their decisions in choosing marriage partners. Given such social ramifications, therefore it comes as of no surprise that in all of Jane Austen's novels including *Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, and *Emma,* marriage occupies a central position as the backbone of main and subplots. Therefore, this paper aims to offer an investigation of matrimony and marriage market as reflected in Jane Austen's five major novels. A close analysis of this kind will surely shed light onto nineteenth century British society's perception of marriage as an institution and its socio-economic significance (e.g. as a determiner of class and status) by providing an insight into the social status and the rights of married and single women.

[1] For detailed information about early nineteenth century English society see: G. E. Mitton's *Jane Austen and Her Times 1775 – 1817.*

Marriage and courtship plots in Jane Austen's six major novels have been a topic of investigation in the academia. However, so far literary studies have usually dealt with the marriage plot by singling out one novel of the author; almost no study has offered a comparative study of all or most of Jane Austen's novels in its treatment of the subject. The article titled "Marriage in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,*"[2] is one such example to an analysis based on only one novel. Nor, has there been any comprehensive study analyzing the economic and social implications of matrimony on Austen's female characters, and therefore the early nineteenth society at large, in line with the courtship plot. Charles H. Hinnant's "Jane Austen's "Wild Imagination": Romance and the Courtship Plot in the Six Canonical Novels" for instance looks at all of her novels but puts forward a structural literary analysis, offering seven different narrative models which constitute Austen's courtship plots such as "the Cinderella plot of *Mansfield Park*" or "rescue plot in *Northanger Abbey*" and "drama of prior commitment in *Persuasion*," etc. (294-296). As can be seen this type of structural literary analysis does not offer socio-economic explanations to the universal marriage subject in Austen's novels. While this article puts forward a structuralist reading, in line with New Criticism theory, another one offers a linguistic investigation of marriage plots, focusing on the word "resolve." "Resolving the Institution of Marriage in Eighteenth-Century Courtship Novels" Heidi Giles looks at Austen's courtship plots from a linguistic perspective to show how to use the word "resolve" in marriage decisions renders Austen's treatment of marital decisions of the female characters found in other courtship plots in the eighteenth century different (76). While this study correctly sets Jane Austen's treatment of marriage plot different from other eighteenth century romantics, involves a chronological misplacement of Austen within the eighteenth century with its title. In *"Instrument of Growth: The Courtship and Marriage Plot in Jane Austen's Novels,"* William H. Magee offers another structuralist reading of the author's novels and goes onto explain how Jane Austen utilized and later modified this conventional narrative model (marriage plot) to develop her female characters saying:

> The courtship and marriage convention of the novel of manners provided early British novelists with the necessary framework for their art of story- telling... Among Jane Austen's artistic achievements none is more deliberate than her gradual

[2] Amjad Azam Mohammed's "Marriage In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*."

> enlargement of the courtship and marriage plot into a variable pattern for detailing the growth of successive heroines. (198).

Even though cursory references have been made to historical and social contexts concerning marriage as an institution, this article, because of its structuralist focus, does not concern itself with a lengthy historical overview of marital women's status in English society. Given such limitations and differences in focus in Austen's treatment of marriage as a social subject, I believe that based on its treatment in Austen's five major novels, my article will offer a comprehensive study of marriage in British women's lives in the nineteenth century.

Despite the fact that Jane Austen lived most of her life in the late eighteenth century and died well before Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837, because incentives of marriage for women and married women's status and rights in British society remained the same until the late nineteenth and even the early twentieth centuries, studying Jane Austen's fiction will shed light onto women's lives in relation to marriage across two centuries. Therefore, this article brings in readings and discussions about marriage and women's lives from the Victorian period as well when most of the activist feminism began to emerge. Moreover, Jane Austen's fiction defies easy chronological categorization. Literary critics have so far commented on the impossibility of situating Jane Austen in a chronological literary period. Austen was born and raised during a time when Romanticism ruled the literary stage with its focus on descriptions of nature, surge of feelings and the gothic. Unlike popular sentimental melodramas or gothic fiction produced by her contemporaries— Mary Shelley's gothic horror story *Frankenstein* (1818) or Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)—Jane Austen's fiction showcases the hallmarks of domestic and social realism[3], features of Victorian literature—meaning her development of ordinary characters, everyday places and plausible events with an implied reference to social and historical contexts of the time. In fact a Victorian academic Donald D. Stone in his essay titled "Victorian Feminism and the Nineteenth-century Novel" maintains that Jane Austen deliberately distanced herself from the romantic notions which were deceptively pleasing but lacked in substance and connection to reality: Austen in her novels wanted to *show "the meretricious effects on women of a diet of romantic novels. Jane Austen hoped to guarantee her readers' faith in her own version of reality—a normative reality—by replacing the readers' romantic dreams of the limitless*

[3] For a detailed exploration of domestic realism in English Novel see: Vineta Colby's *Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel.*

possibilities open to them (and the characters in romantic novels) with a realistic awareness of the limitations in actual life." (70). Furthermore another academic Susan Zlotnick in her essay "The Trouble with Jane Austen" draws attention to un-Romantic features of Austen's works:

> Her novels are topical, acute records of the pressures being put on traditional forms of power by emergent forms of wealth. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the large landowners who ruled Britain through patronage and paternalism were visibly being challenged by democratizing forces. Austen's novels chart the social reconfigurations that occur as old and new money, old and new forms of power, old and new values come into contact and conflict with each other. (Zlotnick).

Given the overarching involvement of her works with social and domestic realism, most literary critics tend to categorize her as a pre-Victorian novelist who stands as a precursor to major themes in Victorian literature or treat her individually because of her story-telling techniques, and subject matter. Barbara Bail Collins in her essay titled *"Jane Austen's Victorian Novel"* with a specific focus on *Mansfield Park*, for instance, points to this dilemma saying:

> *Mansfield Park* cannot be called a Victorian novel. It was first published in I814; ... And it is equally impossible to put *Mansfield Park* into an artistic timetable, for any attempt to compare Jane Austen with any of her predecessors or to compare her successors with herself must invariably end in failure. She was one of literature's greatest artists and as such she was always and unmistakably Jane Austen. (175).

Even though Collins recognizes chronological misfit of putting Jane Austen's novels into Victorian times, she ends her article by labeling one of Austen's novels *Mansfield Park* as *"the earliest of the great Victorian novels"* because Austen "*put down on paper the world around her as she saw it, and it is thus that she mirrors a changing social attitude in Mansfield Park"* (185).

Reviewing the discussion concerning periodization of Jane Austen's works are important because Austen's focus on social reality specifically concerning marriage as a social institution builds a historical continuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth century/Victorian periods. Therefore, this article also includes debates concerning married women's status that took place later in the nineteenth century-Victorian period—as well. Given the fact that women's status in marriage had

remained almost the same for centuries in British society until effective feminist resistance movements of the early twentieth century, this comprehensive analysis of married women's economic and social status expanding twocenturies would provide necessary historical context for the subject under study. This article therefore looks at women's rights and marriage in the British society by including eighteenth-century activist Mary Wolstonecraft's the pioneering *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and Victorian John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), as well as the late nineteenth-century reform bills such as The Married Women's Property Act in 1882.

Marriage and Nineteenth Century British Women

It is quite paradoxical that despite the fact that married women's dispossession of monetary and legal rights known as coverture[4] inflicted unfavorable limitations on women's lives—sparking nineteenth-century feminist criticism over the economic disabilities of married women, marriage still stood as the ultimate goal for nineteenth-century women. This social reality is duly reflected in Jane Austen's fiction where for women marriage is the ultimate social and economic determinant as Donald Stone in his article "Victorian Feminism and the Nineteenth-century Novel" points out:

> To reason right in Austen's fiction is to be submissive to the social order as it is presently constituted... In Austen's society there was no other means open to the maturing female besides marriage, and when an ideal or near-ideal marriage was impossible women often chose an imperfect partner as a sign of their submissiveness ... Resigning oneself to marriage means in effect resigning oneself-with open eyes-to life. (70-71).

Prior to the passage of the Divorce Acts and Married Women's Property Acts in 1870, 1882, 1892, respectively, a married woman's legal status before the law and her right to own and maintain property was subsumed under that of the husband according to the law known as coverture. Implementation of this law, literally turning women into chattels, which was duly criticized by philosopher John Stuart Mill's 1869 book *The Subjection of Women*, necessaitated that the husband and wife were to be considered one entity and this entity be represented by the man. Mill maintains his objection to coverture as a violation of human rights: *"The legal*

[4] For a detailed explanation of coverture, see Tim Stretton, et al's *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World.*

subordination of one sex to the other' is 'wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement" (1). In this claim, Mill echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published almost one century earlier. In this pioneering work of the eighteenth century, Wollstonecraft criticizes women's subordinate position to men and society's "viewing them as if they were in a perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone" (Intro xxxii). She believes that women's inferiority to men can be amended through education. While championing for bringing women's education on par with men, Wollstonecraft, sets lacking nature of women's education and an emphasis on women's outer beauty and frivolity for marriage market as the main causes of women's inferior view in society. The fact that she acknowledges and subtly criticizes matrimony as the ultimate and the only determiner of a woman's worth and status in British society is a point reflected and expanded on Jane Austen's fiction. Wollstonecraft argues as such in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

> The education of women has been attended to more in recent years than formerly; but they're still regarded as a frivolous sex, and are ridiculed or pitied by writers who try to improve them by satire or instruction. It is acknowledged that they spend many of their earliest years acquiring a smattering of accomplishments, but strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire to get themselves settled by marriage—the only way women can rise in the world. This desire makes mere animals of them, and when they marry they act as such children can be expected to act: they dress, they paint, they give nicknames to God's creatures. (xxxiii).

The application of coverture has a long historical tradition; the notable eighteenth century jurist Sir William Blackstone, in his 1765 authoritative legal text, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, fixing subordinate position of the wife to the husband, reinstated the sanctioning power of coverture through the label of femme covert:

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-French e feme-covert …; is said to be covert baron, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord;

> and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. (442).

Law of coverture had many restricting monetary and legal implications on a married woman in England such as inability to maintain and dispose of property, as well as prohibitions in representing themselves at courts, file lawsuits (including divorce) or execute contracts under their name. The scholar Mary Lyndon Shanley in her book *Feminism, Marriage, And the Law in Victorian England* (1989) specifically stresses the negative consequences of married women's alienation from their own property:

> A man assumed legal rights over his wife's property at marriage, and any property that came to her during marriage was legally his. While a husband could not alienate his wife's real property entirely, any rents or other income from it belonged to him. On the other hand, a woman's personal property, including the money she might have saved or earned before her marriage or earned while married, passed entirely to her husband for him to use and dispose of as he saw fit. (9).

As can be seen, once women were married, they were completely dependent on their husbands economically, which was considered as a form of slavery by the feminists of the time: *"For feminists, one of the most striking manifestations of this marital "slavery" was the fact that under the common law a wife was in many ways regarded as the property of her husband. The common law doctrine of coverture dictated that when a woman married, her legal personality was subsumed in that of her husband"* (Shanley 8). This legal and economic dependence of married women was also criticized by Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* and he argues for granting married women ownership of property separate from the husband's control: *"a woman's inheritance or gains ought to be as much her own after marriage as before. The rule is simple: whatever would be the husband's or wife's if they were not married, should be under their exclusive control during marriage"* (86).

In addition to injustices concerning married women's property rights, women in England did not have the right to go to court for legal matters unless their husbands acquiesced to represent them; and unless their husbands signed contracts with them, their signature was legally void. In family matters, husbands were the ultimate decision maker: apart from economic decisions, they had the final say in child raising and women's physical appearance. Women, on the other hand, had to comply with the authority of their husbands. Feminists, in the late

nineteenth century, started to draw attention to the plight of married women saying that current laws concerning marriage violated the legal and economic rights of a woman and positioned her as a slave by *"subordinating her to her husband's will, and subjecting her to restrictions that did not apply to unmarried women or to any men"* (Shanley10).

In addition to imposing such limitations on women, marriage was final and indissoluble, considered a sacred union in accordance with Catholic teachings dating as far back as the eighth century (Yalom 138). As a result, divorce was forbidden and rare and women were not granted the right to file for a divorce before the Divorce Act of 1857. Passage of this law, which for the first time considered matrimony as a contract rather than a sacrament, much like the case in Islamic traditions, eased some of the restrictions inflicted on women in filing for divorce. This new law, however, recognized only adultery as a legitimate reason for divorce and still privileged men over women because while it authorized men to file for divorce solely on grounds of adultery, wives had to prove infidelity in addition to offenses such as cruelty, incest or desertion (Savage 103; Perkin, *Women and Marriage* 22). Before the Divorce Act of 1857, apart from ecclesiastical annulment, a couple could get a divorce by private Act of Parliament, which was an extremely difficult and expensive process resorted only by the wealthy aristocratic classes. In addition to these constraints, women were further put on disadvantageous position because if a wife left her husband before obtaining a divorce, she was convicted of being a deserter and had to forfeit any claim to division of property and children custody (Perkin, *Victorian Women* 126).

Despite the grim future awaiting married early nineteenth century and Victorian women alike, in the face of such monetary and legal restrictions, marriage, still, was the only means through which women could improve their social status and secure themselves financially—a reality which helps one understand the centrality of matrimony in Jane Austen's novels. The scholar Rosemary Auchmuty in article titled *"The Victorian Theory of Spinsterhood" where she investigate status of spinsters in nineteenth century England, answers the crucial question she asks "Why then were women so eager to marry?"* as such: *"Because social status mattered more to women than legal status. In the words of Florence Nightingale, who spoke from experience, 'a married woman of eighteen has more independence, and is thought better able to act for herself than a single one of thirty-six"* (42). Here it is evident that social pressures and conceptions regarding married

women and single ones superseded legal realities. In addition to pre-Victorian as well as Victorian ideals placing marriage above all other institutions based on Christian theology, societal stigma concerning unmarried women explains why spinsterhood was shunned vehemently:

> … Some parts of Victorian society felt threated by spinsters. Married women bound by emotional and financial ties to their husbands and families, as well as by law, were less likely to question manmade ideals than unmarried women who were economically dependent on an institution in which they played a role of doubtful satisfaction and minimal utility. Men and women alike exerted themselves to keep spinsters in social and economic subjection, the first in order to prevent an assault on their own territory, the second through the personal jealousy and rivalry engendered by the conventions of their upbringing. Having been educated to believe that matrimony was the crowning honour and achievement of her life, no wife and mother cared to see women whom she had previously regarded as failures enjoying equal status with her and enjoying lives which were patently more interesting and rewarding than her own conjugal and maternal ministrations. (46-47).

As understood from the above quotation, in nineteenth century society unmarried women were seen as a danger to society by both sexes partly due to their perceived independence from the traditional male domination and control. In addition to societal setbacks and gender prejudices, remaining single was not preferred for economic reasons. Growing an old maid without any inheritance or any male relatives such as fathers, brothers or uncles to support them, was the most undesirable situation for nineteenth-century women. The fact that working to make a living was discouraged for middle and upper class women contributed their avoidance of spinsterhood. Also, the British inheritance laws which privileged male heirs to females- elder male sons had the right to inherit their parents' property; even the second male sons were shunned under normal circumstances- made it necessary for women to get married unless they wanted to live in complete destitution. As a result, scared by the unfavorable prospects of *"lonely poverty"* awaiting their daughters, many middle-class parents who had several daughters, wanted to see them married off as soon as possible (Auchmuty 43).

As a result, one can understand the rush Mrs. Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* is in to find husbands for her five daughters, apparently in agreement with the wishful thinking that is maintained in the opening words of the novel*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."* (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 8). Furthermore, as Austen shows not only the situation of unmarried women, known as spinsters, is dire but also women who separate from their husbands suffer as a result of discriminatory laws on division of property upon separation in early nineteenth century British society. For instance, in *Sense and Sensibility* Eliza, initially a woman of large fortune, after separating from her unfaithful husband, ends up in a sponging house for people in debt since her *"legal allowance was not adequate to her fortune, nor sufficient for her comfortable maintenance"* (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 146).

Giving some examples from Austen's novels about the inheritance laws which discriminated against women in British society would be illuminating here. In *Persuasion*, for instance, Eliot family fortune is to pass onto a male heir, Mr. William Eliot, bypassing three daughters of Sir Walter Eliot. Likewise, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Bennet's property is entailed, meaning Mr. Collins, as a male relative has the right to it sidelining Mr. Bennet's own five daughters. Moreover, Marianne and Elinor are left penniless after their fathers' death since John Dashwood, their half bother, who inherited his father's estate refuses to help them financially. As it is evident in Austen's novels, the injustice of inheritance laws deteriorated the financial situation of women and made them extremely dependent on a man to survive, chiefly husbands and other male relatives in the absence of one. As a result, marriage was the only way to set themselves free of a fate of poverty and dependence despite the given limitations awaiting married women. In other words, social and economic pressures compelled nineteenth-century women to get married instead of remaining single. In England in 1871, "*nearly 90 percent of English women between the ages of forty-five and forty-nine were or had been married"* (Shanley 9).

Marriage as a Social and Economic Shelter

As mentioned before, the ubiquity of matrimony in Austen's novels as a plot device partly results from economic and social predicaments awaiting unmarried nineteenth century and Victorian women known as spinsters. The fear of remaining a single maid without any financial means of support is very apparent in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mrs. Bennet, afraid that her daughters will face a penniless life after Mr.

Collins inherits Mr. Bennet's estate upon his death, is hysterically in search of rich husbands for her daughters. Belonging to the middle class, for Bennet sisters, working to earn their livelihood was out of the question because having to work for sustenance was considered socially degrading and equally unfavorable to remaining single for middle and upper class women. Also, jobs which were open to working middle-class women such as being a governess, a shop assistant, a nurse or an office clerk did not help women much financially since average money working class women could make was "below subsistence level" (Shanley 10). Among all these professions open to working middle class women, being a governess was considered the least satisfying and conflicting in terms of class standing. A governess who worked for the upper class families had to be knowledgeable and refined in manners; however, because she came from a lower strata, she was an inferior and often ridiculed and subjected to harsh treatment of children and parents alike. Scholar Millicent Bell in her study "The Tale of the Governess" draws attention to the precarious social position of a governess saying, *"Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and to a degree even in later decades, a governess was likely to be someone who suffered what modern sociologists call "status incongruity" in being neither a member of her employer's class nor exactly a servant"* (294). Austen's *Emma* points to the plight of governesses as Emma, as a single rich woman, pities Jane Fairfax after learning that she is going to be a governess to support herself unless she marries well. As a result, Victorian women who considered working as socially demeaning and economically unsatisfactory knew very well that only honorable *"job"* a woman could get to promote herself in social sphere was being a wife. The literary scholar Allison Sulloway in her book titled *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* makes a similar observation*: "There was an obsessive restatement of the doctrine that for women "a dignified marriage" followed by the birth of sons was the only "grand promotion of which they are capable"* (16).

In addition to providing economic protection, marriage helped women improve their social status. In nineteenth-century England, while a man could not improve his social rank by marrying a titled woman of wealth-even though it means increasing his fortunes through his wife's money- marriage decided a woman's social rank depending on her husband's birth and social standing. In other words, marrying into a wealthy and titled family would elevate a middle-class woman both economically and socially; however, a wife marrying lower than her class would fall into her husband's level instead of helping him raise his status to hers. For

example, in *Mansfield Park,* Fanny's aunt Lady Bertram-Maria Ward—to the surprise for her middle-class parents who would have never imagined that their daughter could marry Sir Thomas Bertram, a wealthy baronet and titled landowner, and radically improve her status in society. On the other hand, Fanny's mother, unlike her sister, ended up marrying a sailor from a working class who during the course of their marriage lost his job and became an alcoholic, which consequently caused Fanny's mother to decline sharply in social strata. Given the examples, it can be concluded that for middle class women marriage was both an economic and social necessity.

Considering the social and economic implications of marriage, choosing a marriage partner attained utmost importance for nineteenth-century single women. Obviously arranged marriages organized by immediate family members as well as acquaintances were commonplace. Jane Austen, as an acute observer of society, draws attention to this matter in her novels. Mrs. Jennings of *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, is characterized as the ultimate matchmaker, one of those people who have *"nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world*" (29). She is so ardent in this endeavor that she constantly looks for suitable couples to match: *"In the promotion of this object she was zealously active, as far as her ability reached; and missed no opportunity of projecting wedding among all the young people of her acquaintance."* Reflecting early-nineteenth century society's class prejudices and traditions, and as a precursor to Victorian times, it is only natural that Mrs. Jennings consider wealth, rank and birth as the ultimate measures to marital unions. For instance, she decided that Marianne and Colonel Brandon *"would be an excellent match, for he was rich she was handsome,"* a marriage that would ultimately improve middle class Marianne's social status and economic condition (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 29).

In *Emma*; however, contributing to realization of suitable marriages is not reserved for the old ladies. Emma, even though a young single woman herself, spends most her time and energy in matchmaking, which in itself becomes the central focus of the novel. The first couples to get married through her help is Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor. Miss Taylor, being a governess to Emma, climbs up the social ladder and is saved from remaining a governess throughout her life by marrying a middle class man of "*unexceptionable character, east fortune, suitable age and pleasant manners"* (Austen 5). Even though Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's father, regrets that *"Mr. Weston ever thought of her!"* as a wife and is sure that

Emma will miss her in her absence, his most trusted friend Mr. Knightley, a landowner, objects the father's resistance to such marriage in light of the well-known predicament awaiting unmarried governess: *"She [Emma] knows how much the marriage is to Miss Taylor's advantage; she knows how very acceptable it must be at Miss Taylor's time of life to be settled in a home of her own, and how important her to be secure of a comfortable provision, and therefore cannot allow herself to feel so much pain as pleasure. Every friend of Miss Taylor must be glad to have her so happily married"* (Austen, *Emma* 5).

In addition to acquaintances who are on the lookout for suitable matches for single women, immediate family members of unmarried ones are also in constant search of well-to-do husbands who will improve the condition of their female relatives. In *Pride and Prejudice* Mrs. Bennet whose *"business of life was to get her daughters married,"* is one of the salient examples to this. After learning that *"a young man of large fortune from the north of England"* named Mr. Bingley has purchased Netherfield, and decided to live in their town, she is overjoyed with the expectation that he *surely* will take one of her daughters as his wife*: "Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A Single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls."* The opening lines of the book, *"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"* (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 3), then can be attributed to Mrs. Bennet, an early nineteenth-century mother in anticipation of concerned Victorian mothers who want to see their daughters marry off to wealthy gentlemen. In characterization of Mrs. Bennet, Austen obviously levels criticism at ardent matchmakers and their steadfast determination which sees marriage as a convenience to improve class and social status. Through the following narrator's comment, Austen criticizes society's reducing individuals to objects in matchmaking plans: *"This truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters"* (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 3).

Mrs. Bennet is so zealous in her *"job"* that she even dares to endanger her daughter's life in pursuit of a husband. Mrs. Bennet sends Jane to Netherfield on horseback instead of in a carriage. According to her plan, without any protection from the expected pouring rain, Jane, catching a cold, would have a legitimate excuse to extend her stays at Mr.Bingley's house, and acquire a chance to further their acquaintances. Mr. Bennet as a concerned father who is afraid that Jane's situation could worsen by culminating in a dangerous fit *"in pursuit of Mr. Bingley"*

objects to these schemes. However, his wife's dismissive response is an indicator of tactless insistency of pre-Victorian mothers embodied by Mrs. Bennet: *"People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well."* (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 22). Mrs. Bennet's pursuit of rich husbands for her daughters does not stop there. She regards Mr. Collins, inheritor of Mr. Bennet's estate upon his death, as the most suitable match for her second daughter. As a result, she is profoundly surprised how Elizabeth can miss a chance to marry well by rejecting Mr. Collins' proposal. She threatens her with loneliness and destitution after his father's death if she persists in remaining single. Her warning in fact stands a poignant reminder of the fate of many single pre-Victorian women without any livelihood would face: *"But I tell you what, Miss Lizzy, if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all- and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead- I shall not be able to keep you-and so I warn you"* (77). As we see in Austen novels, not only mothers are compelled to find rich husbands for their daughters; it is also a concern of other male relatives. In *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, Mr. John Dashwood, considers Colonel Brandon the most suitable match for Elinor. After learning that he is a man of fortune, and misreading his closeness to her, he concludes that even though some of his friends may advise him against the smallness of Elinor's fortune*, "it is a match that must give universal satisfaction"* (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 159).

As evidenced by such examples from Austen's novels, despite economic and legal restrictions marriage incurs on women' lives, in pre-Victorian society remaining an unmarried woman is considered an aberration with dire economic setbacks. And Austen draws attention to this problem of *"spinsters,"*[5] in society by highlighting unfavorable conditions awaiting unmarried women characters especially in old age. One of the best examples portraying the condition of unmarried women is Miss Bates in *Emma*. Miss Bates, as a single woman without any material means to sustain herself becomes a subject of ridicule and contempt of Emma, who doesn't have to worry about money even though she never marries. Emma therefore condescendingly objects to any comparison between them, as suggested by her friend Harriet that she can end up being *"an old maid at last, like Miss Bates"* (Austen 55). In addition to Harriet, realizing Emma's impolite attitude towards Miss Bates, Mr. Knightley asks Emma to be more compassionate and

[5] For a further investigation of spinsterhood in Victorian English society, see Anderson's article "The Social Position of Spinsters in Mid-Victorian Britain."

understanding in her treatment of a woman who is poor and not *"an equal in situation"* to Emma. His remarks underscore the realities of single nineteenth-century women who are destined to fall downward in the social ladder unless they marry well or inherit enough wealth from their relatives. And as Mrs. Bates' situation exemplifies, their condition is doomed to deteriorate further: *"She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more"* (246). As such, Mr. Knightley's advice and criticism stands as Austen's critique of economic destitute that is forced upon unmarried women in society. The contrast in two single women's situation, one with ample means, the other not, further consolidates marriage as an economic shelter for women.

Emma's situation is different from other heroines of Jane Austen in that she, exempt from financial disabilities, decidedly wants to remain single despite the social stigma attached to spinsterhood. Harriet, who knows that marriage is the only way for her to secure herself economically and socially, asks Emma when she is going to get married, expecting a similar inclination or an urge to get married. However, Emma responds saying, *"And I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all"* (Austen, *Emma* 55). Harriet representing middle class pre-Victorian women whose fortunes are largely dependent on a good marriage is utterly surprised because for her *"it is so odd to hear a woman talk so"* (55). However, Emma, who is financially secured by her father's fortune sees herself exempt from the harsh realities facing most nineteenth-century unmarried women: *"I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry"* (55). Having the luxury to be a romantic when it comes to matrimony unlike the overwhelming majority of pre-Victorian marital unions, Emma sees true love as the sole motivation to change her mind: *"And without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are held as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield"* (55). Emma's situation as a single but wealthy woman once more stresses the importance of marriage as an economic shelter for women who are not as lucky as her: *"I shall never be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public. A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else"* (56).

Jane Austen also shows us instances where women, not so fortunate as Emma, consent to marry disagreeable and ugly men in order to secure their social and economic status. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's twenty-seven year old friend Charlotte, afraid that she may turn into a *"poor old maid,"* without any financial security agrees to marry Mr. Collins, who is neither "sensible nor agreeable" and whose *"society was irksome."* Charlotte's situation draws attention to the predicament of well-educated women with inadequate means in pre-Victorian England; for these middle class women, marriage is the only means to save them from degradation: *"Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honorable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however, uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want"* (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 84). Here, Austen obviously levels criticism at society's prioritizing of money over love through her presentation of contrasting views of two women, Charlotte's pragmatism versus Elizabeth's romanticism when it comes to marriage. Charlotte, confessing that she is not a romantic, reasons in favor of marriage for financial security: *"I ask only for a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collin's character, connections and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state"* (85).

Marriage to Preserve and Maintain Class Hierarchies

Having looked at economic and social incentives of marriage for single pre-Victorian women through examples from Austen's novels, we can now turn to the investigation of how marriage functioned as protector of class hierarchies in nineteenth century England. Ultimately becoming a realistic reflection of pre-Victorian class-based society, Austen introduces us with characters who either willingly or forcefully abide by the existing class boundaries in marital decisions. Therefore, society's tacit acknowledgment of class hierarchies in matrimonial unions becomes a guarantor of the existing class system. As we see in Austen's novels, in early nineteenth-century society close relatives of couples such as parents, uncles or aunts are often in charge of deciding on the suitability of a match in accordance with societal ranks. One of the best examples to those class-conscious relatives is Lady Catherine de Bourgh of *Pride and Prejudice*. As a rich noblewoman, she disdains middle-classed Elizabeth and constantly discourages a marriage between his nephew Mr. Darcy and her. Instead, in an attempt to protect aristocracy from the intrusions of the lower classes, she presents her own daughter

as the suitable match for him. Motivated by this resolution, at the end of the novel Lady Catherine de Bourgh confronts Elizabeth and orders her to stay away from her nephew by reminding the impropriety of their relationship and impossibility of their marriage considering the disparity between their social classes. She cannot let *"their marriage, [Mr. Darcy and her daughter] to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the word and wholly unallied to the family"* (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 231). Therefore, she accuses Elizabeth of tricking Darcy into marrying herself through use of her charms. Lady Catherine obviously represents the aristocracy of the time by voicing its norms in formation of marital unions. The following remarks of her reiterate class-bound prescriptions, *a duty*, which are supposed to guide the members of aristocratic class: *"It ought to be so, it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason. But your arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and all his family. You may have drawn him in."* (231). Elizabeth's answer to Lady De Bourgh, however, defies rigid class hierarchies observed in marriage arrangements: *"Neither duty nor honour, nor gratitude have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No principle of either would be violated by my marriage to with Mr. Darcy"* (234). This duty to class is such a pervading notion that even Mr. Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth is interrupted by hesitations and turns into a reproachment rather than a profession of love and commitment: *"He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed; He was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority- of its being a degradation-of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit"* (125).

While Elizabeth of *Pride and Prejudice* challenges nineteenth-century class structures imposed on her by marrying Mr. Darcy; Anne Elliot of *Persuasion* dutifully follows the conventions and rejects Captain Wentworth's first proposal primarily because both her father, Sir Walter Elliot and Lady Russell think their marriage as "a degrading alliance" and "a most unfortunate one." Even though Captain Wentworth is a promising youth with "a sanguine temper" and "fearlessness of mind," he has no fortune, no connections and no *secure* profession to promote him as a *good* husband. An aristocratic woman's marriage to man of lowly birth and restricted means is considered unfavorable as it would mean degradation in would-be wife's social and economic standing. Therefore, Lady Russell's reasoning in opposition to this union shows imposing role of class

boundaries in nineteenth century English marriage market: *"Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but on the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connections to secure even his farther rise in that profession; would be, indeed, a throwing away"* (Austen, *Persuasion* 19). Under her influence, Anne was *"persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing-indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it"* (19).

In the end when Anne decides to marry Captain Wentworth, it is not because she loved him so much so that she defied the principles of her class and acquiesced to marry lower, instead it was mainly due to change in Captain's status in society, elevated to hers as a result the fortunes he has made in the Navy. Anne's initial decision to refuse Captain Wentworth as husband, indicates that she sees marriage as a subordination of the self to the social order and a submission to the will of those who function as gatekeepers of certain classes. So unlike Elizabeth who defies class prescriptions in choosing a marriage partner, Anne demonstrates a strong sense of duty by rejecting the man she loved because of his lower rank. Even after eight years of marriage, Anne thinks that her father Sir Walter Elliot— a vain character criticized by Austen who prefers company of only well-born people in public— and Lady Russell, a family friend, were right in their initial opposition of her marriage to him because earlier her husband acquired neither considerable wealth nor important position in society.

Motivated by a similar assumption, Anne also objects to a marriage between Mrs. Clay and her father, Sir Walter Elliot. She is frightened and disturbed by the attention Mrs. Clay of a lower birth gets from her sister Elizabeth and her father: *"The sight of Mrs. Clay in such favour, and Anne so overlooked, was a perpetual provocation to her there; and vexed her as much as when she was away"* (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 96). Anne's main objection to this match stems from the fact that she wants to preserve the family's upper class *image* because her father's marriage to a woman of "a lower birth" would mean bringing Mrs. Clay of an "obscure birth into undue distinction" even though it would not downgrade her father's aristocratic status. Obviously an extremely class-conscious Anne would be irked by the consequence of such a marriage which would make Mrs. Clay preside over Elizabeth and Anne at Kellynch Hall by becoming the Lady Elliot. Judging Anne's thought and actions in relation to marriage, it can be concluded that among

all of the Austen heroines, Anne is the most class-conscious, partly because as a member of gentry she is unlike other heroines such as Elizabeth, Marianne, Fanny and Elinor, who all need to marry well and above for economic and social reasons.

Another character who desires to see marriage function as protector of class hierarchies is Mrs. Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*. This manipulative mother disinherits her first son Edward Ferrars when he refuses to marry a rich heiress. Mrs. Ferrars and her daughter, Fanny Dashwood, oppose a match between Edward Ferrars and Lucy Steele, who, being a poor girl, is way below their social standing. On the other hand, Mrs. Ferrars considers Miss Morton, a woman of large fortune, the suitable wife for her son. Fearing that Mrs. Ferrars would harshly object to their relationship and ultimately disown him, Edward and Lucy keep the engagement a secret for four years. Upon its being made public, Fanny Dashwood, who *"thought to make a match between Edward and some Lord's daughter"* falls into *"violent hysterics immediately"* and starts scolding Lucy. As expected, Mrs. Ferrars disowns her son and settles everything on his younger brother Robert. The fury and the disappointment that Mrs. Ferrars and her daughter experience once more underlines the importance attached to class and wealth in marriage arrangements. Likewise, in *Emma*, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax have to conceal their engagement since Jane Fairfax is an orphan with no fortune or family name. Like Edward, Frank is afraid that Mrs. Chuchill, on whom his fortune depends, would not consent to his marrying a poor woman of no consequence.

In *Emma*, through Emma Woodhouse's matchmaking activities, one can get a better understanding of how combination of class, birth and financial well-being dictate the parameters of finding marriage partners in pre-Victorian society, especially how marriage becomes a means to promote or lower women's rank in society. Emma, an officious matchmaker, intends to get a well-to-do husband for her seventeen-year old boarding school friend Harriet of an obscure birth. Believing that Harriett's unknown family lineage has upper-class origins, to use Mr. Knightley's phrase, blinded by her *"infatuation for that girl,"* Emma thinks that Mr. Martin, being only a *farmer,* is not an equal of Harriet, who *must* be a daughter of an aristocrat. She objects to Mr. Knightley, who reprimands her for dissuading Harriet from marrying Mr. Martin: *"What! think a farmer, (and with all his sense and all his merit Mr. Martin is nothing more,) a good match for my intimate friend!"* (Austen 39). Instead, Emma considers Mr. Elton, who is a middle class man with enough fortune as the perfect match for Harriet. Later, she designates Frank

Churcill as a husband for her but when she learns that Harriet has feelings for Mr. Knightley, Emma believes that Mr. Knightley would debase himself if he were to marry Harriet, who turns out to be the daughter of a tradesman. Her protesting objection to such a union stresses her class-conscious reasoning in addition to a concealed jealousy for his affections: *"Mr. Knightley and Harriet Smith!- Such an elevation on her side! Such a debasement on his!- It was horrible to Emma to think how it must sink him in the general opinion, to foresee the smiles, sneers, the merriment it would prompt at his expense; the mortification and distain of his brother, the thousand inconveniences to himself … Was it a new circumstance for a man of first rate abilities to be captivated by very inferior powers"* (*Emma* 271). Envious of Harriet and scared by the possibility of Mr. Knightley's interest in Harriet, Emma immediately comes to the realization that *"Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself"* (268). Here it is interesting to note that Emma cites comparability of their class and rank as an explanation for suitability of such marriage even before any mention of her romantic attraction to Mr. Knightly. Emma's regret in preventing Harriet from marrying Mr. Martin in the first place echoes her strong belief in rigid class boundaries: *"Oh! had she never brought Harriet forward! Had she left her where she ought, and where he had told her she ought!--Had she not, with a folly which no tongue could express, prevented her marrying the unexceptionable young man who would have made her happy and respectable in the line of life to which she ought to belong-- all would have been safe; none of this dreadful sequel would have been"* (272).

Emma, like Anne of *Persuasion*, is an overly class-conscious heroine of Jane Austen. Her strict adherence to social class hierarchy not only colors her matchmaking schemes but also she brings her class consciousness to such a level that she believes being wealthy and coming from a noble blood would remove the shame of being an orphan in the case of Harriet: *"the stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed"* (317). Consequently, Emma's distancing of herself from Harriet upon learning her humble parentage illustrates the extent to which early nineteenth-century British society functions in accordance with class boundaries. This is mainly why *"the intimacy between her [Harriet] and Emma must sink; their friendship change onto a calmer sort of goodwill"* because Emma *needs to* keep her distance away from Harriet, who as a wife of a farmer and daughter of a tradesman is far below her rank (*Emma* 318).

Marriage Revealing 'Good' and 'Bad' Characters

So far in our investigation of Austen's novels, we have seen both restricting and ameliorative implications of marriage on socio-economic status of pre-Victorian women. In addition to this social dimension, marriage serves as a kind of criterion to measure and compare characters in Jane Austen novels. One such character is John Willoughby of *Sense and Sensibility*. Presented as a dashing young man who captivates Marianne's heart, a potential romantic hero with his gallant rescue of Marianne, his deceitful and greedy character is revealed when he heartlessly abandons her to marry a wealthy woman despite his open flirtation with Marianne. As a dissipated man who squanders all of his money by getting into huge debts, Willoughby has to marry a woman of fortune to secure his finances. In his cruel farewell to Marianne, Willoughby evadingly confesses such intentions saying *"It had been for some time my intention to marry a woman of fortune. To attach myself to your sister, therefore, was not a thing to be thought of"* (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 227). In the end preferring affluence to *"a comparative poverty"* his marriage to a wealthy heiress, Miss Sophia, underscores the folly in his character (227). In his characterization, the readers encounter the epitome of young nineteenth-century bachelor men—to benefit from the legal practice of coverture which obligates married women to relinquish their property at husband's disposal—who would prefer toil-free pursue of rich wives to improve their financial status despite available chances for men to improve their livelihood through professions in the army, jurisdiction, and church. In addition to being an implicit criticism of coverture, through Willoughby's presentation as a romantic villain, Austen sets marriage as a touchstone which reveals avaricious and treacherous character of opportunistic men like Willoughby.

Another such character from the same novel is Lucy Steele. Like Willoughby her sly and greedy nature emerges in her heartless oscillation between the two brothers. Lucy, upon learning that their mother her secret fiancée Edward Ferrars has been disinherited by Mrs. Ferrars, she hastily places her affections on Edward's brother Robert. Even though Edward does not abandon Lucy when he is disowned by his mother because of his relation to her, Lucy's cunning and avaricious behavior in changing marriage partners underscores treachery and vanity in her character. Both Edward and Elinor express their shock at such sudden and unexpected marriage. Edward maintains his disappointment saying "the vanity of the one had been so worked on by the flattery of the other, as to lead by degrees to

all the rest" (257). Lucy's marriage to Robert, then, reveals the real face of Lucy, whom Edward thought to be *"well-disposed, good hearted girl."* And now *"thoroughly enlightened on her character," Edward, "had no scruple in believing her capable of the utmost meanness of wanton ill-nature"* (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 256).

In addition to such characters, Jane Austen creates others whose manipulative schemes in the issue of marriage for their own socio-economic benefits affect would-be couples. One such character is Mr. William Eliot in *Persuasion*. Mr. Eliot tries to prevent a marriage between his uncle Sir Walter Eliot and Mrs. Clay with the knowledge that if she is to produce a male heir, it would endanger his plans to inherit the baronetcy and the estate. Mrs. Smith, an old friend of Anne, helps her to see Mr. Elliot's real intentions and his true character by relating his past deeds when he encouraged her husband to spend extravagantly which ultimately became financial destruction to Mrs. Smith when Mr Smith died leaving a great deal of debt behind. According to Mrs. Smith's description, as a selfish person who *"has no feelings for others"* Mr. Eliot is *"a man without heart or conscience, a designing, wary, cold-blooded being"* (Austen, *Persuasion* 132). She also indicates the real reason behind his marriage to his first wife instead of Elizabeth saying that he *"at that period of his life, had one object in view-to make his fortune, and by a quicker process than the law."* Thus, instead of marrying Elizabeth and having to wait for Sir Walter's death to be rich, Mr. Eliot chooses quick and easy wealth with freedom attached to it by marrying a wealthy woman from the working class. Anne, who regards titles and rank as dear and important, is especially shocked to learn that Mr. Eliot has no concern for baronetcy and once he even has intended to sell it for fifty pounds: *"His chance of the Kellych estate was something, but all the honour of the family he held as cheap as dirt"* (134). But as his letter to Mrs. Smith makes it clear his new interest in gaining the acquaintance of Sir Walter Eliot is intended to secure the inheritance of his estate after his death. And he knows that this can only be realized by preventing Sir Walter producing a male heir. To do this, Mr. Elton has to prevent Sir Walter getting married to Mrs. Clays.

Ideal Marriage in Jane Austen's Fiction

Jane Austen sets marriage of Admiral Croft and Mrs. Croft as an example for emulation in *Persuasion*. Anne, praising their mutual compatibility and marital bliss thinks that Anne and Captain Wentworth's marriage would follow their example. Considering the time Jane Austen writes in, this marriage strikes us as

visionary and revolutionary even comparing it with today's standards. In early nineteenth and Victorian societies alike, the notion of "separate spheres" rigidly dictated the roles a husband and a wife would adopt in the family: *"Each had distinct but complementary functions to perform"* (Shanley 5). For example, while women mainly functioned within the domestic sphere, men were out in the public space. Along with their role in child rearing middle class women were responsible for domestic affairs. Unlike the working class women, who had to do the work themselves, middle class women only orchestrated the maintenance of a house including the care of children, cleaning, sewing and cooking. On the other hand, men functioned outside: he was responsible for earning money and made decisions regarding matters of public concern. Men fought wars and protected the homeland while women were solely responsible for producing and sustaining healthy citizens. Consequently, the concept of *"Separate spheres"* emphasized the hierarchical structure of the family, positioning men over women and subordinating women to men. Even though some progressive laws passed at the end of the nineteenth century concerning women's rights in marriage, they were short of meeting the feminists' real objective: to end the dominance of husbands over their wives and to achieve 'marriage based on 'spousal equality'. Crofts' marriage, then, comparing it to Victorian standards, is highly progressive since they breach their own "separate spheres" by functioning in both public and domestic domains. For instance, while Admiral Croft's wife, stepping into public-male- sphere, joins him in his journeys at sea, Admiral Croft is happy to help his wife with the housework. One particular instance in the book which also questions the prevailing notion of "separate spheres" is when Crofts drive the carriage. As an indication of ideal and happy partnership, they share the responsibility of driving when Mrs. Croft cautions her husband and takes the reins upon encountering posts: *"But by coolly giving the reins a better direction herself, they happily passed the danger; and by once afterwards judiciously putting out her hand, they neither fell into a rut, nor ran a 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"* (Austen, *Persuasion* 62). Obviously, Anne reads their driving as a symbol of the way they run their marriage: equal partnership.

Conclusion

Jane Austen is known as the writer of happy endings and marriages. Not only all of her novels end in at least one marriage, but also marriage plays a central role in them. Jane Austen never married; however, centrality of marriage in her work is not surprising given the fact that marriage for women in nineteenth century English society held crucial economic and social implications— for most women marriage was the only means to improve and secure their economic well-being as well as social standing. Moreover, in contrast to sensational Romantic melodramas of her time, Jane Austen's turn to domestic realism, namely realistic portrayals of the growing middle-class people and lifestyles, testifies to her creative intelligence and her keen eye in observing the people and society around her. Jane Austen's fiction, then, becomes an invaluable source for study of the representation of women's issues specifically about the institution of marriage, its role in women's lives, position of married women as well as socio-economic incentives of marriage for women in England at the time the novels were written.

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