

## Challenging Patriarchal Dominance: Jessie Burton's *The House of Fortune* and the Female Protagonist's Quest for Autonomy

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**Abstract:** *This study delved into the societal landscape of 18th-century England portrayed in Jessie Burton's novel, The House of Fortune. It explored the challenges faced by women in a male-dominated society by highlighting a determined 18-year-old woman's journey for autonomy. The research employed Radical Feminist Theory to critically evaluate the pervasive male dominance prevalent in that era and called for a comprehensive societal restructuring by eliminating men's superiority. This study used qualitative methods and textual analysis to explore the protagonist's encounters with patriarchal barriers and emphasized the necessity for self-empowerment strategies to counter such dominance. It advocated for women's proactive adoption of self-empowerment strategies to challenge patriarchal oppression effectively. Furthermore, the study highlighted the protagonist's success in taking control of her destiny by defying societal norms and prioritizing personal values over societal expectations. This investigation significantly contributed to discussions on female empowerment by showcasing the protagonist's resilience and successful defiance of societal norms, ultimately seizing control over her destiny in an era characterized by patriarchal values. Through her struggles, she transcends societal norms, fulfilling her aspiration to marry for love rather than succumbing to financial motives. This study also advocated for women's autonomy and underscores the importance of challenging and dismantling patriarchal systems for individual empowerment and societal advancement.*

**Keywords:** *male-dominated, patriarchal barriers, radical feminism, self-empowerment, societal norms*

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### Introduction

Jessica Kathryn Burton, English actress and writer is known by her stage name Jessie Burton. *The Miniaturist*, *The House of Fortune*, *The Confession*, and

*The Muse* are her most well-known and recent books. Her books have been translated into more than 40 languages due to their immense popularity. Burton

(2022) also writes nonfiction and numerous magazines, including *Vogue*, *The Independent*, and *Grazia* have featured her work.

*The Miniaturist*, released in 2014, is followed by *The House of Fortune*, which comes out in 2022. Some of the same individuals are there, but the protagonist has been changed after 18 years, now that Burton has clarified the family issue. Her niece Thea is now the main character, taking Nella's place as the protagonist. Burton has skillfully juxtaposed the lives of Nella, who wed a wealthy man for security, and Thea, who aspires to marry for love rather than money. *The House of Fortune* is a breathtaking, epic story about secrets and dreams, and it centers on an 18-year-old girl's will to take charge of her own fate.

Despite the fact that women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were not treated as human beings and were instead used by their families as a method of achieving financial security, some of these women battled patriarchal control and social conventions and defied the law by

choosing to defend themselves. Despite the stark differences between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and modern era, women's enjoyment in making their own decisions is still negatively impacted by patriarchal rule. Women are still under pressure to marry for money and to be social puppets and have no choice in the matter at all. This research emphasizes the ways in which a woman may still strive to change her destiny—which is determined by others around her rather than by herself—even if she was born into a culture where men are the oppressors and women are the oppressed. This research sheds light on many issues that women in the twenty-first century confront, including coping strategies and resistance to a culture that is controlled by men.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Within the feminist movement, Radical Feminism is a viewpoint that advocates for a drastic reconstruction of the society, eliminating male dominance in all spheres of society, including social and economic ones. It acknowledges that social divisions along with racial, class,

and sexual orientation also impact the lives of women. Radical feminists believe that males govern and oppress women because society is essentially patriarchal. In their fight to free women from what they regard as an unfair society, radical feminists want to overthrow established institutions and social norms. In this struggle, women are opposed to being sexual objects, rape and other forms of violence and are brought to the public's attention.

Radical feminists believe that patriarchal gender relations, not legal frameworks or class struggles, are the primary source of women's oppression. Partisanship was often seen by early radical feminism, which emerged within second-wave feminism in the 1960s as a "trans historical phenomenon" (Willis, 1984) that existed before or deeper than other forms of oppression, serving as "not only the oldest and most universal form of domination but the primary form" and serving as the template for all others (Ellen, 1984).

Radical feminists contend that women have been systematically oppressed and disadvantaged because they are perceived

as the "other" (Simone, 2011) to the male norm as a result of patriarchy. They go on to say that the systematic subjugation of women benefits males as a class. The idea that all males are always better off when all women are oppressed does not characterize patriarchal thinking. Instead, it contends that a relationship of dominance—in which one side is powerful and uses the other for the benefit of the former is the fundamental component of patriarchy. Radical feminists hold that societal structures and other means of control are employed by males to oppress women. Radical feminists think that everyone will be freed from an unfair society if patriarchy is eradicated, and they work to do this by opposing established institutions and social conventions. According to Ti-Grace, "the need men have for the role of oppressor is the source and foundation of all human oppression" (2000, p. 86), the hunger of male class for power drives them to continue oppressing the female class.

Canadian-American author Shulamith (1968) and a small group of her "sisters" were at the cutting edge of a

movement that drastically altered American culture in the late 1960s. During that period, women were mostly excluded from key political roles, practically all prestigious professions were exclusively held by males, the primary role of women was to take care of the family, abortion was essentially outlawed, and rape was a shame that should be ignored. Since the first wave of American women movement's gained the right to vote in 1920 and lost the fight for broader freedom, feminism has been in a slump. Following decades of economic hardship and war, it was only then that a "second wave" of feminism emerged as a result of postwar women's dissatisfactions, most memorably detailed by Betty Friedan in "The Feminine Mystique" (1963).

Alongside the emergence of the radical feminists was a more moderate women's movement, spearheaded by periodicals like *Ms.*, which was created in 1972 by Gloria Steinem and Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and organizations like the National Organization for Women, which was formed in 1966 by Betty Friedan and

other activists. According to the movement's current statement of purpose, its major objectives were to fully integrate women into American society's mainstream primarily through equal representation and compensation. In contrast, the radical feminists sought to completely reimagine both private and public life.

Firestone's publication "Notes from The First Year", which was later joined by the Second and Third Years in 1970 and 1971, introduced ideas like "the myth of the vaginal orgasm" and "the personal is political," and helped shape the core rhetoric of radical feminist (Shulamith, 1968). Firestone is most known for "The Dialectic of Sex," a book she authored in a few short months with much enthusiasm. "Dialectic" reinterpreted Marx, Engels, and Freud over the course of about 200 pages, arguing that a "sexual class system" underpinned social and economic divisions that went far deeper than that. Firestone contended that the fundamental basis of women's subjugation was the conventional family unit. "The tapeworm of exploitation will never be annihilated unless revolution

uproots the basic social organization, the biological family—the vinculum through which the psychology of power can always be smuggled" (Shulamith, 1970). With her trademark directness, she went on to explain, calling births "like shitting a pumpkin," (Shulamith, 1968. P.45) pregnancy "barbaric," and childhood "a supervised nightmare". She wrote:

Feminists have to question, not just all of *Western* culture, but the organization of culture itself, and further, even the very organization of nature. Many women give up in despair: if that's how deep it goes they don't want to know. (1970, p. 67)

Firestone went on that women were an oppressed sex group and that the only way to free them was to overthrow the global patriarchal system in a revolutionary manner. According to Guven, radical feminism calls for a radical reconstruction of the social structure that eliminates men's supremacy in all spheres of society, including the economy (2022). A patriarchal social structure is one in which males predominantly occupy positions of

power. Since the dawn of time, women have been reduced to nothing more than tools in the hands of a patriarchal society. A woman's duty in a patriarchal culture is to maintain the role of the "stay-at-home" mother, which entails taking care of the children, taking care of the house, and all other responsibilities (Lauren, 2021). In post-1960s feminism, the term "patriarchy," which originally denoted a father's power as the head of the family, has come to represent the institutionalized system of male control and female subjugation. The term refers to a political, social, and economic structure that is controlled by males and oppresses women (Cheris et al., 1992). The majority of feminist studies explain the intricate patterns of discrimination against women by pointing to patriarchy or male authority over women. Women who were sexually, economically, politically, mentally, and physically oppressed (Susan, 1985, p. 710).

Numerous issues were brought up by the 18th-century movement. The 18th century is a crucial period to examine while researching the mistreatment of women by the male-dominated society.

Gender discrimination and inequality are widespread at the present. Women were the subjugated victims of the patriarchal system, which maintained that men were superior to women and should rule them. Women were the suffering gender that depended on men's charity since they were treated with little respect and lived in impoverished communities (Melis, 2022). The women, especially the young and attractive ones, suffered from despair as a result of their inability to stand up for their rights and their refusal to wed wealthy men for financial benefit. In Jessie Burton's novel, *The House of Fortune*, an 18th-century lady defies patriarchal conventions, presenting a strong and independent figure in contrast to this historical reality. The main character battles to be allowed to marry for love instead of money, highlighting the ongoing fight against patriarchal domination. Burton's portrayal underscores the imperative for women to continue their battle for equal rights and respect as human beings rather than just pawns, even in the face of cultural

shifts from the 18th to the 21st centuries.

### **Aims and Objectives**

1. To find out the novel's portrayal of the 18th-century female protagonist's fight against patriarchal rule and her journey to taking charge of her own life.
2. To investigate how marrying a wealthy man is depicted in the book as a requirement for safety.

### **Literature Review**

The research explores the social mores of the eighteenth century, when women were forced into marriage for financial security and used as players in the game. This analysis of the female protagonist of *The House of Fortune* examines her from the perspective of a radical feminist. The protagonist fights to fulfill her one desire, which is to take charge of her own life, while responding apathetically to the patriarchal culture of the eighteenth century. The protagonist fights for her rights as a woman and disobeys all social standards throughout. This research emphasizes the limitations

placed on the female lead, an 18-year-old who, in spite of all the challenges in her life, is able to confront them all and fight for her rights. Investigations of how women react to patriarchal power are presented in the 2009 paper, "Women and Patriarchal Power in the Selected Novels of NgugiWaThiong'o." In particular, the study looks at how Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Wizard of the Crow* depict women challenging patriarchy and demolish it. According to this study, if women want to succeed in their battle against patriarchy, they need to take the initiative and look into specific strategies to grant themselves social, political, and economic power. These strategies include, among others, subversion, tacit silence, pragmatic or short-term collaboration, persistence, and solidarity. In order to analyze women's battle against patriarchal rule in Ngugi's book *Empowerment of a Female*, this study draws on the opinions of feminists like Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Friedan who advocate for complete

liberty and equality. As Ngugi suggests, female empowerment, equity, and cooperation are the only fair and trustworthy ways to ensure resource allocation in society. In reality, for society to progress, men and women alike must support this ideal at all costs (Mugambi, 2009).

"Woman Struggle in Paulo Coelho's *The Spy*" (Novianti et al., 2020) explores the struggles faced by women. The objectives are to pinpoint the kinds of difficulties that the women face, the means by which the main character satisfies her desires, and the reasons behind her difficulties. Maslow's (1987) theory is applied in this research to examine the many obstacles women have in meeting their needs and the manner in which the main character faces these obstacles. The idea of aspiration is then used to expound on the reasons for these fights. The results of the investigation allow for the formulation of certain conclusions. The first is the different ways that women fight in *The Spy* to fulfill their needs; these include battles for survival, goals,

love and relationships, independence, and a positive reputation, among other things. Second, the main character makes relationships with people from higher social classes, becomes a spy, and engages in sexual activity in return for cash and favors in an effort to meet her needs. Third, the author's past and the main character's goal to become a free woman have influenced the protagonist's problems (Noviyanti et al., 2020).

Woolf, in her declaration of rebellion against women as reality's prisoners, defies the stereotype of the time, which held that women should be dedicated to their husbands. The female characters fight against being constrained while looking for meaning and agency in the world through interactions with men. Woolf breaks the preconception of the day when she declares her revolt against women being the prisoners of reality. Woolf refuted the disadvantaged status of women during the Victorian era in her study of female characters. The remarks, speeches, and internal monologues of the female characters

reveal that their loneliness, loss, and suffering stem from patriarchal rule (Khrisat, 2012).

The researcher Moore discussed weddings in the 18th century in the 2009 paper "Love and Marriage in 18th-century Britain, Historically Speaking" (2009). At the beginning of the 18th century, most marriages between affluent families were essentially financial transactions established to cement close relationships and trade or buy land and property. While people in the working class and agricultural regions were more or less free to choose whom they would marry for life, albeit usually within the same narrowed economic group and geographical region, a great deal of marriages among wealthy, prosperous, and middle-class families were planned by parents with the potential bride and bridegroom having little or no say. Moore describes a woman whose father arranged her marriage, in the study. Astell (2015) questioned about few happy marriages, even though weddings are such a fortunate state in a withering indictment



of marriage published in 1700. She remained unmarried. The 23-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont had never seen the Irish aristocrat when her father proposed to her in 1712. She described getting ready for her wedding as "daily preparation for the journey to Hell"(Astell, 1700). Elizabeth chose to marry Edward Wortley Montagu, her lover, a few days before the planned nuptials, rather than face an eternity of suffering (Wendy, 2009). Similarly, in this study, the female protagonist is being forced to marry a man for financial gain in the 18th century. This just shows how long the patriarchal society has been using women as a pawn and not treating them as human beings.

"The Effectiveness of Female Roles in Disney Films" is an essay published in 2022 (Chen et al., 2022). The writers discuss how women's growing consciousness of their civic rights and social status led to the emergence of the feminist movement. A significant and crucial part of the massive worldwide feminist movement of the 20th century

was the explosion of feminist movements fueled by education. The goal of this study is to investigate how Disney films made in the USA throughout the 20th century affected society. The study goes on to illustrate how Disney films promote feminism in general, raises awareness of rights, and advances women's rights in order to bolster the theories of social identity and cognitive theory. This article comes to the conclusion that Disney movies only help women's standing and encourage feminism and female freedom (Chen et al., 2022).

The female protagonist's battles for rights are examined in this analysis of *The House of Fortune* because they demonstrate how the protagonist may alter her own fate and drastically alter the patriarchal society of the eighteenth century. She makes every effort to fight for and earn her rights, despite the patriarchal nature of the 18th century, by taking inspiration from her role model, Rebecca, a theater star who also leads a free and independent life.

## **Research Methodology**

In order to understand the hardships of the female protagonist against a culture that is dominated by men, this research uses a qualitative technique. The data used in this study came from Jessie Burton's. It is focused on transformation, has difficulties with gender, inequality, oppression, and repression, and is marginalized—that is, how an individual or group is regarded insignificantly. This research demonstrates how the female lead is viewed as a pawn and an inconsequential entity, and how she rewrites her own fate by taking control of it. This study's material was gathered from print and web sources. Deductive theme analysis is used to do the qualitative content analysis. According to the writers, Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is a method for analyzing data that helps identify meaningful patterns and themes in a dataset related to a particular research question. *The House of Fortune* by Jessie Burton will be analyzed using six phases of theme analysis. These themes

involve familiarizing yourself with your data, drafting draft codes, searching for and reviewing themes, naming and recognizing the themes, and producing the report, among other procedures. The 18-year-old, attractive Thea is going to change her fate in the patriarchal society by rejecting and rearranging the 18th-century social norms that state a woman must marry into a wealthy family in order to shield her family from poverty. The key components of radical feminism are listed below:

1. It is false to believe that being married in an arranged marriage can improve your financial situation.
2. A change in the society's structure is required.
3. The patriarchal culture views women as little more than puppets.
4. It is untrue to assume that a woman and her family would become more prosperous and influential in society if she marries a wealthy guy.
5. It is incorrect to assume that a beautiful lady should always marry a wealthy man.
6. It is unethical and immoral to force a woman to marry for financial benefit.

7. Radical feminism is a feminist philosophy that seeks to do away with gender stereotypes and established patriarchal power systems.

### **Female Protagonist's Fight against Patriarchal Rule**

Jessie Burton made the decision to have a female lead, when questioned by a reviewer, she said that she didn't think about creating a strong female protagonist—rather, it just came naturally to her. However, she has never liked the concept of a "strong female," as every woman she has ever known is strong and the phrase suggests that those who aren't strong would be particularly exceptional. Not many male authors are asked why they portrayed so many strong men in their books. The eighteen-year-old protagonist, Thea, battles for her independence. In the eighteenth century, it was expected of a lady to marry a wealthy man in order to lift her family out of poverty and to do so without any issues. Thea finds this especially challenging because she is already in love with Walter Riebeck and it makes Thea want to be somewhere else intensely. Since none of them has

any idea what it means to be eighteen, she wants to leave them and start her own life. It “gives Thea a fierce urge to be anywhere else. To be away from them, and start her own life, because no one knows what it is to be eighteen” (Burton 2022, p. 3)

Thea, who has now turned eighteen, is seeking excitement and novelty in her life. She is sick of having to endure the same birthday customs from her father, aunt, and elderly nursemaid every year. However, Thea would only prefer one birthday gift. She must discover how her mother, Marin Brandt, passed away while giving birth to her all those years ago. Her father and aunt frequently sidestep the question or decline to answer it if she asks about her mother. Thea is especially motivated by this to leave them and begin a fresh chapter in her life as she is sick of being treated like a child. She is certain of “I was the end of something” (p. 6), when her family declines to give her the story of her birth despite her repeated requests. She believes she has a right to know the truth about her mother, even if she does

not hold herself responsible for her death though she passed away while giving birth. “Her escapes into comedy or tragedy feels like a kind of homecoming. There is an unwritten romance performed in the back corridors of the Schouwburg. Thea knows she will never give up” (p. 7). Thea has spent her entire life being watched and is not permitted to go alone. As she becomes older, she persuades her parents to allow her to go alone to the playhouse. She had to promise to return home right away. She only needs this little window of independence from her family to be with Walter, her true love. The plays that are presented at the theater have captured Thea's heart. The theater performer Rebecca Bosman is her role model. Although Thea had been going to the theater with her nursemaid since she was thirteen. Her motivation for attending these performances shifted a few months ago after she met Walter Riebeck, an imaginative painter whose paintings are fascinating to look at. She now has even more motivation to go to the theater only to see Walter and is

determined to keep Walter and her newfound love for him, no matter what. Despite her guilt for hiding the truth from her family she thinks that, “Walter’s love is too important”. She is not willing to give up her love for her family. “What if you do not want to be in the harbor anymore? What if you feel that you do not belong” (p. 8)

Thea Brandt has lived under several constraints with her family throughout her life. Due to her status as a woman and a woman of color, Thea experiences double marginalization because of her skin tone, she occasionally questions whether she really belongs in her family. She adores her family and would sacrifice anything for them, but questions if she would ever want to live in their protective and constrained household. When it comes to living freely, she has a very open mind and wants to live independently, without anybody to protect her.

Even though these thoughts come to her mind more than usual, but she never dares to express them in front of anyone. She always feels like an outcast

in her own house because of the fact that she is kept in dark and her house is full of secrets, and also because she is a strong woman who does not want or need the protection of her family. "But behind those painted backdrops, something much more real waits. The love of Thea's life, her reason for living. No dreary party held by an Amsterdam grandee could ever ruin the promise of Walter Riebeck" (p. 9).

Thea is shown as a powerful lady who is aware of her desires and is never prepared to give up on her love. Thea is certain that she is in love with Walter, and no amount of social gatherings or attractive guys she encounters will be able to convince her otherwise. Thea believes that everyone in her immediate vicinity is dishonest and just cares about their own interests similar to how Thea's aunt Nella is attempting to match Thea with a wealthy man in order for Nella to receive financial assistance as well. The only true thing in Thea's existence, she realizes, is her love for Walter, and that everyone else is a fake. She has made a vow of love to Walter,

her life and purpose for existing, and no one can ever break that commitment. "Some people come to Schouwburg to lose themselves for a couple of hours, but Thea comes to discover herself, to build her soul with words and light" (p. 25). Thea has had a difficult time defining herself throughout her whole life and never seems to fit in anywhere. Thea travels to Schouwburg to view plays at the theater in the aim of discovering who she really is. She seeks self-discovery through the characters' speech and the theater's lighting in order to feel like she belongs. Thea always feels deep down that she does not fit in her family or her town, despite the fact that she is now content with her partner, Walter. Thea attempts a radical self-discovery via theater viewing.

"Rebecca was an artist, living according to the tides of her talent rather than the demands of the society. She was a magnet to Thea" (p. 30). A woman's role in the eighteenth century was to marry, raise a family, and take care of her home. On the contrary, Thea's character comes out as someone who is

unwilling to submit to social pressure. Thea is a powerful young woman who finds it difficult to lead an independent life in a world where males rule. She finds herself drawn to Rebecca, her role model, as she is portrayed as a powerful lady who isn't afraid to defy social expectations and pursue her own profession. Rebecca would have been married by now if she had not let the patriarchal culture to determine her future. Rebecca's acting talent would have remained undiscovered and hidden in the shadows, if she had allowed society to make the final decision. Similar to Rebecca, Thea is attempting to navigate society on her own, free from outside influence. "You might be a woman now, Thea, but we'll all pay the price if you don't go to the Sarragon ball" (p. 33). Thea's elderly nursemaid Cornelia understands that Thea is no longer a kid but rather a lady, but she is also aware of the potential repercussions if Thea chooses not to attend the ball that her aunt is so adamant about her going to. Thea can't deny her aunt, even if she doesn't want to go to the ball. There are two possible

causes for this. The first is that Thea understands she has no say in the issue, and the other is because she loves her aunt and does not want to defy her desires. Cornelia is aware of what would happen if Thea didn't show up for the celebration. Even though Thea is an adult now, she is still unable to make her own decisions in life. She tries so hard to take charge of her life, but she never seems to be able to. "I thought you didn't care about the rules of the society? You never married. You have your own room here. Your freedom" (p. 36). Thea has faced the possibility of being her future self as she works to alter the patriarchal culture of the eighteenth century by changing the expectations placed on women to marry wealthy men rather than for love.

No matter how freely she lives, Rebecca can never be completely free from the constraints of society, as she informs Thea, whether she likes them or not, there are still regulations that apply to her. It may be for nothing that Thea tries to live a life devoid of masculine dominance. "Why do her family always

have to ruin everything” (p. 46). Thea recently experienced one of her greatest times ever with Walter. The fact remains, sadly, that Thea must go to the Sarragon ball in order for her aunt to find her a wealthy suitor. Thea used to be close to Walter, but now she detests the thought of being around her family, especially when it comes to attending the ball. Thea feels that her family destroys everything in her life, especially her ability to love freely, thus she fights to spend more time with her loved one than her family. Thea has always known her life with her father, aunt, and nursemaid, despite the fact that family plays a significant role in her life, and she feels that she now thinks that her family is continually getting in the way of her independence, regardless of how much Thea attempts to take charge of her life. “These things are not in her control. Her sense of powerlessness is overwhelming” (p. 50). One issue that Thea battles with throughout is control—control over her life and the ways in which she chooses to live it. She has no control over the circumstances that are confronting her

at every turn, though. Since Otto, Thea's father, just lost his job, Thea's aunt is even more motivated to find Thea a wealthy partner. She cannot bring herself to tell her aunt that she is in love with Walter, even though she loves him and wants to marry him, as she states, “Walter, as I love you, and you love me, why shouldn't you and I be married”(p. 83). Thea is clearly prepared to battle and fight for her love, even if it means defying her aunt's demands, as seen by her thought, “It's aunt Nella, expectant, full of assumption that Thea Brandt will do as she is told” (p. 83). “Thea rolls on her side to face him. She feels womanly, in control of her own destiny” (p. 267). Thea feels in charge of her own life now that she has shared a private moment with Walter. However, Thea thinks, “How on Earth is she ever going to tell them that she has found a husband for herself” (p. 87) Despite the fact that Thea and Walter are not officially married yet, she feels and thinks of herself as a married woman following their marriage, a lady who has taken charge of her own life. Thea is thinking

about telling her aunt—who wants her to marry a wealthy man—and how she wants them to respond. Thea is now more determined than ever to stay with Walter—the one person who can truly make her happy—rather than following her aunt's wishes and getting married to a wealthy man. "Nella points to the vacant bed. She utters the words, "My girl," with difficulty. "My girl has gone" (p. 267). Furthermore, she wants to be married for love, not money. She is prepared to go against every social standard and make her own decisions in life. Thea will never, ever allow anyone to choose her future. The only option left to Thea is to flee as Nella sets up her marriage to a wealthy and ambitious man. She acts just in that manner. Thea flees her house a few hours before her wedding. This demonstrates Thea's unwillingness to give up her affection for anyone. She does not want to submit to the demands or wishes of others; instead, she wants to marry for love. Thea is portrayed as a militant feminist who, under any circumstances, will not live a life that is not chosen for her. Nella thinks to

herself, "How soon it will be time to rouse the bride, to feed and dress and escort her to the church. By half past the hour of ten, Thea Brandt will be a wife" (p. 265). Nella went against Thea's wishes, even though she believed she was acting in Thea's best interests.

However, she never would have imagined that Thea would act in such a dramatic manner. This shows that Thea is now in charge of her life and can alter her course by acting necessary and drastic.

### **Marrying a Wealthy Man for Safety**

The author portrays Aunt Nella as a more pragmatic woman who wishes for her niece Thea to wed a wealthy man in an effort to alleviate their financial difficulties. Since the Brandt family has been impoverished for a while, Nella hopes that Thea's marriage would help to put an end to their issues. They have sold much of their artwork and furniture in order to make ends meet. Thea's marriage to a wealthy fellow is the final hope. This illustrates how women were subject to patriarchal authority in the



18th century and how it continues to have a big impact on them in the 21st. "Let tonight work, let someone want her. It might be a good thing that people notice her. Thea is beautiful, accomplished. She deserves a chance" (p. 11). Otto Brandt is not too thrilled with Nella's suggestion that they head to the party in the hopes of meeting a wealthy gentleman for Thea. Otto Brandt, has dedicated his life to preventing Thea from being a spectacle and has shielded her from the harsh realities of life. Now that Thea is getting attention, Nella hopes that a wealthy man would be eager to propose to her. Nella doesn't think about love because her own marriage failed and she now feels that it is wrong for a woman to marry for love and thinks that getting married for security and money is the ultimate goal of being a gorgeous young woman. She wishes to find Thea the ideal partner and wants everyone to realize how gorgeous Thea is. Nella is so sick of Thea's impoverished lifestyle that she is willing to do everything to help her meet a wealthy partner. Nella truly wants what's best for Thea, despite

the impression that she just cares about herself and not Thea or her feelings. "Wealth, should Thea find it at the ball, would protect her. Marriage would protect her" (p. 15). The sole reason for Nella to bring Thea to the ball is the hope that Thea would find a man there, a man who would be rich and help the family with their financial issues. The whole concept of safety is shown in this quote when Nella tells Otto that marriage would protect Thea. Nella's definition of protection is directly linked with money. Nella always thinks that if a woman marries a rich man, the wealth would bring the woman happiness. According to the 18th century, this is the only way for a woman to survive. "And then what? Do you want her here alone in this giant tomb, no income, no protection" (p. 15). Nella refers to their culture as a "giant tomb" to highlight how full of customs and laws it is, particularly for women, who are expected to follow social norms. No matter how hard women strive, they will always be forced to face the fact that a woman in the 18th century needed a wealthy husband in

order to be secure. The use of the term "safe" in this context suggests that an 18<sup>th</sup>-century single lady could never be secure on her own. Women want a partner who can provide them with a sense of financial security rather than emotional safety. Practical as she is, Nella understands the challenges Thea may have down the road. She therefore hopes for a better future for Thea, a wealthy husband, security, and defense against the male-dominated society. It is ironic that a woman needs a man to exist in a society where men predominate. When Otto remarks that Nella wishes to have a place of her own, Nella responds, "There is a man out there who will do the same for Thea" (p. 17).

According to Nella, a woman cannot succeed in her own right. For her to succeed, own a house, and feel comfortable and secure, she requires a man. "Maybe Nella will have to marry a rich man" (p. 20). The need to wed a wealthy man in order to get money has been demonstrated throughout the novel by a number of characters. Johannes

Brandt, Nella's spouse, perished in a lake. Nella did not inherit any money from her late husband since he was severely disgraced being a homosexual and their image was severely damaged. Otto recommended Nella get married again after her husband passed away. This establishes how helpless a lady who is widowed and has no financial inheritance. "As widows, they were no longer legal entities controlled by a husband" (p. 21). To feel safe, women required a wealthy husband, a large home, and substantial inheritances. But what would happen if a woman's spouse passed away? Depending on the type of death he experienced! In the event that the man met a disgraceful end, as did Johannes Brandt, his pecuniary bequests would not pass to his spouse because of the disgusting way in which he passed away following his homosexual revelations.

### **Conclusion**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, females were not married for love, but rather for money. Contrary to this, the main character in Jessie Burton's book *The House of*

Fortune fights for self-determination and is ultimately able to alter her course in life. Thea, an eighteen-year-old lady in the 18th century, would have had the same destiny as other women of that era, when women were married off to wealthy men for protection and financial gain and exploited as pawns in the patriarchal society. The social standing of a lady was based on her husband's wealth. Thea, the female protagonist, faces obstacles in her quest for a love marriage at every step. She battles to avoid getting married to someone she does not love, and because of her tenacity, she is able to take charge of her life and avoid getting married just for financial gain. Thea is able to alter the patriarchal society's rules as a result of her battle. A radical feminist like Thea is able to subvert these expectations and marry for love rather than safety, despite the fact that it was crucial for a woman in the male-dominated 18th century society to marry a man for safety. The research illustrates these reasons through examples taken from the aforementioned novel.

The study helps women around the world trying to fight against the people who use them as pawns for their gain. Since it is almost hard to address every issue raised in a literature, this research concentrates just on the protagonist, a single female character. Due to the study's narrow focus, which centers on one novel's character, it solely looks at the issues that an 18<sup>th</sup> century woman faced in a society dominated by men and her battles to change the course of events that others determined for her.

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