Disrupting Social Order: The Widows of Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility

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Disrupting Social Order: The Widows of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the power struggle between the widows and young men in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. The focus is specifically on the power struggle regarding marriage: the widow endeavors to arrange the man’s marriage, while the man fights to regain his agency and masculinity by marrying whom he chooses. This thesis examines the implications of these struggles between male and female and arranged and companionate marriages.

This thesis will also discuss the stylistic reflection of these struggles in the text. Jane Austen gives us male characters who are under the domination of a wealthy widow. While under the widow’s thumb, the young man loses his agency and has his masculinity challenged. A look at the grammatical construction of her phrases reveals that Austen continuously places the widows in the position of power, that is the subject or actor in the sentence. The young men who stand in anticipation of their share of the family fortune from the widows are placed in the position of direct object, that which is acted upon, rather than the position of subject, he who does the acting. The young men are then left with the choice of sitting idly by, allowing the female to remain in power, or acting and reasserting the order of male domination.
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Introduction

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife (PP 1).

This wildly famous first line of Pride and Prejudice wastes no time in taking the reader to the central concern of the novel-- marriage. A young man who possesses a fortune that would allow for him to comfortably marry, must of course be in the market for a bride. In this one sentence, Jane Austen has introduced so many issues surrounding the institution of marriage in the 19th Century. First to note is her conflation of fortune and marriage; in the middle and upper classes, to have a wife one must have money. A wife, then, is a commodity to be bought or traded for on the marriage market. Austen, however, is writing at an interesting time in that there is a transition from arranged marriages in which parents negotiate the market to companionate marriages in which the men and women navigate the market themselves. Although it does not figure in Austen's first sentence, the concept of the companionate marriage plays an integral role in her work; Charles Hinnant notes that all seven of Austen's novels are also "concerned with the quest for an ideal love-match" (298).

Austen was not alone in her preoccupation with this quest. Katherine Sobba Green writes that during the period "between 1740 and 1820, the subgenre [of the courtship novel] developed and flourished as some two dozen writers, most of them women, treated the time between a young woman's coming out and her marriage as the most important period of her life" (Green 2). It is not marriage exactly then at the center of the novel; rather it is the process leading up to the marriage that is of interest to Austen. And as marriage has become less about negotiations and dowries between parents and more about affection and similar temperaments being discovered between the
woman and man, it is on the woman and her choice of suitor that Austen focuses. Yes, the woman has a choice to make. For another aspect of the courtship novel is that women, “no longer merely unwilling victims, became heroines with significant, though modest, prerogatives of choice and action” (Green 2). If women are given the ability to act and choose, then what happens to the men in the novels? A return to the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* will help to illustrate this point more clearly. A young man with fortune must be in want of a wife. Austen does not write the man must want a wife. If she had written the phrase in this way, the man would be performing the action of wanting a wife. However, as the phrase stands in the novel, the man is in the position of passive subject. He is, grammatically, performing no action other than possessing a want; in other words, Austen does not write the young man as actively desiring a wife. Perhaps of note, the *OED* defines “in want of” as “in need of.” Austen has given her man even less agency in the matter as now a wife is not even something he desires, but something he needs. A wife is a necessity according to the dictates of his family or society. So as young women are given the ability to act and choose in the genre of the courtship novel, thus occupying the typically masculine role, the men slip more into the passive, typically feminine position.

The binary relationship between masculine and feminine is shaken up. The dichotomies of dominant and subordinate and active and passive no longer as consistently correspond to the gender they had previously. This thesis will explore the power struggle between the genders, but the female disrupting the binary will not be the young woman herself. Another important point made by Hinnant is his noting that “one of the unstated conventions of the courtship novel is that the lovers must undergo a traumatic
experience" (294) and that the novel tells not only of the courtship but also of "the
problems arising" (Green 2). There is then something, or someone, that impedes the
movement of the couple from courtship to marriage. In Austen’s novels *Pride and
Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, the two works which will be the focus of this paper,
this impediment comes in the form of the wealthy widow.

Austen’s widows hinder the progress of the young men and women
moving towards contracting an engagement. They use their wealth as power and attempt to maneuver the young men who stand to inherit that wealth into marriages which the widows deem fit. The widows also halt, or attempt to, the progression from arranged marriages to companionate matches. They are a sort of bridge between the old ways and the new; they are of a period when arranged marriages were standard but are now living in a time when many of the young make their own choices. The widows, interestingly, also occupy a strange space in terms of gender. Scholarship in the figure of the widow in literature in Austen’s time has recognized and analyzed the widow’s disruption of the gender binary. Karen Bloom Gevirtz has done a study of the widow in her book *Life After Death: Widows and the English Novel, Defoe to Austen*; her examination of the gender of Austen’s widows has served as the basis for this present research. Widows are females with the wealth and power of a male and so possess both masculine and feminine qualities. In this way, they disrupt and complicate the binary of male/female. What this thesis contributes to the field of Austen studies is an examination of the affects of this disruption of the binary.
Current scholarship on Austen's widows has focused on the widow in terms of her relationship to, and the maneuvering of, the females within her social circle. Critics have discussed the way the widow interferes in affairs, but none seem to remark on her meddling in the affairs of men. It is her dominating and usurpation of the masculine power position that makes her a figure who blurs the gender lines. To be dominant to, to have control over, and to order about a male is to truly leap across the gender divide. With the female in possession of both masculinity and agency, the young men are forced to take the feminine and submissive role or fight back and reclaim their position. It is this power struggle that this thesis will explore. The first focus will be on the position of the widows and the power that they have. The second will be on the effect that this power has on the young men, or more specifically, the masculinity of the young men who are waiting for their inheritance.
Chapter 1

Why, this is the whole Scheme and Intention of all Marriage Articles. The comfortable Estate of Widow-hood, is the only Hope that keeps up a Wife’s Spirits. Where is the Woman who would scruple to be a Wife, if she had it in her Power to be a Widow, whenever she pleas’d? (Gay 1.1).

These words from Mr. Peachum to his daughter, Polly, in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* shed light on the plight of the middle- and upper-class young woman of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century. First she is under the rule of her father, and then she is married off (unless she marries secretly like Polly). Whether the marriage is arranged or not, she falls under the rule of her husband. If she does not marry, she may perhaps become a governess, but will, more likely than not, fall under the care (the rule) of her brother or another male relative. The girl is trapped in a cycle of male domination, a victim of the system of patriarchy, and, as Jane Miller writes in her book *Women Writing About Men*, is also “discovering the extent and nature of her own freedom and dependence. She is faced by the quality of male authority and by the unreliability of many of the men who wield it” (Miller 59). Unless. Unless her husband were to die and she were to become a widow. Prior to the Dower Act of 1833, “With her husband’s death, the widow gained full civil capacity in the eyes of the law” (Kertzer and Barbagli 247) and so moved from being a possession of her husband’s to a person, a being that existed as herself rather than as the daughter of Mr.---- or the wife of Lord -----. In becoming a widow, the woman moves from her subjugated position into one of, at least some, power.

Martin Dribe, Christer Lundh and Paul Nystedt, in their article “Widowhood Strategies in Preindustrial Society,” note that a widow had five options upon the death of
her husband. She could, if she were young enough and so inclined, remarry, move to a household headed by a child or near relation, move to a household headed by someone other than a relation, or move out of the parish. The fifth option available was to carry on alone as the head of the household (208). In so doing, the widow assumes a position which was the “normal status for men” (Dribe et al 210), that of the patriarch. In the research presented in their article, Dribe et al found that widowers were more likely to remarry, while widows were much “more likely to remain as head of an independent household, which might reflect, in part, their preference for the kind of independence not accorded to married women—full control of productive and political resources” (220).

Upon the death of her husband, the widow inherits a part or all of the husband’s property, of which she herself is included. She, in a sense then, inherits herself and so obtains her independence; she now has control over her deceased husband’s property and so has control over herself. The authors emphasize the point that this position of power was “normal” for men, whereas for women the role of head of household was not “normal” (Dribe et al 230).

In the period during which Austen writes, widows then occupy a strange place. In her novels, as in life, they are female characters, and yet, because of the control they have over the family estate, they occupy a male position. So when it comes to a discussion of gender roles in eighteenth and nineteenth-century society, the widow stands “squarely on the fault line” (Gevirtz 14), and in the case of an Austen novel “consistently complicates old dichotomies” (Gevirtz 139). As they are women holding the patriarchal, and thus male, position of head of the family and of the fortune, widows complicate the binary of male/female. Kertzer and Barbagli note that at the end of the eighteenth century, “widows
played a more important role than single women since they were more often in charge of a family household” (244). A married woman was unlikely to be head of the household, as it was her husband who held that position. With no husband at her side, the widow was able to assume the role.

Just what was this role that the widow played? Was it merely the role of the head of the household? The word ‘merely’ cannot be applied to that role, as it is one that imparts much power. Karen Bloom Gevirtz notes that “widows could own property; they ran their own households, they made their own decisions. . . Once she inherited, in theory, the widow controlled her inheritance and, sometimes with it, the family finances” (Gevirtz 14). A widow of a wealthy man could potentially be in control of a vast amount of land and money, and consequently of those—children, cousins, etc—who would stand as potential inheritors of that estate.

The whole of Jane Austen’s works contain twelve widows. Sense and Sensibility brings us four of them, while Pride and Prejudice the one, Lady Catherine. Gevirtz notes that Sense and Sensibility “features Mrs. Dashwood, whose widowhood catalyzes the action of the novel; Mrs. Ferrars, whose widowhood creates one of the crises of money and marriage in the novel; Mrs. Smith, whose widowhood creates another crisis of marriage and money; and Mrs. Jennings, whose actions so facilitate both plot and commentary” (138). In her word choice, Gevirtz has introduced an interesting grammatical situation. In each description of the four females, the widow stands as the subject of the clause, the actor, the doer, and so has assumed the position of active agent. Mrs. Dashwood typifies the figure of the poor (poor in comparison to her situation during her husband’s life) widow, dependent on her relations. Mrs. Jennings is settled with a
jointure and is sort of a well-meaning widow who stands as a mother figure to the Miss Dashwoods. These two are the less powerful figures of the four, but nonetheless, stand in positions of some control and some influence over the men in their circle of acquaintance. But it is Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Smith, who both, as says Gevirtz, create crises for young men directly under their control involving those themes that permeate the whole of the novel—marriage and money.

The first widow with whom the reader is acquainted in the novel is Mrs. Dashwood. *Sense and Sensibility* opens by informing the reader that “The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex” (5). The estate on which the family lived, Norland Park, is described as having belonged to a single man, who, upon the death of his housekeeper, invited his nephew, Mr. Henry Dashwood, who was to inherit the estate, and his family to the estate. Mr. Henry Dashwood had one son, Mr. John Dashwood, from his previous marriage, and three daughters, Elinor, Marianne and Margaret, from his present wife— the Mrs. Dashwood with whom we are concerned. Upon the death of the gentleman, the will was read, and it was revealed that Norland Estate was bequeathed not to Mr. Henry Dashwood, but to his son John. Mr. Henry Dashwood realized the importance of living economically thenceforth so that he could secure the future of Mrs. Dashwood and his three daughters in the event of his death. Unfortunately, Mr. Dashwood survived but “one twelvemonth. . . and ten thousand pounds, including the late legacies was all that remained for his widow and daughters” (SS 6). Mr. John Dashwood attended his father as he was dying and promised to “do everything in his power to make [his mother-in-law and sisters] comfortable” (SS 7). This left Mrs. Dashwood’s future at his mercy. He and his wife moved to Norland Park, and Mrs. John Dashwood became the
mistress of the estate that Mrs. Dashwood saw as, for all intents and purposes, rightfully hers.

Her daughter-in-law made living at Norland Park quite uncomfortable, so Mrs. Dashwood set about looking for “a suitable dwelling in the neighbourhood of Norland” (SS 13). Mrs. Dashwood’s husband had left behind enough money for her to remain as the head of her own household, though just not of her present household. Mrs. Dashwood receives a letter from a relation Sir John Middleton of Devonshire in which he offers to her and her daughters Barton Cottage on his estate of Barton Park. Mrs. Dashwood readily accepts, moving herself and her daughters an estate outside of the parish, and yet to a home over which she will retain her status as head of the household, choosing a mixture of three of the five options offered by Dribe et al.

Prior to the family’s departure, they receive a visit from Mr. Edward Ferrars, the brother of Mrs. John Dashwood and, believed by Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne, beau of Elinor Dashwood. Of this relationship between Edward and Elinor the narrator says, “Some mothers might have encouraged the intimacy from motives of interest, for Edward Ferrars was the eldest son of a man who had died very rich; and some might have repressed it from motives of prudence, for, except a trifling sum, the whole of his fortune depended on the will of his mother” (SS 14). The narrator introduces an interesting point about relationships and attachments of young people at the time. Mothers would encourage the intimacy. Mothers stand as, to use the word Katherine Sobba Green borrows from Maria Edgeworth, “maneuverers” (154). In Manoueveruring, Green notes that Edgeworth writes of the shift that is occurring from arranged to companionate marriages, and that this shift did not stop mothers from trying to maneuver their children
into good marriages (Green 152). An intimacy with Mr. Ferrars, then, is one encouraged by the mothers because of motives of interest, namely that of money and of maneuvering a daughter into a good marriage.

The narrator goes further to say that some mothers may have opposed the match. Again, the mother is a maneuverer, this time steering her daughter away. The narrator reveals that Edward is not, in fact, rich. “Except a trifling sum, the whole of his fortune depended on the will of his mother” (SS 14). Here, the reader is introduced to a widow of great power, a power which she holds over her estate, her fortune, and consequently, over her sons, Edward and Robert. Mrs. Ferrars’ wishes or whims will decide the fortune of Edward. What is implied here is that a marriage between Elinor and Edward is no guarantee of Elinor’s security in a future free from poverty. Were the marriage not to fit the will of Mrs. Ferrars, it is possible, and also quite likely, that Edward’s fortune would be withheld from him. Elinor makes this point quite clearly. “He is very far from being independent. What his mother really is we cannot know. . . . I am very much mistaken if Edward is not himself aware that there would be many difficulties in his way, if he were to wish to marry a woman who had not either a great fortune or high rank” (SS 18). Like Mrs. Dashwood, Mrs. Ferrars then stands to encourage or discourage Edward’s wishes to marry a young woman depending on whether she deems the woman of enough wealth and rank, or, to return to Edgeworth, whether she thinks it would produce a good marriage.

Mrs. Ferrars, with the fortune in her hand, thus has control over whom her son may choose to marry. This, however, is not the only aspect of his life over which Edward has no voice. The narrator tells the reader that Mrs. Ferrars “wished to interest him in
political concerns, to get him into parliament, or to see him connected with some of the
great men of the day. . . . But Edward had no turn for great men or barouches. All his
wishes centered in domestic comfort and the quiet of private life” (SS 14). Mrs. Ferrars’
views for Edward are introduced before his own; the narrator is giving more importance,
precedence, to Mrs. Ferrars’ wishes for her son than for her son’s wishes for himself. It
matters not if Edward has no turn for great men. Mrs. Dashwood, a spectator on the
matter, brings this point further to light when she questions Edward, “What are Mrs.
Ferrars’s views for you at present, Edward? . . . are you still to be a great orator in spite of
yourself?” (SS 66). Mrs. Dashwood here recognizes that Edward’s designs for himself are
of no consequence as it is his mother’s designs with which she is concerned. Mrs.
Dashwood’s use of the phrase “in spite of yourself” gives light to the fact that Edward’s
desires are of no consequence to his mother as Mrs. Ferrars’ cares are centered on her
wishes, and hers alone.

Elinor is quite aware of Mrs. Ferrars’ power over Edward and entertains no real
notion of their marrying without her giving consent. “[Elinor] knew that his mother
neither behaved to him so as to make his home comfortable at present, nor to give him
any assurance that he might form a home for himself, without strictly attending to her
views for his aggrandizement” (SS 19). Edward will only be allowed to make a home for
himself if he meets his mother’s wishes, both in pursuing a career of which she approves
and in finding a woman whom she deems suitable. So Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Dashwood
both have power over the marriages of their children. Mrs. Dashwood’s power, though
lesser of the two, is of encouraging or discouraging a match. She can use the power of
persuading her girls to marry the man she deems most suitable by playing on the
daughter's regard for the mother—making the marriage something that will either greatly please or greatly displease herself based on her view of the man in question. Mrs. Ferrars is able to persuade or dissuade a marriage between her sons and a young woman by promising or withholding a fortune. In both instances the mother, as head of the household, is the voice of power and of influence in the matter of the marriages of her children.

This is true also in the case of the two widows with whom the Dashwoods become acquainted upon their move to Barton Park. Having moved to Barton Cottage, the family of Mrs. Dashwood begins to move in the social circle of the owner of the estate, Sir John Middleton. Of this party is Sir John's mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings. The narrator introduces Mrs. Jennings as "a widow with an ample jointure. She had only two daughters, both of whom she had lived to see respectably married, and she had now therefore nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world. In the promotion of this object she was zealously active, as far as her abilities reached" (SS 29). Mrs. Jennings, with her ample jointure, then falls into the category of a widow who was well provided for and able to remain as the head of her own household (Dribe et al). She is currently only visiting her daughter, and not living as a member of her daughter's household. Having maneuvered her daughters into good marriages, Mrs. Jennings still has marriage as a great concern of hers. She, like Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars, encourages and projects the marriages of the young people with whom she is acquainted, and is "zealously active" in marrying those single people around her. She has naught to do but to "marry the rest of the world." This phrasing is again an instance where the narrator places the widow as the subject of the sentence and the young people as the object: the
world does not marry but rather are married off, coupled, engaged, by Mrs. Jennings. While Mrs. Jennings may not, in actuality, play as integral a part in the marriages of the world as she is here presented, the phrase reveals the power that she, as a widow, either believes herself to possess or is capable of possessing.

Marriage is indeed so much a concern of Mrs. Jennings that it is on the basis of forming marriages which she invites Elinor and Marianne to London. "I am sure your mother will not object to it; for I have had such good luck in getting my own girls off my hands, that she will think me a very fit person to have the charge of you. . . . I shall speak a good word for you to all the young men, you may depend upon it" (SS 109). First to note is that in giving a reason for why she is an appropriate chaperone, Mrs. Jennings mentions neither her morals nor her position as a well-respected woman in society. Rather, her suitability rests solely on her ability to produce matches for the girls, for which she presents as evidence her own daughters' marriages. Also in this speech, Mrs. Jennings illustrates her influence, whether it be real or imagined. She makes it clear that she will go and speak praises of the girls to the young men. Here she is meddling in the affairs of the young much as Mrs. Dashwood earlier was. She plans to promote an interest for Elinor or Marianne in one of the young men of her acquaintance. The young man will not fall for the girl entirely of his own volition; the young man will be encouraged or will be prompted to fall for the girl. Mrs. Jennings will be the instigator or the actor of the match. This is visible in her first words of entreaty for the visit: "I have had such good luck in getting my own girls off my hands." Mrs. Jennings got her girls off her hands, implying that she did some of the maneuvering in the marriage market. She is
both harking back to days of arranged marriages and revealing the power she had in the matter of her daughters’ marriages.

Mrs. Jennings’ daughter, Charlotte, illustrates to Elinor just how powerful her mother’s influence over a young man is. Charlotte reveals that her sister, Lady Middleton, and her husband, Sir John, wished very much for the marriage between herself and Colonel Brandon. “But mama did not think the match good enough for me, otherwise Sir John would have mentioned it to the Colonel, and we should have been married immediately” (SS 85). There is no mention of a fondness for Charlotte or an inclination towards liking her on the part of Colonel Brandon. There is merely the design of Lady Middleton and Sir John. But this design is not allowed to be put into action because Mrs. Jennings did not approve of Colonel Brandon. Sir John’s failure to mention the possibility of the match is a clear indication of the importance of Mrs. Jennings’ approval in the matter. Elinor asks, “Did not Colonel Brandon know of Sir John’s proposal to your mother before it was made? Had he never owned his affection to yourself?” (SS 85). For surely it would be affection by either one or both of the young parties involved that would prompt a marriage. Charlotte’s answer reveals, however, that it is Mrs. Jennings, and Mrs. Jennings alone who would prompt a marriage. “Oh! no; but if mama had not objected to it, I dare say he would have liked it above all things. He had not seen me then above twice, for it was before I left school” (SS 86). If Mrs. Jennings had approved, Colonel Brandon would have been happy with the match; her approval would have been enough to inspire an inclination towards marrying Charlotte even though no prior pronouncement of affection on his part existed. The reader cannot take this exchange to be entirely the truth, as Colonel Brandon’s thoughts on the matter are
never presented. However, Charlotte’s speech presents the power she believes her mother to have and gives light to a power struggle between the genders- the widow's word over the young man’s.

The last of the widows of Sense and Sensibility, Mrs. Smith, is introduced by fortune and estate first, rather than by name, firmly establishing her as a woman of great wealth and power. Mrs. Smith (in name at least) enters the consciousness of the Dashwoods when Mr. Willoughby, quite unexpectedly, that is through Marianne’s being enters their social circle. Elinor, curious to know more of the man who so gallantly rescued Marianne after her fall down the hills, made inquiries to Sir John of Willoughby’s living situation. “On this point Sir John could give more certain intelligence; and he told them that Mr. Willoughby had no property of his own in the country; that he resided there only while he was visiting the old lady at Allenham Court, to whom he was related, and whose possessions he was to inherit” (SS 34). The old lady is, of course, Mrs. Smith, and in this elaboration on Willoughby’s situation, Sir John has given light to a relationship between widow and young man that hinges on money. This relationship between Willoughby and Mrs. Smith is then parallel to that of Edward and Mrs. Ferrars: both widows are in possession of and control of a large fortune which will be given to the men who stand to inherit it only if the widow so wills it. Willoughby brings to light the power which Mrs. Smith has over him when he is forced to leave the Dashwoods and cancel their plans for dinner. “Mrs. Smith has this morning exercised the privilege of riches upon a poor dependent cousin, by sending me on business to London. I have just received my dispatches…” (SS 57). The construction of the first sentence is such that Mrs. Smith is, as in Gevirtz’s earlier description of her, in the position of power,
as it is she who gives the orders and forces Willoughby to act. Because Mrs. Smith is in possession of the fortune, she is able to transcend to the dominant position. So though a female and a member of the "subordinate of the sexes," she is in the grammatical position of the subject of the sentence who asserts her power over the less wealthy male, Willoughby, who, grammatically and in life, is an object whose fate is at the mercy of Mrs. Smith.

It is Willoughby’s own words that appear in the above passage, so it is Willoughby himself who introduces his plight of lack of agency to the Dashwoods. Mrs. Dashwood, in her need to rationalize Willoughby’s departure, says, “I am persuaded that Mrs. Smith suspects his regard for Marianne, disapproves of it, (perhaps because she has other views for him,) and on that account is eager to get him away;- and that the business which she sends him off to transact, invented as an excuse to dismiss him” (SS 58). Mrs. Dashwood again stands as an outside observer commenting on the dynamic of the relationship between the powerful widow and the powerless young man. Her speech also further affirms the amount of power that is had by the widow in the case of marriage. Mrs. Smith, like the other three widows of the novel, is in a position to arrange, encourage or deter a marriage between Willoughby and a young woman. Mrs. Dashwood parenthetically notes that Mrs. Smith’s probable reason for calling Willoughby away is her design for his marrying a woman who is not Marianne-- a woman of Mrs. Smith’s choosing.

This power in the marriage realm is shown to extend much farther than the voicing of opinion or discontent with the choice made by the young man. Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Smith, with their ample fortunes, are able to interfere in more ways than Mrs.
Jennings and Mrs. Dashwood, who both only have the power of words. Upon seeing Edward’s unhappiness, Mrs. Dashwood tries to cheer him by reassuring him that his “mother will secure to you, in time, that independence you are so anxious for; it is her duty, and it will, it must ere long become her happiness to prevent your whole youth from being wasted in discontent” (SS 76). Mrs. Dashwood’s use of the word independence is such an intriguing one as it is unclear whether she is referring to money or to the ability to act freely. The latter is, for Edward, impossible without the former, so agency and money are entirely conflated. Mrs. Dashwood’s reassurance to Edward makes it clear that Mrs. Ferrars controls more than just Edward’s fortune. Unless his mother bestows a substantial amount on him and so gives him the ability to act rather than sit by as his youth is “wasted in discontent,” Edward’s life, that is his future career and wife, remains in his mother’s hands. This becomes all the more obvious when it is revealed that Edward has been secretly engaged to Miss Lucy Steele for the past four years. Lucy relates to Elinor “of what importance it is to us, not to have [news of the engagement] reach his mother; for she would never approve of it, I dare say. I shall have no fortune, and I fancy she is an exceeding proud woman” (SS 96). Edward’s mother has yet to secure to him the independence he so desires and requires in order to make his own engagement. Of the utmost importance, according to Lucy’s speech, is Mrs. Ferrars’ approval. Lucy’s lack of fortune, however, is surely an impediment to gaining that.

Lucy clearly recognizes that it would be Mrs. Ferrars’ desire to maneuver her son into a marriage that would increase both his wealth and the family’s standing. Edward could of course resist her designs and marry as he pleases, but Lucy shares with Elinor the consequences of such a brash action: “But Mrs. Ferrars is a very headstrong proud
woman, and in her first fit of anger upon hearing it, would very likely secure every thing
to Robert, and the idea of that, for Edward’s sake, frightens away all my inclination for
hasty measures” (SS 106). A marriage between her son and a woman of little fortune
would surely injure the pride of a woman who has such high designs for her son. Lucy’s
fears, however, are not rooted in the initial damage but the havoc this injury of pride
would wreak. Slighted by her son, Mrs. Ferrars would seek retribution by bestowing
Edward’s fortune on his brother, withholding his independence. As seen earlier, the term
is such as can mean either fortune or agency, or, unfortunately for poor Edward, both.

Lucy had every right to fear, for Mrs. Ferrars indeed discovers the engagement.
Mr. John Dashwood relates: “What poor Mrs. Ferrars suffered, when first Fanny broke it
to her, is not to be described. While she with the truest affection had been planning a
most eligible connection for him, was it to be supposed that he could be all the time
secretly engaged to another person!- such a suspicion could never have entered her
head!” (SS 187). She, who was previously planning Edward’s career, was also planning
his future in terms of a wife. Mrs. Ferrars, “with the truest affection,” had set her sights
on Miss Morton, an eligible match because of her large fortune. Mrs. Ferrars has great
views for Edward’s aggrandizement both in career and in his situation in life, so his
marriage to Miss Morton, a woman of thirty-thousand pounds, would fulfill his mother’s
views. The marriage would also keep Mrs. Ferrars comfortably seated in her position of
power as she would have arranged the marriage, maneuvering both Edward and Miss
Morton on the marriage market. The importance of marrying a woman of fortune and of
marrying the woman of his mother’s choosing is emphasized by John Dashwood. For, if
Edward marries Miss Morton, Mrs. Ferrars, “with the utmost liberality, will come
forward, and settle on him a thousand a-year” (SS 159). If he marries Miss Morton as his mother wishes, he will receive his thousand a-year. Interestingly, Austen’s earlier use of the word independence is absent here. In this instance there is no confusion: Edward will be receiving money only and not agency, as his marrying Miss Morton would be the result of force by his mother and not an action done of his own volition. If he marries the woman whom he chooses to marry, if he acts independently in other words, he will be left poor.

When Edward decides to exercise his independence and pronounce his intention to marry Lucy, Mrs. Ferrars, just as Lucy feared, decides, “with a very natural kind of spirit, to settle that estate upon Robert immediately, which might have been Edward’s, on proper conditions” (SS 189-90). In so doing, she gives money to Robert, but also, elevates him to the status of eldest son. Here is an extreme illustration of her power as she, with one flip of her hand, alters the dynamic of her family. She does not stop there, however. “She would never see him again; and so far would she be from affording him the smallest assistance, that if he were to enter into any profession with a view of better support, she would do all in her power to prevent his advancing in it” (SS 188). Here indeed is a woman whose will is not to be thwarted! Mrs. Ferrars has the power not only to deny Edward his fortune, but to cut him out of the family entirely. The prevention of his advancement also implies that Mrs. Ferrars’ influence extends beyond members of her family and to people in positions of power in society. Her wealth has given her the ability to enact control far beyond the normal reaches of a woman of her time. Mrs. Ferrars stands as a true testament to the fact that “the eighteenth-century widow possessed rights and therefore potential unlike other women, and consequently escaped the gender
conventions assigned to women to identify them as such” (Gevirtz 168). Mrs. Ferrars is usurping the role of the man as she wields such power over her family, her fortune and, also beyond her estate.

Edward’s contracting of a marriage without his mother’s consent led to his change, or more precisely, loss of fortune. So, too, did Willoughby dare to act independently only to be cut off by Mrs. Smith. His rich cousin hears tell of an indiscretion of his: “Mrs. Smith had somehow or other been informed, I imagine by some distant relation, whose interest it was to deprive me of her favour” (SS 228). Why deprive Willoughby of Mrs. Smith’s favor? Willoughby stands to inherit the estate upon her death. But, were he to fall out of her favor, the estate could easily be bequeathed to a relative who better suits Mrs. Smith’s moral and upright values. As with Mrs. Ferrars, it is upon Mrs. Smith’s favor, desire, will, whim, that Willoughby’s fortune rests. A fall out of favor is thus a fall out of fortune. Willoughby tells Elinor of his downfall. “She taxed me with the offence at once, and my confusion may be guessed... In short, it ended in a total breach. By one measure I might have saved myself. In the height of her morality, good woman! she offered to forgive the past, if I would marry Eliza. That could not be- and I was formally dismissed from her favour and her house” (SS 229). Like Edward, Willoughby is removed from the widow’s sight because he refuses to marry the woman she chooses for him. Willoughby might have saved himself, that is retained his fortune, and Edward could have remained his mother’s eldest son, and received the money associated with this position, if only they had allowed themselves to be maneuvered by the widows into marriage.
It is with marriage arrangements that we began and it is back at marriage that we find ourselves. It is clear that the presence of money greatly influences these marriage arrangements. But Mrs. Dashwood promoting intimacies and Mrs. Jennings arranging marriages reminds that it is not just the rich widows like Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Smith who wield such power over the marriages of their young relations. For earlier Mrs. Jennings’ influence concerning the marriage of her daughter to Colonel Brandon was seen to have stopped the proceedings before they ever began. Interestingly, Mrs. Dashwood’s influence is also seen in relation to an arrangement of marriage for Colonel Brandon. He has shown an inclination for Marianne, who is unfortunately taken quite ill and lies near death. Elinor, knowing Colonel Brandon’s affection for her sister, asks her mother, “Did you allow him to hope?” (SS 239). Did Mrs. Dashwood allow Colonel Brandon to hope for a marriage with Marianne, allow him to hope for her affection and her hand? Here, Mrs. Dashwood wields the power. She could put an end to his hope by saying that the match could not take place. Marianne dotes on her mother, so could likely be persuaded. Also, Colonel Brandon’s character is not one that would go against the wishes of a parent; Mrs. Dashwood’s allowance of the match would be necessary before he would pursue the marriage. Mrs. Dashwood relates to Elinor her response to Colonel Brandon: “my greatest happiness would lie in promoting their marriage; and since our arrival... have given him every encouragement in my power” (SS 239). Mrs. Dashwood recognizes her power, the power of encouragement. She also makes it clear that her happiness is linked with the marriage, further showing the power she has to coax both Marianne and Colonel Brandon that the match must take place.
Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Jennings have shown the power of influence a widow has. This influence, in the form of opinions and promotion, is particularly directed at the arranging of and the discouraging of marriages of those young people of their acquaintance. The widow, once married but now no longer, plays an odd role in the marriages that take place in Sense and Sensibility. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Ferrars bring another kind of influence to the marriage arrangements in the form of money. And though not nearly as wealthy as Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Jennings are in possession of some money and do stand as heads of their own households. For the widows, then, money gives power. Power can be used, and is used by the widows, to promote marriage. Marriage can bring money. The widows of Sense and Sensibility have brought forth a strange interconnected triangle of money, power and marriage. The marriage, the one match that the widow desires to take place, is achieved, or attempted to be so, by her using her power and her money. Lady Catherine of Pride and Prejudice, too, has a great interest in the marriages of those around (more specifically under) her. It is to this widow that we lastly turn.

Lady Catherine enters into the consciousness of the Bennet family upon the visit of Mr. Collins to their home, Longbourn. Because of an entailment, that is a legal situation in which the estate is passed to someone other than the children of the estate owner, Longbourn will be inherited by Mr. Collins upon the death of Mr. Bennet, which would leave his widow and five daughters with nowhere to go. Mr. Collins, a clergyman, feels the need to visit the family to temper any ill feelings that may be had due to the entailment. Upon arrival, Mr. Collins is questioned of his patroness and his parish. He informs the Bennets that his patroness is “the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de
Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of the parish" (PP 43). In the first instance of Lady Catherine’s presence in the text, she joins the rankings of the widows of Sense and Sensibility. Lady Catherine has preferred Mr. Collins to the parish. It is Lady Catherine who is the subject, the actor, and Mr. Collins who is acted upon. The widow is here financially placed in the position of power, a position which is reflected grammatically.

Furthering a likeness between herself and the previous four widows, Lady Catherine immediately becomes connected with the concern of marriage. The family says that they are surprised to see that Mr. Collins is able to stay so long away from his parish, that Lady Catherine did not require his presence. Mr. Collins informs them that “she made not the smallest objection to his joining in the society of the neighbourhood, nor to his leaving the parish occasionally for a week or two, to visit his relations. She had even condescended to advise him to marry as soon as he could, provided he chose with discretion” (PP 45-6). First to note is the fact that again Lady Catherine is the subject of the sentence. She controls the action of the direct object both within the confines of the clause and in reality. For it is implied that had Lady Catherine objected to Mr. Collins’ going, he would neither interact socially with his parish nor would he presently be at Longbourn. Moving then to the action that Lady Catherine does: she advised him to marry, making it clear that she desired that he find a young woman. Austen’s use of the word “condescended” makes the phrase even more interesting; in condescending to advise, Lady Catherine is lowering herself to do something she would normally consider beneath her. This shows her position as far above that of Mr. Collins. But, it also connects the widow, once again, with marriage advisement. She condescended when the
issue of marriage arose, perhaps illustrating the connection between the widow and maneuvering marriages. For, Lady Catherine further involves herself in the marriage concerns of Mr. Collins by placing a provision on her advisement, noting that he should marry only if he chose this young woman with discretion.

The true reason for Mr. Collins’ visit is now apparent. Lady Catherine has deemed it time for him to marry, and since the estate which he is to inherit is a home to five reportedly beautiful young women, there is no place more natural to go for a wife than to Longbourn. He initially sets his sights on Jane, since she is the eldest, but is soon put off by Mrs. Bennet who informs him of Jane’s imminent engagement. “Mr. Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth- and it was soon done- done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire. Elizabeth, equally next to Jane in birth and beauty, succeeded her of course” (PP 48). Mr. Collins is clearly not looking for love, but for a young woman who will suit the desires of Lady Catherine. He has been advised to marry, and so marry he will, and must. Having changed from Jane to Elizabeth, Mr. Collins approaches his intended with the question of marriage. He offers to her the following speech:

My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly in my happiness; and thirdly- which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me
her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject. . . . she said, 'Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry.

—Chuse properly, chuse a gentlewoman for my sake; and for your own, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her (PP 72).

The speech begins with Mr. Collins’ views on why he should marry— he thinks it proper for every clergyman— and then continues to say that it will make him happy. The third reason, and the greater part of his speech, however, is devoted to Lady Catherine’s views on marriage. He says precedes Lady Catherine’s views with “thirdly,” but then quickly makes the point that he should have mentioned earlier the reason that will follow. Clearly he places Lady Catherine’s views before his own as he recognizes his error in mentioning her opinion first. Lady Catherine has given her opinion, and unasked for too, (echoing her condescending to advise) as he notes, so it has come as more of a command than an opinion: “you must marry” are her words. It is also clear that his choice must be pleasing to her. She tells him to choose a gentlewoman for “my sake,” and Austen goes as far as to emphasize the word ‘my’ to show just how important Lady Catherine’s approval of the woman is. Her final words dispatch him to go find this woman and bring her back to Hunsford. It is unclear whether Lady Catherine means for Mr. Collins to marry the girl and then bring her to Hunsford or to bring her to Hunsford for prior approval. In either case, however, Lady Catherine had placed such provisos and given advice as to the type of girl he should marry that Mr. Collins’ eyes are likely to fall only on that woman of
whom he knows Lady Catherine would approve. Mr. Collins has surely taken her words to heart as we now find him away from his parish, seeking Elizabeth’s hand at Longbourn.

Elizabeth seems to know just how much Mr. Collins defers to his patroness. Rather than denying him outright, Elizabeth responds, “Nay, were your friend Lady Catherine to know me, I am persuaded she would find me in every respect ill qualified for the situation” (PP 73). Elizabeth mentions nothing of her disinclination for the match. She instead relies only on her knowledge of Mr. Collins’ great regard for Lady Catherine and her opinion. Mr. Collins begins his answer gravely, “Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so,” but abruptly changes his mood, “but I cannot imagine that her ladyship would at all disapprove of you” (PP 73-4). His initial response illustrates that thoughts of a marriage to Elizabeth would instantly cease if he thought Lady Catherine would disapprove of his marriage to her. For he abruptly cuts off this thought and finishes by saying he sees no reason for Lady Catherine’s disapproval. Therefore, his offer of marriage stands.

Elizabeth, however, has no intention of marrying Mr. Collins. Mrs. Bennet pleads with her and does all in her power to persuade her daughter to accept the proposal. Mrs. Bennet even appeals to her husband in the matter. Mrs. Bennet, who is not a widow like Mrs. Dashwood of Sense and Sensibility, must defer to her husband, who, as head of the household, has the power of persuasion in the Bennet family. Mr. Bennet approves of Elizabeth’s refusal, however, and so Mr. Collins’ proposal is refused. Mr. Collins, however, was advised to find a wife. He need only turn to Elizabeth’s friend Charlotte, who readily agrees to a marriage. Charlotte, seeing little other prospect, marries Mr.
Collins and is brought back to Hunsford to be visited by Lady Catherine. Mr. Collins has fulfilled his duty. Elizabeth, anxious to see her friend’s situation in her marriage, visits their home. Elizabeth is not long there before she feels the influence of Lady Catherine. She “enquired into Charlotte’s domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, and gave her a great deal of advice, as to the management of them all; told her how every thing ought to be regulated in so small a family as her’s, and instructed her as to the care of her cows and her poultry” (PP 109). Lady Catherine, having dictated the type of wife Mr. Collins should find, of course is now advising the way his wife should manage the household. She has acted as the instigator of the marriage, and so now, as patroness and head of the estate, she must see to the managing of the marriage. This keeps her firmly in the dominant, subject position.

Lady Catherine is not concerned only with the marriage of Mr. Collins. He is her clergyman, and though an important part of her estate, his marriage is not nearly as great a concern to her as is her nephew’s. Her nephew is Mr. Darcy, friend of Mr. Bingley of Netherfield, with whom Elizabeth became acquainted upon their becoming neighbors of Longbourn. While Elizabeth is visiting Charlotte and Mr. Collins, she is introduced to Lady Catherine, of course, but also to her daughter, Miss de Bourgh. Miss de Bourgh is Mr. Darcy’s cousin, and it is she “for whom he was evidently destined by Lady Catherine” (PP 113). Lady Catherine makes it clear that Mr. Darcy is off the marriage market, for he is, if not yet betrothed, destined to be so. There is no evidence of Darcy’s desire to marry his cousin, nor conversely, of hers to marry him. Lady Catherine, member of a great family and owner of a large estate, is much concerned with the advancement of the family both in wealth and status. She is not about to let the young
people make matches of their own, but rather, she will arrange the match herself. Like the previous widows, she is a maneuverer on the marriage market.

Lady Catherine so desires the match between her nephew and her daughter, in fact, that rumors of his engagement to Elizabeth send Lady Catherine to Elizabeth’s door. Elizabeth, surprised to see the woman at Longbourn, asks her why she has come. She replies, “At once to insist upon having such a report universally contradicted” (PP 230). Lady Catherine demands that Elizabeth say the marriage is not to take place, and to dismiss any ideas of the marriage occurring from her mind. She continues to say of the match between Darcy and Miss de Bourgh that “it ought to be so; it must be so. . . . This match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter. . . . The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of his mother, as well as her’s” (PP 231). Lady Catherine’s deep concern in the matter of the marriage of her daughter and her nephew is here most clearly illustrated. She moves from the match being one that should be to one that must be, giving light to her domineering and commanding nature. She goes as far as ordering Elizabeth to cease aspiring to a marriage with Mr. Darcy, as Lady Catherine has already planned his future. Mr. Darcy’s lack of involvement in the engagement becomes apparent at the end of Lady Catherine’s speech when she qualifies the engagement as one of a “peculiar kind” and further of being a “wish of his mother, as well as her’s.” Members of the family see the benefits of the match, as was the case with Colonel Brandon and Charlotte, and later with Colonel Brandon and Marianne. There is no talk of affection between the two young people or of an inclination for marriage to each other. Lady Catherine stands as a
representation of the tradition of arranged marriages, and so her domineering will creates a tension with the younger generation who are turning to the companionate marriage.

Elizabeth refuses to contradict the report as Lady Catherine wished, or more accurately, demanded. Lady Catherine leaves and Elizabeth must consider what may happen. She reflects that "She knew not the exact degree of his affection for his aunt, or his dependence on her judgment, but it was natural to suppose that he thought much higher of her ladyship than she could do; and it was certain, that in enumerating the miseries of a marriage with one, whose immediate connections were so unequal to his own, his aunt would address him on his weakest side. . ." (PP 235). Elizabeth is here acknowledging the great power and influence that Lady Catherine has. It is entirely possible that Darcy would defer to his aunt's wishes; he may be dependent upon her and so not have the agency to act as he pleases. She also recognizes that Lady Catherine could easily influence Darcy's decision by enumerating the negatives there are in marrying Elizabeth. The widow again has the power of discouragement in the marriage of the young. Interestingly, Elizabeth qualifies Darcy's dependence as being on Lady Catherine's judgment; there is no conflation of independence and fortune here as was seen with Edward. Austen here makes it clear that Darcy, if he were to defer to his aunt's wishes, would so because of some sort of familial interest rather than a monetary one. Elizabeth continues her rumination: "If he had been wavering before, as to what he should do, which had often seemed likely, the advice and intreaty of so near a relation might settle every doubt. . ." (PP 235). Such a strong and dominant figure as Lady Catherine could easily sway Darcy's decision to coincide with her own desires. She has
previously stood as the actor, the subject, and so a pattern of her domination is already in place.

Lady Catherine's power and influence reach much beyond the arranging of and the concerns of marriage. It has already been shown that marriage is of great concern to the widow, but also of importance are the concerns of the parish. Lady Catherine, as the widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh, now sits in his former place as the head of the household. This extends not only to her immediate household, but also to her surrounding parish. The reader learns that Lady Catherine "derives the best part of her abilities from her rank and fortune" (PP 57). So Lady Catherine is a widow of great fortune and also of rank, which gives her a power unseen in the previous four widows. Lady Catherine is also, arguably, not so much directly on the fault line between male and female, but, as I see it, leaning slightly more toward the masculine side. Elizabeth's observations help to make this crossing of the gender boundary more clear: "though this great lady was not in the commission of the peace for the county, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish... and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty (PP 102). Elizabeth's thoughts liken Lady Catherine to a magistrate, a judge and something of a constable or peacekeeper. These are all very definitely masculine roles that Lady Catherine is playing. Also, Katherine Sobba Green notes that marriage between Darcy and his cousin has a female agent, Lady Catherine, "but its nature remains 'patriarchal' - concerned not for individual good but for familial well-being, the transmission of property and status" (157). So though the subject is of marriage, a normally female domestic sphere, it is
actually a case in which the marriage in concern exists in the male sphere of property and wealth. Lady Catherine, even when the concern is domestic, sits as patriarch. Though the widows before her have stood as the actors, they have all been confined to acting within the feminine sphere—marriage and household. Lady Catherine jumps over the gender fault line where her fellow widows have previously straddled it.

The widows of *Pride and Prejudice* and of *Sense and Sensibility* show themselves to be strong forces within the novel. They create crises, facilitate action, influence decisions, withhold fortune, alter family dynamics, and, always, interfere in the marriages of the young people in their circle. In every instance, the widow has, upon the death of her husband, assumed the role of head of the house. In so doing, she has elevated herself to a position of power which is impossible and unfathomable for the single or the married woman. The widow is a woman who takes all the “normal” male characteristics, often taking the active role, which is reflected stylistically in her grammatical position as subject in many key sentences in the text. Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Dashwood, Mrs. Ferrars and Lady Catherine lay “claims to signs of both masculinity and femininity” (Gevirtz 168). Thus, they complicate the binary of male/female and usurp the dominant position from the young men who fall under their control. With such a disruption to social order, the young men are left with two options—stand idly by, or reassert the order of male domination.
Chapter 2

The widows have laid siege against the order of male domination. Lady Catherine, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars have broken past the dividing line that separates the masculine from the feminine. In so doing, they have also broken down another barrier. John Tosh notes that “because men have been dominant in the public sphere, masculinity carries public meanings of great political moment” (217) and that in the period of 1750-1850, “masculinity” stands for a bewildering diversity of approaches,” including, “the gendering of public discourse about the state of the nation” (218). Masculinity is synonymous with the public sphere, so in taking on male traits, the widow is also leaving the domestic sphere of home and family and entering the public sphere of society and politics. The widows’ hands in the marriages of the young men under her control is not just a private, domestic concern of finding a good match to secure their daughter’s future. Rather, the widow is making matches that will increase her family’s fortune and rank, that will advance the family’s standing in society. For in joining her daughter with Mr. Darcy, Lady Catherine seeks to increase the land and wealth of her family, and in so doing alter the landscape of society. The widows, in blending the masculine and the feminine, are also blurring the boundaries which previously separated the two sexes— the domestic and the public. The domestic concern of matrimony is constantly linked to the public concern of money and estate, so that the widow’s control of the former is in direct relation to their power over the latter. The public knowledge of the young men’s lack of fortune comes to have an effect on the marriages they are able to contract.
As these domestic concerns become part of public discourse, the young men’s masculinity becomes threatened. Edward, Willoughby, Robert, Colonel Brandon and Mr. Collins are unable to act on their own. They are unable to form marriages on their own. They have, in short, lost their agency to the wealthy widows. Claudia Johnson writes that these young men are “doomed to dependency and ennui until the death of a near relation will supply the money and liberty they crave” (55). Money will grant the men the ability to contract a marriage and to act in other ways as they please. But until the widow is removed and the fortune bestowed, the man remains stuck as the person who is acted upon. They have lost their agency and so are unable to choose their own wife, to decide their own career, or to act in any way other than that which the widow approves of. Rather than be doomed to ennui and an emasculated state, the young men react and attempt to regain their agency and subsequently, their masculinity.

Though there are two barriers broken, that between public and private as well as that between masculine and feminine, the former stems from the latter. As Nancy Armstrong writes, Austen, in her use of the power struggle between widow and young man, condenses “the complex and competing ways of representing human identity into a single binary opposition represented by male versus female” (253). So, in order for the young man to reinstate the boundaries between the binaries, he must reassert the dominance of the masculine over the feminine. He must place himself in the position of actor, in the position of power over the female. He must first of all be the one to choose his wife, to not be forced into a marriage by the widow. In this way he can reassert his agency. To reclaim his lost masculinity, he must be sure to set his sights upon a woman
of less power than himself, for he must be able to hold the dominant position in the relationship if he is to reassert his maleness.

In his article “Who Says She’s a Bourgeois Writer?,” J.A. Downie notes that “Jane Austen goes to considerable lengths to offer the reader information about the financial circumstances of her characters” (70). This is especially true of the young men in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, whose financial circumstances become hot topics of conversation in the neighborhood. Let us return for a moment to the Dashwoods’ first meeting Willoughby. Elinor inquires of his character to Sir John, who can offer little on this point. What Sir John can offer is information regarding Willoughby’s finances. “On this point Sir John could give more certain intelligence; and he told them that Mr. Willoughby had no property of his own in the country; that he resided there only while he was visiting the old lady at Allenham Court, to whom he was related, and whose possessions he was to inherit” (*SS* 34). Sir John seems to have quite an extensive knowledge of Willoughby’s fortune, considering he is a person with whom he has little acquaintance. Sir John is here being used to make the reader fully aware of Willoughby’s financial situation, namely that his finances are dependent upon his relation.

This point of Willoughby’s fortune, or rather lack thereof, is an important piece of information for Elinor and it is to it that she returns when the question of marriage arises, linking money and marriage once again. In wondering why Willoughby has yet to propose to her sister, Marianne, Elinor “could easily conceive that marriage might not be immediately in their power; for though Willoughby was independent, there was no reason to believe him rich” (*SS* 54). The establishment of Willoughby’s finances earlier by Sir
John allow for money to be the quick and ready answer in the delay of marriage. Here again is the appearance of the word “independent,” which Austen distinguishes from wealth here by noting that Willoughby has independence but may not be rich. Agency and fortune are here separate terms; however, the implication is such that the ability to act independently is entirely dependent on the possession of wealth. Elinor’s thoughts also further the link between marriage and money when she makes a connection between a happy marriage and the presence of enough wealth to support the marriage, for without that, “every kind of external comfort must be wanting” (SS 67). Marianne and Elinor take the discussion of money required for a comfortable and happy marriage further by fixing on exact monetary amounts. Elinor proposes a competency of a thousand a-year and Marianne two thousand, for, she argues, “A family cannot well be maintained on a smaller [income]... A proper establishment of servants, a carriage, perhaps two, and hunters, cannot be supported on less” (SS 67). From the sisters’ exchange, “rich” is defined as having two thousand a-year and such extravagances as carriages and hunters. The sisters have yet to see evidence of Willoughby’s being able to afford all that, and so, because money is necessary for agency, he is not free to marry Marianne.

Willoughby’s independence is again linked to his fortune when his wealthy cousin, Mrs. Smith calls him away on business. Willoughby shares the unfortunate news with the Dashwoods by relating that “Mrs. Smith has this morning exercised the privilege of riches upon a poor dependent cousin” (SS 57). He is here, in his own words, making it clear that he is not rich, that his finances are such that he is dependent upon his cousin. His independence is again spoken of in the same breath as fortune, as it is because he has none that he is unable to act independently of Mrs. Smith’s desires and stay where he is:
Mrs. Dashwood makes a similar observation. "Had he been in a situation to act independently and marry immediately, it might have been odd that he should leave us without acknowledging everything to me at once: but this is not the case" (SS 61). The public knowledge of Willoughby's financial situation allows Mrs. Dashwood to place blame for his failure of acknowledging the attachment on the widow who controls his fortune. Had he been in possession of his own fortune, he would have been free to marry Marianne immediately. But because he is dependent on Mrs. Smith, he must leave as she has summoned him. He must also leave without proposing or acknowledging an affection for Marianne, as he lacks the independence, the finances and the agency, to do so.

Willoughby, in attempting to regain his agency, does act contrary to Mrs. Smith's wishes. Mrs. Smith has been presented as a person of upright values, so a moral transgression, such as the one Willoughby is learned to have committed, would clearly be against her wishes. The transgression is an act against a female, a weak female, so in this act Willoughby has a chance to regain both agency and masculinity. Colonel Brandon relates the story to Elinor. He tells her of Eliza, daughter of the union of Colonel Brandon's brother with the Colonel's own beloved. The mother was abandoned by her husband, Colonel Brandon's brother, and left her daughter, Eliza, to the care of Colonel Brandon. He, not having a home or family of his own, saw it best to place her in a school where she could have companions and receive a good education. He later placed her under the care of a respectable woman, whose guardianship she left to visit Bath with friends. Eliza disappeared from Bath, seduced by none other than Willoughby. Colonel Brandon then tells Elinor that when he had been called away from their party earlier, it was to attend to this matter (SS 147-148).
Colonel Brandon’s words are perhaps best examined, for in the semantics of agency, they place Willoughby in quite a different position than he was in the earlier discussion of him. “Little did Mr. Willoughby imagine, I suppose, when his looks censured me for incivility in breaking up the party, that I was called away to the relief of one, whom he had made poor and miserable. . . . He had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address!” (SS 148). Willoughby has made Eliza poor. The rich widow was previously the active subject, as she was the one with the power. Willoughby’s action has allowed for a change in the semantics. With the widow no longer present to stand as the power figure, the young man, who is the next in line in the hierarchy of power, is able to move up. Willoughby is, in the above passage, not an object to be acted upon by the widow. Instead, he is the active subject who is able to, and who does, act upon another object, Eliza. Hazel Jones observes that in Bath, “opportunities existed for libertines to take advantage of youth and inexperience—Colonel Brandon’s seventeen-year-old ward, ranging the streets of Bath and mixing with unsuitable companions, is an easy conquest for Willoughby” (50). Willoughby, in seducing Eliza, has made a conquest. He has done not only an action, but a decidedly masculine one wrought with connotations of war and victory. He has moved to the position of one who has agency, as he is the one who is doing the actions in the above passage, and also masculinity as he reasserts the order of domination of male over female.

Leaving Willoughby aside for a moment, let us look more closely at Colonel Brandon’s tale. Colonel Brandon notes that Eliza, the mother of the young girl used so
cruelly by Willoughby, was his beloved. She was married instead to his brother, "married against her inclination to my brother. Her fortune was large, and our family estate was much encumbered" (SS 145). Colonel Brandon was unable to have the woman of his choosing because money and fortune entered into and complicated the marriage market.

His brother was the elder of the two, so his marriage to Eliza was necessary as her fortune would then become his and rescue the family's estate. Colonel Brandon has suffered the same fate with Charlotte (if her claim is to be believed) in that he lost a marriage to her because his fortune and rank were not high enough. Interestingly, both Colonel Brandon and Willoughby presently show a regard for Marianne, and it is because of this regard that Colonel Brandon relates Willoughby's tale of debauchery to Elinor. Colonel Brandon concludes his tale by saying that Willoughby's character "is now before you; expensive, dissipated, and worse than both" (SS 148).

It is once again to expense that Austen returns. Willoughby is expensive, but it has been greatly established that he has no fortune, or at least no great fortune. Willoughby himself clarifies the point of his finances to Elinor. Upon hearing of Marianne's sickness, Willoughby entreats Elinor to hear him out as he wishes for Marianne's forgiveness. Willoughby begins his speech by saying "My fortune was never large, and I have always been expensive. . . Every year since my coming of age, or even before, I believe, had added to my debts" (SS 227). Here, the reader is made finally and firmly aware of Willoughby's financial situation; he has some fortune, but he is inclined to live above his means. The construction of his phrases is worth noting. Willoughby has removed himself from his speech and instead speaks only of years and debt. Rather than saying that he had spent money, or had gambled or had done any number of things to add
to his debts, he claims, rather, that the years had added to them. In removing himself from the sentence, Willoughby has removed any responsibility for his position from his shoulders. If he only had Mrs. Smith’s money, he would be able to live the lifestyle he pleases. The lack of fortune brings Willoughby from his position as subject that he obtained in dominating Eliza; money is once again linked to the ability to act.

Willoughby continues his story to Elinor by making clear the connection between money and agency. “Though the death of my old cousin, Mrs. Smith, was to set me free; yet that event being uncertain, and possibly far distant, it had been for some time my intention to re-establish my circumstance by marrying a woman of fortune” (SS 227). The death of Mrs. Smith was to set him free. Through the death of the widow, the death of the controller of the money, Willoughby would gain his fortune, and subsequently his independence. The money is the path to independence. Willoughby recognizes this as he notes that, being that Mrs. Smith’s death may be long off, his other option is to marry a woman of fortune. Her fortune would free him from his debts as well as free him from the control of Mrs. Smith. She would no longer be a rich relation able to enact her will on the poor Willoughby. Marianne’s fortune was not large enough, so a marriage to her would not provide him with the finances necessary for his freedom. He relates to Elinor that he had, at first, no intention of marrying her sister as his greed was greater than his affection. But he soon found himself “by insensible degrees, sincerely fond of her” (SS 227). Again, Willoughby’s phrasing is such that he has done no action; he is not to blame as he merely found himself in love with Marianne. Something acted upon him and brought about the emotion.
Willoughby does admit that this emotion eventually led him to wish to marry Marianne. Unfortunately, Mrs. Smith learned of his transgression and ill treatment of Eliza. Hence he was summoned from Marianne’s company. Mrs. Smith told Willoughby she would forgive him only if he would marry Eliza. He could not do so, and so was dismissed from Mrs. Smith’s favor, and so lost his fortune. He continues his story by saying that he spent the next night agonizing over his future. “My affection for Marianne, my thorough conviction of her attachment to me—it was all insufficient to outweigh that dread of poverty, or get the better of those false ideas of necessity of riches, which I was naturally inclined to feel, and expensive society had increased” (SS 229). Willoughby had always been expensive, and so was naturally inclined to need riches; he has become used to living in such a society and so this has nurtured his inclination. It is not his fault that the desire for wealth was greater than his love for Marianne. Society has exacerbated this need for wealth in him, and so, out of Mrs. Smith’s favor, Willoughby then needs to turn to his other option, marrying a woman of fortune.

Willoughby sets his sights on Miss Grey, a woman rumored to be quite rich. Elinor asks Mrs. Jennings of the lady’s wealth, and she is quick to supply Elinor and the reader with the girl’s financial circumstances. “Fifty thousand pounds, my dear. Did you ever see her? a smart, stylish girl they say, but not handsome. . . Fifty thousand pounds! and by all accounts it wo’nt come before it’s wanted; for they say he is all to pieces. . .” (SS 137). Mrs. Jennings’ report on Miss Grey makes it clear, as she repeats it twice, that what is of importance in the matter is the fifty thousand pounds. The girl’s lack of beauty is glossed over, and is in fact book ended by Mrs. Jennings’ repetition of the fortune in the girl’s possession. The girl’s intellect or beauty is of little concern to Willoughby as he
is not looking for companionship but for fortune. The end of Mrs. Jennings’ speech makes it clear that Willoughby is in debt. In her book *Jane Austen and Marriage*, Hazel Jones elaborates on the fortune of Miss Grey. “The woman’s fortune was transferred to her husband and usually invested at 5% to provide a yearly income. Miss Grey’s £50,000 would earn £2,500 a year for Willoughby, enabling him to maintain his foxhounds and hunters with a comfortable sum left over for luxuries” (Jones 58). When his fortune was refused by Mrs. Smith, he had to seek it elsewhere if he wished to pay his debts and continue to live in expensive society. In marrying Miss Grey, he comes into the possession not only of a wife, but also of her fortune and the income that fortune will provide. Miss Grey’s fifty thousand pounds will give Willoughby the freedom to maintain foxhounds and to hunt, and to partake of any other luxuries he should choose. The fortune gives him the independence to act as he pleases. He will have the competency, roughly £2500 a year based on the standard 5% interest, that Marianne noted earlier as being necessary to a happy and comfortable marriage.

Previously, Willoughby acted as his own agent by seducing the young Eliza. Here, Willoughby is again acting as agent by contracting a marriage with a woman against the wishes of Mrs. Smith. Both acts of agency involve a woman and are acts that bring Willoughby farther from Mrs. Smith’s favor. For in marrying Miss Grey, Willoughby is not doing as Mrs. Smith asked and marrying Eliza. He is asserting his position as male, as the subject and dominant person who can do as he pleases. At the end of his story to Elinor, Willoughby attempts to place himself in the position of blameless victim again, the position of the object who was acted upon by Mrs. Smith, by society, by whomever. He goes so far as to blame his wife, the very wife he chose, for his cruel letter
to Marianne, a letter his wife writes and he was “forced” to copy. Of his wife he says, “her money was necessary to me” and so “I copied my wife’s words... and every memento was torn from me” (SS 233). The words were not his, but rather his wife’s, and so Willoughby is a blameless victim who was merely forced to copy words. He needed her money and so he had no choice in the matter, as he sees it. He even goes as far as to say that the mementos were torn from him, meaning that they were taken and forcefully and that he did not act and forfeit them willingly. Elinor, however, recognizes Willoughby’s agency. “You have made your own choice. It was not forced on you” (SS 233).

Willoughby indeed made his own choice. He chose to seduce Eliza, chose to refuse to marry her, chose to marry Miss Grey, and all his choices were made in direct contrast to the wishes of Mrs. Smith. In making choices, however, Willoughby was able to become his own agent. In acting contrary to the wishes of Mrs. Smith, he freed himself from her rule. In marrying Miss Grey, he gained the fortune that would give him the independence he so desired. Willoughby was trapped in a web of money and power much like Edward Ferrars. In fact, the situation between the two is so similar that even Elinor observes that “Edward seemed a second Willoughby...” (SS 184).

As with Willoughby, the reader is made intimately aware of Edward’s financial situation. Mrs. Dashwood’s comments, as seen in chapter 1, and Miss Lucy Steele provide the reader with the information of Edward’s finances. Lucy has been secretly engaged to Edward for four years. She shares this engagement only with Elinor, whom Edward has spoken of to her as a trusted friend, noting her need to unburden herself of this great secret to someone. However, the more likely motive is to discourage any
affection that she may have perceived between Elinor and Edward. Elinor of course agrees to keep this knowledge to herself and offers sympathy to Lucy, as she will have great difficulties in going ahead with the marriage. Elinor concludes by saying, “Mr. Ferrars, I believe, is entirely dependent on his mother” (SS 105). Lucy confirms Elinor’s belief by detailing Edward’s finances. “He has only two thousand pounds of his own; it would be madness to marry upon that, though for my own part, I could give up every prospect of more without a sigh... but I love him too well to be the selfish means of robbing him, perhaps, of all that his mother might give him if he married to please her” (SS 105). First, the use of the word dependent here is worth noting. Elinor says that Edward is entirely dependent on his mother; her modification of dependent with the adverb “entirely” perhaps implies a dependence that is both financial and familial. Edward perhaps is dependent on his mother’s judgment, much the way Elizabeth feared Darcy was dependent on Lady Catherine’s. Lucy’s response, however, places Edward’s dependence only in the financial realm. She makes a clear distinction between the money that Edward has as his own and the money that he stands to receive from his mother. As seen earlier, this money from his mother will only be received if he acts in a way that pleases her. It would be madness for Lucy to marry Edward both on the grounds of the meagerness of his fortune, and on the fact that a marriage of which his mother does not approve would result in being cut off from any hope of an increase in fortune. So, Lucy too, conflates wealth and agency. She makes it clear that marrying on such a fortune as Edward’s would be mad; it is not enough of a fortune to support them comfortably. She goes further to say that she would not want to rob Edward “of all that his mother might give him if he married to please her.” Lucy is perfectly aware of the fact that Edward will
he marries the woman of his mother's choosing. Edward is thus entirely dependent on his mother's choice in the matter of marriage, as it is only with a marriage of which she approves that Edward will gain his inheritance. As long as his mother controls his fortune, Edward is unable to take the active role and choose his own wife.

He has, however, formed an engagement with Lucy without his mother's knowledge. This is a step towards his reclaiming his masculinity as he is taking the role of actor. This is reflected in the speech of John Dashwood both in the meaning of his words and in the stylistic construction of them. "Edward has drawn his own lot, and I fear it will be a bad one" (SS 189). Edward has drawn his own lot, meaning that, like Willoughby, he has made his own choice in the matter. Grammatically, Edward here stands as the subject of the sentence, as the one who has drawn. He has, in contracting this engagement, moved into the position of subject and so gained his lost agency. He has chosen his bride, acting independently of his mother's wishes, and not being acted upon by her domineering desires. In going against the powerful female figure and forming an attachment with Lucy, who is a female of less power than his mother, Edward is able to reclaim his male position of subject, of actor. This reclamation, however, is weakened by the fact that the engagement had to be kept secret from his mother. Because he contracted the engagement but had to keep it secret, his mother still had control of his actions.

John Dashwood continues by lamenting Edward's situation. "If he would only have done as well by himself as all his friends were disposed to do by him, he might now have been in his proper situation and would have wanted for nothing" (SS 189). In other words, if he had done as his mother wished, he would have received his fortune. John
Dashwood's use of the word "proper" is quite possibly a sly remark on Austen's part. Edward's attaining his "proper situation" is only possible if he follows the orders of his mother. The subordination of the male to the female is not, usually, the "proper" practice, but here, the subordination of son to mother is proper. The deference to the parent takes precedence over the gender, here allowing Mrs. Ferrars the ability to be in the dominant position. Submission is the only way for Edward to remain in his "proper" place as eldest son. This position would have allowed for him to want for nothing, as would his rejection of the position and his marrying of a woman of large fortune. Willoughby was able to gain his independence through the wealth that his bride brought him. Edward, however, will be left wanting, as John points out, as Lucy will do little to increase his fortune. Edward, then, is unable to marry Lucy as quickly as Willoughby wed Miss Grey, as money is an issue. They will not have much to live on if they marry right away, and so must find a way to obtain some security for their future first. Edward is unable to act independently of his mother's wishes and so is prevented from fully obtaining his agency.

Lucy's sister Nancy knows the importance of a fortune when it comes to matters of marriage. She frets to Elinor, "... nobody in their senses could expect Mr. Ferrars to give up a woman like Miss Morton, with thirty thousand pounds to her fortune, for Lucy Steele that had nothing at all" (SS 192). Nancy recognizes how mad it would be for Edward not to marry Miss Morton. First, there is the fact that she is rich. Money has seen to be of great concern in matrimony. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Miss Morton is the woman Edward's mother wishes him to marry. In marrying her, he gains not only her thirty thousand pounds, but also the money his mother holds for him, so Edward's fortune would be increased on two counts. More importantly, if Edward
married Miss Morton, he would follow his mother's arrangements and remain in her favor. Notice that the only reason Nancy gives for Edward's marrying is Miss Morton's fortune; there is no companionate marriage here as there would be if he were to marry Lucy. If he were to follow through with the arranged match, he would no longer be dependent on his mother for money and support, but he would be unlikely to be able to assert his independence from his mother after marriage, as he would be married to the woman his mother chose for him. A marriage to Miss Morton would deny Edward his agency and masculinity. So, Edward stands firm in his engagement to Lucy even when he is cut off from his fortune and from his family, as Mrs. Ferrars no longer recognizes him as a son and instead promotes Robert to the position of eldest. He asserts both his independence and his agency by making his own choice in the matter.

Like Willoughby who told of his secret seduction of Eliza, so too does Edward share of his secret (though now public) engagement with Elinor. "Had my mother given me some active profession when I was removed at eighteen from the care of Mr. Pratt, I think- nay, I am sure, it would never have happened... I had therefore, nothing in the world to do, but fancy myself in love" (SS 255-56). Edward has earlier expressed an inclination for joining the clergy, but Mrs. Ferrars had higher designs for her son. She wished him to be a man of great importance, in spite of himself. Mrs. Ferrars has indeed proposed numerous professions for Edward, but he had no desire or inclination for any of them. His not becoming a great man as his mother wished, but instead engaging in no profession and contracting a secret engagement is a sort of act of rebellion, an act of reclaiming agency. But possessing agency would mean that the blame would land on Edward himself, so he, like Willoughby, places the blame, and the agency, elsewhere. It
is his mother's fault for not providing him with a profession that he had so much time at his disposal—time which allowed him to fancy himself in love. Like Willoughby, he did not actively fall in love with Lucy. Rather, it seems to have just fallen on him, so that he one day fancied himself to be in love. He has, in his stance against his mother in refusing to break the engagement, previously been fighting to regain his agency and masculinity. However, he is here placing all the power back in his mother's hands. It is her fault that he is presently engaged to Lucy—it has naught to do with his own choices and feelings.

Speaking of choices and feelings, let us return, for a moment, to Miss Morton. There is nothing said of her desire to marry Edward. Rather, there is only Mrs. Ferrars' wish that a marriage between her and Edward take place. Miss Morton, like Edward, is an object of the marriage market. Nowhere is this made more plain than in an exchange between John Dashwood and his sister Elinor.

"We think now"—said Mr. Dashwood, after a short pause, "of Robert's marrying Miss Morton."

Elinor, smiling at the grave and decisive importance of her brother's tone, calmly replied,

"The Lady, I suppose, has no choice in the affair."

"Choice!- how do you mean?"-

"I only mean, that I suppose from your manner of speaking, it must be the same to Miss Morton whether she marry Edward or Robert"

(SS 210).

As Elinor observes, Miss Morton seems to have little or no choice in the matter. It can be assumed that some sort of agreement for the marriage between Edward and Miss Morton
has been made between Mrs. Ferrars and Miss Morton's family. Perhaps Miss Morton has had some say in the matter, but in the above exchange Elinor remarks upon Miss Morton's lack of choice. In saying that it must be the same to her whether she marries Edward or Robert, Elinor is in a way bringing to light the fact that it is probably all the same to Miss Morton whether she marry Robert, or Edward or any other man whom her family wishes her to marry. She is a woman of great fortune, so her family, likely wanting to increase that fortune, will navigate the marriage market and find her a young man of fortune to marry. Hazel Jones notes that "at the top of the social scale, some aristocratic families still arranged marriages for money and political power, yet love marriages were not unknown. Not all titled or wealthy parents manoeuvred their children into mercenary alliances; not all gentry families allowed their sons and daughters to marry where they chose" (1). Austen is writing during this transitional period, and in this exchange between Elinor and her brother, is emphasizing the "mercenary" aspect of the marriage market that was still in existence. Miss Morton is an example of a young woman who is maneuvered in the marriage market, rather than who has a choice.

Interestingly, and unremarked upon by her, is the fact that Robert too has no choice in the matter. There is the collective We, which likely includes or consists entirely of Mrs. Ferrars, who thinks of the marriage. It is this We that is the subject and Miss Morton and Robert who are the object of the thinking. Mrs. Ferrars is again forming engagements for her son, now Robert, in spite of his feelings for the woman. As Mrs. Ferrars' power has already been seen when Edward disobeyed, Robert is likely to find himself in the same situation. He can marry Miss Morton as his mother wishes, and so gain her fortune and receive his from his mother, or he can refuse and fall out of her
favor, thus losing his inheritance. Robert can either give up his agency and masculinity by bowing to his mother’s wishes, or he can refuse the marriage, retaining both but losing his fortune. As the link has been made between wealth and independence, the loss of fortune could likely result in his loss of agency regardless, and thus of the reasserted masculinity.

With either choice, Robert stands to lose. So what choice does Robert make? Why, he secretly marries Lucy! Robert escaped the marriage plotting between himself and Miss Morton by marrying a woman of his own choosing. He need not worry about losing Miss Morton’s thirty thousand pounds, as Mrs. Ferrars, in cutting off Edward, greatly increased Robert’s fortune. Elinor observes, “The independence she settled on Robert, through resentment against you, has put it in his power to make his own choice” (SS 258). Again the appearance of that tricky word, “independence.” Here, Mrs. Ferrars, in giving the fortune to Robert also gave him the agency to act as he desired. In this case then, the independence settled upon Robert takes the form of both money and the ability to act freely. Is Mrs. Ferrars really so resentful a woman as to settle Edward’s independence on Robert? The text provides no evidence to suggest Mrs. Ferrars’ reason for so drastic an act, other than Elinor’s above explanation of resentment. In having the ability to raise one son to the position of eldest and to remove another from the family, Mrs. Ferrars is presented by Austen as a woman of extreme power. When Mrs. Ferrars exercises this power, she loses one son and drives another to a disadvantageous marriage (in the sense that it did not increase the family’s wealth or rank). Austen, in writing Mrs. Ferrars, has given a warning as to what happens when the widow becomes too controlling, too domineering, too powerful.
Austen has also made it clear that money, independence and choice are all inextricably linked. The independence, in the form of fortune, gave Robert the independence to make his own choice, the ability to regain his agency. Of his marriage choice the narrator says that “[Robert] was proud of his conquest, proud of tricking Edward, and very proud of marrying privately without his mother’s consent” (SS 266). Robert did not just make a choice but made a conquest. Such a decidedly masculine word with connotations of war brings to light that with his action, Robert has gained not just his agency and independence, but his masculinity. He has dominated both Mrs. Ferrars by disobeying her and Lucy by conquering her and claiming her as his own. Robert has reasserted the order of male domination.

In telling of the matter to Elinor, Edward says that Lucy broke the engagement between him and her. Edward had previously attempted to regain his masculinity by forming an engagement with Lucy, thus acting against his mother and being in the position of dominance over a female, Lucy. This, however, has been thwarted, as Lucy breaks the engagement and so also Edward’s masculinity. She is in the position of power as she is the agent who did the breaking, thus rendering Edward “free” (SS 255). The narrator goes a step further to say of Edward that “he was released” (Austen 255). In this phrase, Edward does stand in the position of subject, but the phrase is in the passive voice, and so Edward is, grammatically, the passive rather than the active subject. He performs no action and this is reflected stylistically. Edward quickly moves himself back to the position of subject, however, by proposing to Elinor who readily accepts. Edward is asserting agency here by making his own choice of bride. The two, however, were not “quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a-year” (SS 261) would
be enough to live on. Once again, money impedes independent action. The financial situation makes it clear that the two would be unable to marry without the support of Edward’s mother. He needs the inheritance she had, upon hearing of his engagement to Lucy, deprived him of. For him to obtain his fortune, Edward must first be readmitted into Mrs. Ferrars’ family.

John Dashwood recommends “a letter of proper submission” (SS 263) in which Edward admits of his wrongdoing and asks forgiveness. Again is the appearance of the word “proper” in John Dashwood’s speech. And again, what is “proper” according to John, the male submitting to the female, does not correspond to the usual formula of the female submitting to the male. A letter of submission would mean Edward placing his mother once again in the dominant position, for he would be submitting to her will in the matter. This would mean fully relinquishing the agency he had obtained for himself in contracting an engagement with Lucy and again with Elinor. Edward does submit to his mother, is “admitted to her presence, and pronounced to be again her son” (SS 264). In a way, both Edward and his mother submit— he in writing the letter and she in pronouncing him again her son. Mrs. Ferrars submits further when, upon being accepted back into the family, Edward reveals to his mother his engagement to Elinor. “Mrs. Ferrars at first reasonably endeavoured to dissuade him from marrying Miss Dashwood, by every argument in her power. . .she judged it wisest, from the experience of the past, to submit” (SS 264). Edward has asserted his position as dominant male and his mother has submitted! At this point, Mrs. Ferrars has already settled Edward’s inheritance upon Robert, so Edward need not fear displeasing his mother and her withholding his fortune from him. Mrs. Ferrars no longer has the great power over her son that came from the
money she held from him. Stylistically, the scene between Edward and his mother is quite interesting in terms of the relationship between Austen’s phrasing and the power struggle her words relate to. In the first phrase, Edward “is admitted to her presence.” Edward is grammatically in the position of subject. But the sentence is in the passive voice, so Edward is again the passive subject. In the second phrase, Mrs. Ferrars “judged it wisest . . . to submit.” She is in the position of active subject, but the action she is performing is judging to submit. She is putting herself into the submissive position. She is still the active subject, but is no longer in the dominant position. She no longer has the power of money over her son, and so is no longer firmly in the position of active, dominant, subject. Likewise, Edward is neither the inactive object, nor the active subject, but rather the passive subject. The power struggle between Edward and his mother is not entirely resolved, as he is not entirely in possession of his own agency, but does, in marrying Elinor, reassert his dominance and masculinity.

Once Edward and Elinor are married, the narrator offers a final word on Mrs. Ferrars’s role in the marriage. The narrator, arguably quite sarcastically and slyly, quips, “Mrs. Ferrars came to inspect the happiness which she was almost ashamed of having authorised” (SS 265). It seems that Edward would have married Elinor even without his mother’s authorization. But what the narrator here does is illustrate the position of the widow in marriage concerns. The widow is the one who authorizes; it is she who has the final say, so perhaps the order of male domination has not been entirely righted. For Edward’s final position is that of passive subject, and so he requires another figure (his mother) to perform the action. Mrs. Smith too, like Mrs. Ferrars, has the final word. Mrs. Smith, after his marriage to Miss Grey, forgives Willoughby. “His marriage with a
woman of character, as the source for her clemency, gave him reason for believing that had he behaved with honour towards Marianne, he might at once have been happy and rich" (SS 268). Her clemency is then entirely given because she approves of the woman whom Willoughby has married. Willoughby and Edward no longer financially require the clemency and the authorization, but the very fact that Austen has the widows grant both shows that there is still not a complete independence from the widow. Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Dashwood stand to offer their approval of the marriages in the novel as well. The widows, then, after the marriages have taken place, are left with the final word- the granting of clemency, the words of authorization and the mark of approval.

The widows of Sense and Sensibility do not allow the young men to obtain their agency and their masculinity easily. Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy of Pride and Prejudice, the two young men under the power of the widow Lady Catherine, fare quite differently in the gender struggle. Like his fellow young men discussed above, Mr. Collins' finances are made a topic of conversation. While he is visiting his cousins at Longbourn, he partakes of a game of whist. In losing the game, he has also been losing money. A player at the whist table expresses concern, but Mr. Collins quells this with his response. "I am not in such circumstances as to make five shillings any object. There are undoubtedly many who could not say the same, but thanks to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, I am removed far beyond the necessity of regarding little matters" (PP 57). Here, Mr. Collins' wealth is established, though not in great detail, to be such that he is comfortable and well provided for. Also, it becomes clear that all that he has comes from Lady Catherine, who has removed him beyond concerns of money. She, therefore, has the power over Mr.
Collins as she is the one who will either remove or create monetary concerns for her clergyman.

The power which Lady Catherine has over Mr. Collins is obvious to the Bennet family. For when Mr. Collins has been at Longbourn for quite some time, Mr. Bennet uses the displeasure of Lady Catherine to try to urge Mr. Collins to shorten his stay. Mr. Bennet asks, “But is there not danger of Lady Catherine’s disapprobation here, my good sir?- You had better neglect your relations, than run the risk of offending your patroness” (PP 84). Because Lady Catherine is his patroness, she provides Mr. Collins with his livelihood, and so causing her displeasure could cause a diminishment in his finances. Mr. Collins replies, “My dear sir, . . . I am particularly obliged to you for this friendly caution, and you may depend on my not taking so material a step without her ladyship’s concurrence” (PP 84). Mr. Collins here makes clear that he takes no action without her ladyship’s approval. Mr. Collins is dependent upon her patronage, upon the money she provides him, so he cannot afford to act without her first allowing him to take a step. Mr. Collins’ independence and agency are tied to the purse strings of his patroness.

Mr. Collins is visiting his cousins because Lady Catherine has given him leave to do so. He is also at Longbourn to look for a wife. As seen previously, Lady Catherine has advised Mr. Collins to marry, and so it is with this purpose that he has come to Longbourn. His choice moves from Jane to Elizabeth, who refuses his proposal, to Elizabeth’s friend, Charlotte Lucas. Charles H. Hinnant observes that Lady Catherine’s advisement for Mr. Collins to marry implies that “a change of condition is necessary if [he] expects to prosper in [his] career” (303). He must do as she says in order to stay in her favor and thus retain his position in her parish. Mr. Collins then proposes to
Charlotte, contracting “the kind of sham courtship of convenience” (Hinnant 303) that will allow him to fulfill his order to find a wife, and happily goes back to his patroness with the news. Charlotte informs the Bennet family of her betrothal and Mr. Collins, upon reaching his home, writes to the Bennets of the news and of his plan to return to Longbourn on “Monday fortnight; for Lady Catherine, he added, so heartily approved his marriage, that she wished it to take place as soon as possible, which he trusted would be an unanswerable argument with his amiable Charlotte to name an early day for making him the happiest of men” (PP 87). Lady Catherine has given her stamp of approval to Charlotte after, it can be surmised, Mr. Collins told his patroness of the young woman and of her good qualities. From Mr. Collins’ letter, the reader can assume that had Lady Catherine not approved of Charlotte, the marriage would not occur. Also, her desire for the marriage to happen as soon as possible eclipses both Charlotte’s and Mr. Collins’ plans for the date. Lady Catherine wishes it to be soon, so Mr. Collins wishes the same and will encourage Charlotte to be of the same mind.

Once the marriage takes place, every aspect of Mr. Collins’ household comes under the concern of Lady Catherine. “She examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture, or detected the housemaid in negligence” (PP 112). Mr. Collins will forever be under the rule of Lady Catherine. All that he has, all that is a part of his household, has come through her patronage. Mr. Collins’ household is, and will be as long as he is Lady Catherine’s clergyman, completely supported financially by Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She has the power of money over Mr. Collins and so he will never be independent of her. She will always examine into his employments and advise him on the way to run the
household. Mr. Collins is trapped and will not regain his agency or masculinity as long as he remains under the patronage of Lady Catherine.

Lady Catherine is concerned with the affairs of all who fall under the control of her estate. But of no person’s affairs is she more concerned with than those of her family, namely her nephew Mr. Darcy. Mr. Darcy is introduced to the Bennet family when his friend Mr. Bingley moves to Netherfield Park. It is at the ball there thrown by Bingley that the Bennets first see and hear of Mr. Darcy. “Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year” (PP 8). Mr. Darcy’s financial circumstances, his great wealth, are established within the first five minutes of his arrival. His outward appearance is quickly eclipsed by his income, establishing him not just as a man of handsome features, but more importantly as a man of vast income. Later in the novel, Elizabeth visits Mr. Darcy’s estate while on a scenic tour with her aunt and uncle. Elizabeth reflects on Darcy’s great power. “As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship! - How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! -How much of good or evil must be done by him!” (PP162). Mr. Darcy is established as a man of great wealth, and so is clearly independent in a way the other young men are not. He is also both a landlord and a master, which are both decidedly masculine positions. His position as master gives him the ability to bestow and to guard and, in short, to act, so that, in addition to wealth, Mr. Darcy also possesses the agency unseen in the other young men.
Austen's going to great lengths to establish the financial circumstances of her characters is perhaps most important in the case of Mr. Darcy. His aunt, Lady Catherine, has, as Hazel Jones writes, "remained in situ at Rosings on Sir Lewis' demise" (179) and so is a woman of great wealth, and consequently, of great power. She has command over Mr. Collins and holds the usually male positions in her family as patriarch and in her parish of magistrate. It is her desire that her nephew Mr. Darcy wed her daughter, bringing together two great estates and increasing the wealth of the family. Mr. Darcy, possessing a great fortune and being both master and landlord, has power of his own. He does not desire a match between himself and his cousin, as Lady Catherine does. Rather, Darcy against his will, his reason, his character, has fallen in love with Elizabeth and wishes to marry her (PP 125). Unlike the men of Sense and Sensibility, Mr. Darcy does not happen to find himself in love because of Elizabeth's charms. He falls in love. Neither money nor familial connection figure as the cause for Darcy's wish to marry—the grounds for his decision are based solely on the heart. Elizabeth's heart, too, guides her, and in spite of his great wealth, Elizabeth refuses Darcy's proposal.

Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth, however, reaches the ear of his aunt Lady Catherine, and sends her to Elizabeth's home. The Lady demands that Elizabeth put an end to the rumors. She further demands that Elizabeth not think of marrying Mr. Darcy for he is intended for Lady Catherine's daughter. Elizabeth sends Lady Catherine away disappointed, however, for she has since realized that Mr. Darcy is exactly the man she wishes to marry. She has since regretted her words of refusal and has been entertaining thoughts of his renewing his proposal. Upon Lady Catherine's departure, Elizabeth reflects that "She knew not the exact degree of his affection for his aunt, or his
dependence on her judgment..." (PP 235). What is quite interesting in Elizabeth’s thought is that she says nothing of Darcy’s dependence on his aunt’s fortune. She knows Darcy is wealthy on his own, does not require an inheritance from his aunt, and so is financially independent. The dependence that Elizabeth mentions is only on Lady Catherine’s judgment.

But that is the key. In the relationship between Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins, he is entirely dependent upon her, both for finances and for her judgment in his choice of wife and running of his household. She is in the dominant position and he is in that of the dominated. Their relationship is such as inverts the male/female binary. Mr. Darcy, however, is not dependent upon Lady Catherine financially, and so is not in a position to be dominated by Lady Catherine. She has no wealth or inheritance to hold over him to make him act as she desires. Mr. Darcy has no reason to stand in awe of this figure, for he is not, like Mr. Collins, in a position below this great lady. Rather, he and she are equals when it comes to power and wealth. Well, a further look at the two figures reveals that though the amount of wealth may be equal, the amount of power is actually not. Mr. Darcy is male, whereas Lady Catherine is a female playing at patriarch. Mr. Darcy, with his great wealth and power, is able to reassert the order of male domination and set right the binary of male/female. Lady Catherine claims that an engagement exists between Mr. Darcy and her daughter, in much the way that Mrs. Ferrars speaks of an engagement between Edward and Miss Morton. But Mr. Darcy does not marry his cousin as Lady Catherine wishes, as Edward did not marry Miss Morton as Mrs. Ferrars wished, but rather makes his own choice and marries Elizabeth, who accepts his second proposal.
Darcy gains, or perhaps more accurately, retains, agency as he makes his own choice and masculinity as he remains in the dominant position.

Mr. Darcy stands apart from the other young men. Hazel Jones writes, “Few men could act completely independently, unless they were very rich, very foolish, or had no family to consider” (7). Darcy is indeed very rich, and he possesses wealth on his own, that is without the need of a patroness or of one from whom to inherit a fortune. It is quite difficult to label Darcy foolish; he knows that Elizabeth is not a good match in terms of her social standing and wealth and even makes this clear in his first proposal to her. He has thought it out, fought against his “better” judgment even, and still chosen her. It may perhaps be foolish not to marry for wealth and so increase the estate, but Darcy appears to be above those concerns. He has family to consider, but he obviously is not concerned with Lady Catherine’s opinion on the matter. Darcy stands above the peripheral concerns of marriage and is instead focused only on his companion. Darcy’s choice is not based on wealth, social class or familial maneuvering, but rather on his own feelings and inclination. He comes to see the value in Elizabeth, and is drawn to her by this rather than the value of her property or dowry. Willoughby’s choice was based on riches, which he required and his cousin withheld. His choice then was not wholly his own but was the result of Mrs. Smith’s refusal to grant him his inheritance. Mr. Collins’ choice was based on Lady Catherine’s recommendation for him to marry and to find a girl of whom she would approve. Lady Catherine made the match more than Mr. Collins did. Robert’s choice has no clear reason other than to, arguably, defy his mother. His could be viewed as an act of rebellion in which he sought to reclaim his masculinity and reassert male order. If this is the case, his mother was the impetus for the match and not
Robert’s own feelings or desires. Darcy’s choice, however, was made for companionship. Darcy, and Edward as well, stand as examples of two men whose marriage choices were unpolluted by outside factors—Darcy and Elizabeth and Edward and Elinor are examples of companionate marriages, and arguably, the most likely to end happily. Darcy was able to attain this happiness with little struggle as he possessed wealth and agency unseen in any of the other men. Edward had to fight to attain both, and even at the end does not fully grasp either.
Conclusion

The power struggle between the widows and the young men had at its core the institution of marriage. The widows wished the young men to marry the young women they had deemed suitable, but the men wished to contract their own engagements. The widows attempted to use their wealth and power in order to influence the young men; these were not arranged marriages, exactly, but more like maneuvered marriages. The widows fail in their attempts, however, that is not to say that there was no maneuvering that took place in the marriage market. Interestingly, some of the young men engage in this activity for themselves, contracting engagements that will increase their wealth or status and not necessarily their domestic happiness. The marriages in the two novels that end the happiest, however, are those based entirely on affection. These marriages are also the two that came about with no meddling on the part of the widows.

Mrs. Ferrars is perhaps the widow who most participates in the marriage market. She attempts to maneuver first Edward and then Robert into a marriage with Miss Morton. Robert thwarts this plan by secretly marrying Lucy. The only explanation that can be found is that Robert, wishing to defy his mother, saw in a marriage to Lucy the opportunity to act in direct opposition to his mother’s wishes. In a way, then, Mrs. Ferrars’ desire for Robert to marry Miss Morton pushed him to rebel by doing exactly the opposite of what she wished: that is, not marry Miss Morton and instead marry the woman whom Mrs. Ferrars so vehemently deemed unsuitable for Edward. Robert’s choice is not based on affection for Lucy, of which there is no mention, but apparently on the sheer desire to anger his mother. The narrator notes that Robert was “very proud of marrying privately without his mother’s consent” (SS 266). A marriage to any woman, it
seems, would have made Robert happy, as long as it was to a woman his mother did not approve of. Robert's marriage, then, was based on his desire to displease his mother, rather than on his desire for Lucy. Mrs. Ferrars was very much present in the equation.

Mrs. Smith, too, plays a major role in Willoughby's negotiations on the marriage market. Upon hearing of the state he has left Eliza in, Mrs. Smith hands Willoughby an ultimatum: "In the height of her morality, good woman! she offered to forgive the past, If I would marry Eliza. That could not be—and I was formally dismissed from her favour and her house" (SS 229). Mrs. Smith, being a moral person, attempts to maneuver Willoughby into a marriage that will, in her mind, set right his transgression. She holds the power of money over Willoughby and so believes she can force his hand. Willoughby, however, does not wish to submit and give up his agency and masculinity, and so refuses to bow to Mrs. Smith's wishes. Deprived of her fortune, he is forced to enter the marriage market and find a young woman of wealth to marry. It is his need for money and Miss Grey's possession of it that leads him to a proposal. If Mrs. Smith had not offered the ultimatum and instead continued to designate Willoughby as her heir, Willoughby would likely not have married Miss Grey, for as in the case of Robert, there is no talk of affection between Willoughby and the young woman.

Robert and Willoughby both choose their own partner; however, their choice is not entirely their own. Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Smith still figure in the equation and so the young man's decisions are not made wholly independently. Neither has acted completely as their own agent as the widows were really the impetus for the marriage decisions made. They have, however, in defying the widows, reasserted their male dominance over the female. For in the end, both Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Ferrars submit to the choices the
young men have made. Robert "procured the forgiveness of Mrs. Ferrars, by the simple expedient of asking it" (SS 266) and Willoughby receives "the voluntary forgiveness of Mrs. Smith" who cites "his marriage with a woman of character as the source of her clemency" (SS 268). The widow forgives and so the power struggle ends with the male returning to his dominant position. Interestingly, though both engagements were made with ulterior motives, the conclusion of the novel finds neither marriage an unhappy one. The novel ends with Lucy and Robert living in harmony (SS 267), which at first may seem odd considering there was no talk of affection between the two nor evidence of similar dispositions. The narrator, in a last word on the financial circumstances of the characters, notes that the couple receives "liberal assistance from Mrs. Ferrars" (SS 267). Mrs. Ferrars' money, then, is apparently the source of happiness. In this way, Robert is still dependent on his mother, for it is only through the fortune she bestowed on him and the money she continues to give him, that he is able to be happy in his marriage to Lucy. Willoughby, too, finds happiness, living "to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was not always out of humour, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses, and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity" (SS 268). Willoughby's domestic felicity comes not from his wife herself, but rather from the luxuries which his wife's wealth affords him. Robert is dependent on his mother's wealth and Willoughby on the dowry received upon marrying his wife, so neither is a completely independent agent. The power struggle between male and female ends with neither the victor.

Mr. Collins, too, finds domestic felicity that is independent of his wife. Mr. Collins' happiness comes solely from pleasing his benefactress, Lady Catherine. Mr.
Collins married because Lady Catherine advised him to, chose a woman of whom she would approve, and lived his life according to Lady Catherine’s directions. In fact, the last we hear from Mr. Collins is in a letter to Mr. Bennet in which he cautions against a match between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, for “lady Catherine de Bourgh, does not look on the match with a friendly eye. . . I thought it my duty to give the speediest intelligence of this to my cousin, that she and her noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned” (PP 236). It is clear that doing what will please Lady Catherine is of the utmost importance to Mr. Collins. What also comes through in this letter is how highly Mr. Collins values Lady Catherine’s judgment; he notes that the marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy is not sanctioned by her ladyship and so should not take place. Obviously his own marriage occurred only after Lady Catherine had sanctioned it otherwise he would not have married Charlotte. Mr. Collins’ letter ends with mention of his “dear Charlotte” (PP 237); his wife comes after Lady Catherine, for it is from Lady Catherine’s wealth and beneficence that Mr. Collins receives his domestic felicity. His marriage to Charlotte merely kept Mr. Collins in his patroness’ favor. The novel concludes with Mr. Collins very much under her power, both economically and otherwise. Mr. Collins’ letter is only written because he finds it his duty to try to stop what he knows would displease his patroness. No action of Mr. Collins, from the writing of a letter, to the running of his household, to the choosing of his wife, is done without Lady Catherine in mind; he is wholly dependent on her and so has no agency. In the relationship between Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins, the former has entirely crossed the gender barrier, occupying the male position.
Unfortunately for Lady Catherine, this is not the outcome of the power struggle with her nephew. Mr. Darcy totally defies his aunt’s wishes, refusing to marry his cousin and instead marrying the woman his aunt deems as completely unsuitable, Elizabeth. When Lady Catherine tries to assert dominance over her nephew by forcing his marriage to her daughter, she fails. For no matter how vast her wealth, how far reaching her power, or how firmly she occupies the position of patriarch, she is not a man. It is possible for Lady Catherine to be the ruler on her estate where there is no male equal to challenge her position, but it is impossible for her to assert such power over a male equal, Mr. Darcy. It is true that Robert and Willoughby both defied the wishes of the widows in their lives, however, not in quite the same way as Mr. Darcy. Robert disobeyed his mother merely to be defiant. Willoughby’s actions were guided by wealth. Mr. Darcy, however, chose to disobey Lady Catherine because he wished to marry Elizabeth. There was no outside force guiding his decision. In his first proposal to Elizabeth, Darcy speaks of the strength of his attachment and of how ardently he admires and loves her (PP125). After time to reflect, Elizabeth begins “to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her” (PP 202). There is love, affection and true companionability between the two. And it is for that reason, and that alone, that Elizabeth and Darcy marry.

The same can be said for Edward Ferrars and Elinor. Mrs. Ferrars’ maneuvering was thwarted by both of her sons, as neither married Miss Morton in the end. Edward gains agency by choosing to marry the woman he wishes to and also independence as he chooses Elinor based only on his true affection for her. There is no motive of wealth or conquest guiding his decision. However, as illustrated in Edward’s meeting with his
mother when he submits to her, Edward never completely occupies the position of active subject, the masculine position; his masculinity is not entirely regained as he ends the novel in the position of passive subject, somewhere between masculine and feminine. So, in contrast to Willoughby and Robert, Edward ends the novel with agency but not masculinity. Also, unlike his brother and Willoughby, the novel’s end finds Edward happy not because of material possessions, but because of his wife. He and Elinor, like Darcy and Elizabeth, are entirely suited for one another. They know they will never be rich, and are wise enough not to marry until Edward has secured a living, but their marriage is based entirely on their feelings for one another. The novel’s end finds Edward with “an increasing attachment to his wife and his home” and “contented with his lot” (SS 267). Edward’s happiness, then, stems not from his wealth or from his possessions but from his wife, and from his home he has made with his wife. The same is true for Elizabeth and Darcy. Prior to the marriage, indeed when it is still unclear whether their marriage will take place, the narrator predicts: “His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both” (PP 202).

It is these two marriages, those of Elinor and Edward and Elizabeth and Darcy, that arguably end with the greatest happiness. For both couples, happiness is found not in wealth or luxury, which are transient, but in the spouse. The marriages are based solely on love and affection and the matches were made with no outside influence of wealth or widow. It is also important to note the fate of the other young man mentioned in chapter 2, that is Colonel Brandon, is also a happy one. Novel’s end finds him married to Marianne and “happy, as all those who best loved him, believed he deserved to be” (SS 208).
Colonel Brandon, recall, was spoken of by Mrs. Jennings' daughter as a possible suitor of herself, only her mother did not approve of the match. Mrs. Jennings, however, very much approved of the match between Colonel Brandon and Marianne, and in her playfully meddling way, encouraged the marriage. Mrs. Dashwood, too, pushed for the match by urging Marianne to return his affection. Mrs. Jennings had no real stake in the marriage, as neither Colonel Brandon nor Marianne were members of her family nor dependent on her in any way. They were merely acquaintances of hers in whom she took an interest, as she had "nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world" (SS 29). Mrs. Dashwood was able to coax and encourage both parties, but to no great extent as she had no wealth to entice Colonel Brandon to propose and only his affection for her daughter to rely on. Colonel Brandon, then, chooses Marianne because he loves her. The narrator also notes that "in Marianne he was consoled for every past affliction" (SS 268), so that his marriage is not only one of affection but also of consolation. Regardless, his marriage to Marianne was not based on wealth or on the maneuvering of a widow. Like Edward and Darcy, Colonel Brandon finds his happiness in his wife alone. Marianne, though at first pining for Willoughby, joins the ranks of happy wives. The narrator tells the reader, "Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it once had been to Willoughby" (SS 268).

In her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong writes, "These stories of courtship and marriage offered their readers a way of indulging, with a kind of impunity, in fantasies of political power that were the more acceptable because they were played out within a domestic framework where legitimate monogamy-- and thus the subordination of female to male- would ultimately be affirmed" (29). I argue with
Armstrong’s point that ultimately the female subordinates to the male. In the power struggles described above between widow and young man, there is no clear-cut victor; some end with male domination some female, and some leave the binary a bit blurred. At the heart of the power struggle is money. The young man needs it and the widow possesses it. Robert and Willoughby sacrificed their agency for wealth, while Edward’s assertion of agency left him deprived of masculinity and fortune. Mr. Collins forfeited both agency and masculinity for the domestic comfort provided by his patroness. Mr. Darcy (Colonel Brandon fits here as well) possessed a fortune independent of his wealthy widowed aunt, and so firmly held the agency and masculinity that allowed him to do as he pleased. This point of argumentation aside, the beginning of Armstrong’s statement is a key to unlocking the widow/young man relationship. She notes that there are power struggles that occur within the novel, which have been our focus, but she first brings to light that these stories are in reality ones of courtship and marriage. The power struggles between the young men and the widows are all focused around which woman the man will marry.

Looking at the marriages, the similar thread is that the young men ultimately make their own choice. What this choice is dependent on varies in each situation, but none of the marriages can said to be arranged. Mr. Collins is the closest example to an arranged marriage, but he does choose his own bride; it is only the need to marry that is ‘arranged’ by Lady Catherine. While Robert and Willoughby marry for money rather than love, even they are not spoken of as having an unhappy future ahead. Austen, then, is not offering a value judgment concerning what the young men based their choice for marriage on. She is, however, placing value on the operative word choice. Let us take a
moment to step back from the couples with which we have presently been considered.

For these are indeed the courtships on which *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* focus, but they are not the only marriages in the novel.

Let us return to Colonel Brandon for a moment. His marriage to Marianne is said to be a consolation for every past affliction. If we remember his story, he was in love with Eliza, the mother of the Eliza whom Willoughby leaves. Unfortunately, “she was married – married against her inclination to my brother. Her fortune was large, and our family estate was much encumbered” ([SS] 145). Neither Eliza nor Colonel Brandon’s brother had any liking for each other; the marriage was arranged in order to remove the family’s debt and increase their wealth. Colonel Brandon speaks of his brother’s ill treatment of the girl and of her subsequent “fall” into a “life of sin” ([SS] 146). After a divorce, the girl was left with nothing, and Colonel Brandon eventually discovered her sick and pregnant in a spunging-house (defined by *OED* as a house kept by a bailiff, used as a place of preliminary confinement for debtors). No mention is made of the fate of Colonel Brandon’s brother, but Eliza is left disgraced and dead. This is Austen’s most extreme warning against the dangers of arranged marriages for Eliza falls into sin and decay prior to her untimely death. The arranged marriage failed because it was based solely on the need for wealth. This differs from the situation of Willoughby, however, in that Willoughby himself needed the money and so he contracted the engagement with Miss Grey for himself. Here, it is Colonel Brandon’s *family* that requires the money and so it they who arrange the marriage. Willoughby was able to find some sort of domestic felicity because he had essentially made his own bed, while Colonel Brandon’s brother had no say in the matter and so lashed out with cruelty towards his wife.
Mr. Palmer, too, is anything but nice to his wife, Mrs. Jennings’ daughter. He is by no means as cruel as Colonel Brandon’s brother, but there is little, indeed no, affection shown on his part. There is no evidence of whether or not this marriage were actually arranged, but with all Mrs. Jennings’ talk of having “such good luck in getting [her] own children off [her] hands” (SS 109), it can be surmised that her maneuvering played a large role in her daughters’ eventual marriages. It is said that she discouraged a match between Charlotte and Colonel Brandon, so for Charlotte to have married Mr. Palmer, Mrs. Jennings must have given her approval and encouragement. The narrator notes that Mr. Palmer’s “temper might perhaps be a little soured by finding, like many others of his sex, that through some unaccountable bias in favour of beauty, he was the husband of a very silly woman” (SS 82). Mr. Palmer chose beauty over brains and so found himself to be the husband of a silly woman. It appears that Mr. Palmer did ultimately choose his wife, but it also seems as though Mrs. Jennings likely had a hand in his choice. Her maneuvering likely played some role in the match and so the marriage is an example of one that is perhaps half-choice and half-arranged. Mrs. Jennings interfered in some way and so the marriage is not a happy one.

It is not only, however, arranged marriages which have this fate. Austen also deprives those who choose unwisely of domestic felicity. If Mr. Palmer were not forced to marry Charlotte, he would still fall into this category. Joining him would also be Mr. Bennet who, “captivated by youth and beauty. . . had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. . . and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown” (PP 155). Like Mr. Palmer, Mr. Bennet chose beauty over brains. He also apparently gave no
thought to wealth or rank, and so is able to derive no pleasure from his marriage (aside from that found in his two eldest daughters) unlike Willoughby and Robert, who at least had fortune to fall back on, and Mr. Collins who had his Lady Catherine’s favor and patronage. Beauty, as well as force, then are two reasons for marriage which Austen looks down upon. Those who find happiness at the end of the novels are those whose marriage choices are based on a sound reason, that is the need for wealth or because of true affection.

Austen does not punish Robert, Willoughby and Mr. Collins for the choices they have made. She does, however, make it clear that the happiness they have rests on material things and not on the love they find in their wives. There is a chance that the money will run out, Willoughby has already found himself in debt once, Robert and Lucy are said to be frivolous, and Lady Catherine may become displeased. Interestingly, the power struggles between these men and the widows are those left with the binary “unrighted.” Austen has left open the possibility both that the scales may tip back in the widows’ favors and that the wealth may run out, putting an end to the harmonious living. Edward, Darcy and Colonel Brandon, however, find their happiness with their respective wives, Elinor, Elizabeth and Marianne. The first two stand as their husbands’ intellectual equals, while Marianne is the perfect complement to her husband. Theirs are marriages based on true affection and so will last as long as the love for one another endures. They married without the influence of wealth or widow and so set “right” the binary. Austen ultimately sanctions those marriages which are contracted by choice by leaving those couples living harmoniously. However, she places the higher value on marriages that are
based on affection, rather than money, and so bestows masculinity and agency on those men who are guided by their hearts.
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