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Feminine Empowerment in Cathy Kelly's Romance Novels *Never Too Late*, *Someone Like You* and *Just Between Us*

Master's Thesis
Vaasa 2009

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UNIVERSITY OF VAASA**Faculty of Humanities****Department:** Department of English**Author:** Johanna Oravainen**Master's Thesis:** Feminine Empowerment in Cathy Kelly's Romance Novels *Never Too Late*, *Someone Like You* and *Just Between Us***Degree:** Master of Arts**Subject:** English Studies**Date:** 2009**Supervisor:** Tiina Mäntymäki

ABSTRACT

Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman tavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka Kelly ilmentää naispäähenkilöidensä kehittymistä ja voimaantumista kolmessa romaanissaan: *Never Too Late* (2000), *Someone Like You* (2001) ja *Just Between Us* (2003). Kehitys tapahtuu naisten henkilökohtaisen kehittymisen ja toiminnan kautta. Tutkielman lähtökohtana on, että Kellyn naispäähenkilöt ovat vapauttavia hahmoja, joiden kautta Kelly ilmentää ja edistää naisten vapautumista stereotyyppisistä rooleista ja patriarkaalisesta arvomaailmasta.

Tutkielman teoriaosassa käsitellään kahta asiaa: ensiksi romanssikirjallisuuden lajia, sen määritelmää ja sisältöä sekä sen vapauttavaa merkitystä lukijoille. Tutkimuksen kohteena on myös romanssikirjallisuuden kehittyminen 1980-luvulta tähän päivään, erityisesti naispäähenkilön roolissa tapahtuneet muutokset. Toiseksi käsitellään romanssikirjallisuuden kaavamaisuutta sekä Kellyn romaaneissaan toistuvasti käyttämää kaavaa. Tutkimuksen kohteena ovat myös kirjallisten hahmojen luonnehdinta sekä hahmojen tulkinnassa tarvittava terminologia, erityisesti toiminnan käsite. Teoriaosasta saatujen tietojen ja käsitteiden perusteella analysoidaan Kellyn naispäähenkilöiden kehittymistä, itsenäistymistä ja vapautumista patriarkaalisista isä-tytär-suhteista sekä heidän oman aktiivisuutensa vaikutusta heidän elämässään tapahtuvissa muutoksissa.

Tutkielman johtopäätös on, että Kellyn naispäähenkilöt itsenäistyvät ja kehittyvät romaanien kuluessa oman aktiivisuutensa ansiosta. Kellyn naispäähenkilöt voimaantuvat pääasiassa kahdella tavalla: selvittämällä ongelmalliset isä-tytär-suhteensa sekä turvautumalla naispuolisiin ystäviinsä. Ongelmalliset isä-tytär-suhteet, naisten tasapainoilu perinteisten ja nykyaikaisten naisihanteiden välillä sekä naisten välinen solidaarisuus ovat toistuvia teemoja Kellyn romaaneissa.

KEYWORDS: Cathy Kelly, empowerment, emancipation, romance novel genre

1 INTRODUCTION

Romance novels are a popular genre that is generally condemned as being reactionary, i.e. a genre that cements traditional conceptions of femininity. However, in the 1970's and 1980's many scholars, the most well known of whom was Janice Radway (1984), began to claim that although romance fiction indeed represented women and men in stereotypical ways and maintained the gender dichotomy, as a genre it had an empowering side: women reserved time for themselves to read romance novels instead of always doing housework and serving their families. They also obtained romance and passion to their lives through the protagonists in romances. The romance genre has developed considerably since the 1970's and it has produced different subgenres. What has been noteworthy, is that many writers have created more independent characters and, through them, emphasize women's changing roles in society.

Cathy Kelly is one of these writers who have portrayed female emancipation in her novels. Kelly wants to change the stereotype of women as being the primary caretakers of families even if they are professionally successful. She does this by creating characters who do not confirm to traditional patterns of womanhood, for example starting a family and taking responsibility for household chores. Instead, they are more interested in being successful in their careers and cultivating themselves.

All of Kelly's protagonists face difficulties and challenges in their lives. When they act to solve those problems, they are empowered and they are able to embrace their inner strength and potential. It is the way in which the protagonists get over their difficulties by agency, i.e. by doing something actively instead of letting other people do things to them that makes Kelly's novels emancipatory narratives. As such, they give readers models of strong and independent femininity and thus encourage them to become independent too.

Kelly does not take a stand on what the "proper" woman is like; her only concern is that women themselves are content with the lives they are living and that they use their potential to the fullest. In Kelly's novels the characters regain their independence –

which they have often lost by getting married and/or having children – by realizing their potential for development and putting it into practice.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the development and empowerment of Kelly's female characters throughout three of her novels: *Never Too Late* (1999), *Someone Like You* (2000) and *Just Between Us* (2003). I argue that Kelly's protagonists are emancipatory characters and I study how their lives represent and promote female emancipation. I look at the agency of the women and how what they do affect their personal development.

The three novels chosen for this study have characters that represent women from different age groups and professions, who are all in different situations in their lives. They are faced with problematic situations and conflicts that they have to overcome. Conflict is always present in literature. It is the basic ingredient of any story and the source for the characters' actions. As Annas and Losen observe in *How Fiction Works* (2000: 9), a conflict between two or more people is what a "fictional plot is usually based on or driven by".

1) *Never Too Late* is Cathy Kelly's third novel and it was published in 1999. The novel is about three women, Evie, her sister Cara and Evie's friend Olivia, who all have problems with the (lack of) men in their lives. Evie is a single mother who thinks she might be engaged to the wrong man, Cara is single but wants to be in a relationship and Olivia is under her controlling husband's thumb. The three women try to help each other to solve their problems, but it takes a great deal of will and determination before their lives start to turn for the better. The novel concentrates on a period of one year in their lives.

2) *Someone Like You* was published in 2000, and it is Cathy Kelly's fourth novel. It has been awarded the Parker Romantic Novel of the Year Award. The novel is about three Irish women, Leonie, Emma and Hannah who meet on a holiday in Egypt. They become friends quickly even though they do not seem to have much in common. They continue their friendship after they get back home, and the novel follows their lives during the

next couple of years, when they all face difficulties and finally overcome them with the help and support of their friends and family.

3) *Just Between Us*, which was published in 2003, is different from the two other novels in that it clearly has four main characters: Rosie and her three daughters. During a period of one year all of them experience life changing events that rock their steady and peaceful worlds. The four women have to deal with difficult subjects such as infidelity and alcoholism. By supporting one another they overcome their difficulties and find out new and surprising features about themselves and each other. The most important lesson in this novel is that only by making mistakes we learn about ourselves and of our imperfections. When we come to terms with our own imperfection, we learn to be more tolerant towards to those of other people as well.

Typically for Kelly's novels, the main characters' individual stories overlap to some extent in the narratives since they are part of the same social environment: they are either friends, sisters or mothers and their daughters. There are similarities between the characters in different novels, which indicates, that Kelly uses certain stereotypical patterns when creating her characters. Seija Karppinen defines the term *stereotypical* in her article "Psychological Womanhood and Manhood: Gender vs. Sex" (1989: 79), and outlines the most common features that are associated with the stereotypical woman:

Stereotype is defined as an expectation or conviction that we have about people we have categorised as belonging to a certain social group. [...] In our society the most important tasks of women have traditionally been household work, motherhood and the bringing up of children. [...] Women are not expected to possess technical skills; they may even be considered to be less intelligent than men.

Kelly uses three main types of characters in her novels:

1) A beautiful but insecure woman in her thirties whose life seems to be in order, but who has suffered a tragedy in her past and is dealing with emotional problems. She is usually a kind and caring person who is dominated by her boyfriend or husband. I call this character type "the relinquished conformer".

2) An overweight woman in her thirties or forties, who is usually a single parent and a hopeless romantic. She is funny and outgoing, has good relationships with her children and is content with her life, but thinks that finding a man, her soulmate, would make her life complete. I call this character “the mother figure”.

3) A pretty, but very shy and insecure woman in her thirties, who has a healthy relationship with her boyfriend or husband, but has some other major problems in her life, e.g. she cannot conceive or she has troubles with her parents. I call this character “the self-sufficient worrier”.

Kelly has also other female and male characters in her novels, but these three types usually play the main roles. They are most often described as being ordinary people who have typical everyday problems. Kelly has said in an interview that can be found on her homepage that the reason why her books are so popular may be because she uses realistic characters that most of the readers can relate to (Kelly 2007). She wants to give women credit that they do not usually get in the midst of everyday life. In the same interview Kelly also says that women are often too hard on themselves and that they should listen to themselves more:

Women often define themselves by their families/their jobs/their partners and I thought it would be interesting to have characters who lose the things they define themselves by, so they'd have to go back to the beginning and ask “who am I, if I'm not a career woman/whatever?” The working mom thing is part of modern life because it's hard to juggle kids and a career. (2007)

Kelly wants women to be more compassionate to themselves, and she creates characters who show the real life women how it can be done. A central theme in her novels is that the best way to grow as a person and learn about yourself is to make mistakes in your life. If you try to be perfect and do everything right all the time, you will not evolve into an open-minded person who is capable of accepting the imperfections of yourself and those around you. Making mistakes is human and according to Kelly (2007) we should not take our imperfections so seriously:

Women are very hard on themselves and are always trying to do better. We need to let up a little and pat ourselves on the back a bit more. Women are great! Actually, I think that's the theme that runs through all my books.

Kelly's protagonists grow as persons through their mistakes, because they have to admit and accept that they are not perfect after all. By acknowledging their weaknesses and trying to mend them, Kelly's protagonists are empowered. They work hard to improve the things they do not like about themselves, and by doing that they learn more about who they are. They also learn that in order to be happy, they need to listen to themselves instead of always submitting to other people's expectations of them. In her article "Feminism Should Not Have Boundaries" (2007: 67), Cathy Kozlowicz argues that women's own activity and refusal to be restricted in a certain role are important if they want to live happy and gratifying lives:

Above all, self-esteem and happiness needs to come from within. Being a strong and happy woman comes from feeling good about your career, choices in life, hobbies, decisions, etc. [...] Whether it is knitting, engineering, teaching, driving, cheerleading or football, liking what you do and appreciating what you do well is part of being strong and secure with yourself.

In other words, women need to establish who and what they are, first to themselves and then to other people. This is often difficult, since even in today's society women are often expected to adapt to a certain role; they can either be career women or wives and mothers. Since many women want to have successful careers *and* raise a family, they have to work very hard to prove that they can do everything. In the midst of all this, it is easy to forget about yourself and what you want. This is the situation in which many of Kelly's protagonists are. They need to take distance from their lives and think about what is good and what is bad in it, and also what their place in it is. After they have established their positions and identities, they can begin making changes for the better.

Kelly's novels are popular literature, not only because they have so many readers, but also because they rely on a formula, which is typical of popular literature. In *Reading the Romance* (1984: 569), Janice A. Radway defines the "category or formulaic literature" as literature that relies "on a recipe that dictates the essential ingredients to be

included in each new version of the form. [...] category literature is also characterised by its consistent appeal to a regular audience.” In popular literature this means that each novel consists of elements that the regular readers of such texts are familiar and comfortable with, thus making the reading experience satisfying. Usually contemporary romance literature includes interesting people that the readers can relate to, varying locations and quite realistic events usually concerning relationships.

Kelly’s formula is based on her consistent narrative structure and repetitious use of certain types of main characters. The basic structure of all her novels is in principle the same: first Kelly introduces the main characters by describing their appearance, personality, relationships with other people and the situation in which they live. Then she goes deeper into the characters’ minds and introduces the problems that they struggle with, such as problematic relations with parents, difficulties with conceiving or fear of being lonely, and explains the events that have led to these thoughts and fears. After this, Kelly describes the everyday lives of her characters, and how they manage in running it despite their problems. She introduces minor characters that help the protagonists in solving their conflicts, and finally she describes how their problems are solved and how it affects the rest of their lives. Each chapter focuses on one protagonist at a time, although they all occasionally appear in each other’s chapters, since they know one another and are part of the same social community. Even though their lives are partly twined together, all protagonists have their own problems and stories of development.

The process of feminine empowerment through personal development and action is the main focus of this study. I will describe the features of the romance genre and explain the meaning of romance novels to their readers and how the novels provide the opportunity for escapism to them. I will also explain how the romance novel has evolved from the 1980’s to the present day. I will concentrate mainly on how the roles of the heroines have changed, since they have evolved from passive objects of desire into active and independent women. I will also discuss formula stories and describe the formula that Kelly uses in her novels. After that I will discuss characterisation in order to introduce some terminology for an analysis of Kelly’s characters. Finally, I will

discuss the ways in which the protagonists evolve and change in the course of the novels, what triggers this change, and also how it affects their lives and the people around them.

2 ROMANCE GENRE

According to the homepage of Romance Writers of America (RWA), all romance novels are comprised of two elements: they have “a central love story and an emotionally satisfying ending”. The tone or style, the setting and the level of sensuality may vary between novels, as long as the two basic requirements are met (RWA 2009). Kelly’s novels differ from traditional romance novels in that they do not have a clear leading couple around who all the events take place. Instead they have multiple main characters and settings. Nevertheless, since Kelly’s novels ultimately are about love relationships, I regard them as romance novels.

According to RWA, there are two formats of romance fiction: series or “category” romances and single-title romances. Series romances are novels that are “issued under a common imprint/series name that are usually numbered sequentially and released at regular intervals, usually monthly, with the same number of releases each time.” Harlequin is one of the best known publishers of series romances. Single-title romances are according to RWA “longer romances released individually and not as part of a numbered series” and they can be “released in hard cover, trade paperback, or mass-market paperback sizes.” Kelly’s novels are of the latter format.

2.1 Popularity of Romance Genre

In 2007, approximately 8090 romance novels were released and they sold for 1,375 billion American dollars (RWA 2009). RWA categorises romance novels into following subgenres, in order of popularity (= released novels in 2007) beginning from the most popular: contemporary series romance 25,7 percent, contemporary romance 21,8 percent, historical romance 16 percent, paranormal romance 11,8 percent, romantic suspense 7,2 percent, inspirational romance 7,1 percent, romantic suspense (series) 4,7 percent, other (chick-lit, erotic romance, women’s fiction) 2,9 percent and young adult romance 2,8 percent. The diversity of subgenres indicates that the romance novel genre has developed and regenerated over time conforming to the reader’s wishes.

In her article “Romance Primer” Christina Hamlett (2002: 1) studied the reports of RWA published in 2002 and noticed, that the number of people reading romance novels is enormous in the US alone. According to Hamlett “41.4. million people (age 10 and older) or 18% of the reading-age population have read a romance in the past year.” (2002: 1) Hamlett is interested in finding out who the people behind these figures are and what the conventions of romance writing are. Hamlett says that according to RWA’s studies, a typical romance reader is between 30 and 50 years old, works outside the home and has attended college. (2002: 1) Since romance novels have traditionally been thought to be read by love-hungry and lonely women, it is a surprising discovery that the typical reader of romance novels, and Kelly’s novels as well, is a normal everyday woman, who has a romantic side and who perhaps dreams of finding a soulmate.

Janice A. Radway (1984) is a pioneer in the field of research done on romance novels and the meaning they bear to their readers. She studied a group of women who were enthusiastic romance novel readers in order to find out why they liked the genre of romance so much and what reading meant for them. She called her study group “the Smithton women”. Radway argues that the reason for romance novels’ popularity is not only in the women’s needs for love and affection. According to Radway the reason is much more prosaic, as “the romance’s recent success *also* coincides with important changes in book production, distribution, advertising and marketing techniques.” (1984: 565) The publishers have made the novels accessible to all women by placing them for sale in for example drug stores and super markets. The novels are also affordable because they are printed as paperbacks instead of books with hard covers. Accessibility combined with low prices have contributed to the success of the romance novels, argues Radway. (1984: 570–571)

2.2 Recent Permutations in Romance Novels and Subgenres of Romance Genre

Romance has been a popular genre from the 18th century although the peak of romance as we understand it now was in the 1970’s and 1980’s. *Pamela*, written by Samuel

Richardson in 1740, is considered as the first “real” romance novel in the world (Cowling 2008). Both the structure of the romance novel and the nature of its protagonists have changed especially over the past two-three decades. These changes are discussed in an article called “Renovating Romance” (2009). According to the article, romance novels have changed from what they used to be until the late 1980’s in the following ways:

[...] rape has been substituted by seduction, heroes are less brutish and more emotional, heroines have lives, hobbies, and life goals instead of waiting for the hero to notice them, and while a happy ending is guaranteed for all, the plots are more slightly more believable. [...] In the earlier romances, a dominant hero and very passive heroine were the norm and are most likely due to the gender roles of the time period.

These characteristics combined with the RWA’s requirements for romance novels, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, constitute “the traditional romance novel” that will be discussed in my study.

The topics in contemporary romance novels are more austere than in traditional romance novels. Kelly’s novels deal with difficult issues such as alcoholism and financial distress that have not been discussed openly in traditional romance novels. However, these issues are realistic and common in today’s society. Open discussion about these problems and their frequency amongst people today may relieve the rigid atmosphere that surround them thus offering a therapeutic reading experience, as readers perhaps realize that there is no reason to feel ashamed about their problems.

2.2.1 Development in the Role of the Heroine in Romance Novels

The role of the heroine has changed considerably from a mindless and helpless “prize” to an intelligent woman, who deserves to be taken seriously, as Christina Hamlett (2002: 1) explains:

Romance writing – once the backdrop for bodice-ripping pirates and helpless governesses – has evolved to mirror modern times and male

female dynamics. Heroines, who were once relegated to low-paying jobs as a stepping-stone to marriage, are now cast as women of substance and captains of industry.

Instead of being a helpless woman, who has to be rescued for example from an unwanted marriage or financial distress, a modern heroine is more independent and capable of surviving on her own. Hamlett outlines the characteristics of modern heroines in the following way:

It's also beneficial in contemporary plots to demonstrate fairly early that your heroine is capable of living alone, taking care of herself and making good decisions. Whether she inherited everything she has or painstakingly worked her way up through the trenches of corporate America, she needs to be strong, resourceful and ready to handle the responsibilities of a sensuous adult relationship. (2002: 2)

The heroine is seen as an independent and capable adult in relations to her life and relationships, and the hero is more like an equal partner instead of being a patron or a father figure. Kelly's novels have renewed the role of romance heroines: they feature multiple modern, intelligent and capable protagonists, whose personal growth and empowerment are in focus. The novels concentrate more on the protagonists' relationships with themselves than their relationships with other people. All of Kelly's main and minor characters are more realistic than those in traditional romances: they work for a living instead of having inherited a great deal of money and live in normal houses instead of castles or manors.

In *Feminist Stylistics* (1995: 171), Sara Mills argues that stereotypical gender norms affect the way in which female characters are described in fiction. These norms and conceptions of what is appropriate behaviour also control their actions and sayings, and according to Mills, restrict the role of women "to inactivity, sexual attractiveness, or self-depreciation." Mills continues by arguing that in fiction male characters are usually the agents who get all the action, whereas women are "often the recipients of actions or are the vehicle whereby a problem is solved, either through marriage or through being presented as a gift" (1995: 169). Mills says that the story of Snow White is a good

example of the passive role of female characters, since Snow White's actions are not very central in the story even though she is the main character. It is the prince who performs the heroic deed and awakens her from her sleep by kissing her. (1995: 169)

In traditional romance novels the heroine's role correlates to the passive role of Snow White: women are encouraged to keep their opinions to themselves and look pretty. They are being guarded by their fathers until they marry and become their husband's possession and begin to procreate. In contemporary romance novels the role of the heroine has changed into an active agent and the authors attempt to answer the question: What if the prince does not come? Since modern heroines cannot and will not rely on a man to help them and make their lives worth living, they have to be strong and make it on their own. Besides, often the "prince" turns out to be a frog, who leaves the heroine in financial and/or emotional trouble that she has to get through with the help of her mental strength and female friends.

The heroines role as the recipient becomes evident in descriptions of appearance as well. Mills studied the analysis of several novels written by Desmond Bagley and Gavin Lyall by Batsleer et al. and found out that the descriptions of men and women differ from each other considerably:

Whilst the elements which are described for the male characters are those which are evident when they are in face-to-face contact, the ones which are described for the female characters are those which have to be observed when the character is portrayed as an object to be seen (1995: 162).

Mills adds that the descriptions of men support the image that the writer has wanted to give of them, for example a leather jacket signals that he is tough, whereas the descriptions of women may sometimes exist just to highlight the sexual attractiveness of a female character. Mills has also studied the work of Joanna Russ who discusses the constraints on female characters in literature and how these constraints affect their actions:

She [Joanna Russ] argues that the roles that women characters have are determined by stereotypes of what women are like: that is, concerned with emotion rather than action, relegated to the private sphere, seen as the appendages of males rather than characters in their own right. In much nineteenth-century literature, women characters often function as plot mechanisms, that is, they bring about plot resolution or closure by marriage, by dying, or by leaving. (1995: 170)

In other words women are seen as irrational and emotional creatures, who need the guidance and support of a man to get through everyday life. Even though Russ talks about the nineteenth-century literature, the restricted roles of female characters still apply in much of the contemporary romance novel genre. In Kelly's novels, this is the mould that the protagonists are trying to break. They want to be seen as rational and intelligent people, who are able to take care of themselves and who do not want to be patronized.

2.2.2 Models of Contemporary Romance Heroines: Bridget Jones and Kelly's Protagonists

There seems to be a battle going on concerning the position of women in literature. Many writers, Kelly included, try to break the barriers by creating modern, independent and significant female characters, but the traditions are so powerful that it will take a considerable amount of time and effort to update them. The effort is gradually starting to pay off, as certain features for example from chick-lit novels assimilate as part of the traditional romance novel genre. The heroines in these novels have elements of both male and female characters used in traditional romance novels. They can survive on their own and be tough and persistent when needed but they also have a sensitive and caring side, and they want a partner to share their lives with. These heroines are usually interested in getting to know themselves and they want to improve their mental well-being by analysing their thoughts and feelings by themselves and with their family and friends. They want to feel comfortable in their own skins instead of just trying to find acceptance and validation from someone else.

Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones, who appears in novels *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999), is the most prototypical example of a chick-lit heroine. Bridget is a somewhat neurotic woman in her thirties living in London. She is obsessed about her weight and she can not seem to find a decent man to have a relationship with. Bridget's mother tries to pair her up with almost all the single men she knows, and thinks that Bridget is just being too picky. Bridget works in a publishing company and she has three good friends, Sharon, Jude and Tom. The novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* follows Bridget's life for one year as she writes her adventures in a diary.

Bridget makes her life sound like a disaster most of the time, but Kelly A. Marsh, who has analyzed the novel and its themes, says that Bridget is just being modest and over-dramatic. She would be considered as a relatively successful person in real life, writes Marsh in her article "Contextualizing Bridget Jones" (2004: 57):

Seeing Bridget through Rebecca's [an acquaintance of Bridget's] eyes reminds us of all that Bridget underplays about herself: she owns an apartment in central London, holds jobs in publishing and television, attracts desirable men, and maintains her family relationships and a wide circle of true friends. Rather than idealizing these things, Bridget demonstrates that such an apparently desirable lifestyle is not the perfect product of strict self-regulation that it may seem but rather is subject to the same accidents and problems as any other.

It seems that there is always some part in her life that Bridget is discontented with and she feels inferior to some women who seem to have everything under control. Luckily Bridget has her friends, who are always there for each other no matter what. Together they sort out everybody's relationship and work problems, but they know how to have fun as well. Since Bridget's love life is quite catastrophic most of the time, she worries that she might end up alone when she is old. Her friends worry about the same thing too, but every now and again something happens, which reminds them that they will always have each other. For example when Tom disappeared for a few days after having cosmetic surgery done on his nose, his friends were extremely worried about

him. As it turned out, Tom had only been at home sleeping and his unsympathetic boyfriend Jerome had refused to take care of him.

Even though Bridget has her family and friends who love her just as she is, she wants to learn to understand and love herself as well. She does this by writing her diary and reading self-help books. She wants to be in a committed relationship, but she is not so desperate that she would settle for just anyone. She is a romantic and believes in true love, but until she finds it, she tries to make the best of her life as an independent, urban career-woman.

Bridget resembles the women in Cathy Kelly's novels in that she is the master of her own life. She as well as Kelly's protagonists do not sit around waiting for a man to come and make their lives better. If they want something, they are active and make it happen on their own. They do not think of themselves as being helpless and incapable women or inferior to men in any way. They realize the multiple demands women are required to have in order to survive from everyday life.

Bridget and Kelly's protagonists are heroines of what Barbara B. Stern calls *gynocentric texts* in her article "Feminist Literary Criticism and the Deconstruction of Ads: A Postmodern View of Advertising and Consumer Responses" (1993: 558). She has borrowed the term from Carolyn Allen, and she uses it to refer to texts that feature "a woman as heroine, a central love relationship, and domestic and nurturant values" (1993: 558). Bridget as well as Kelly's protagonists go through multiple relationships and despite the fact that they are modern working women, they also value their families and home life. Stern continues describing the heroines of gynocentric texts by saying that despite the fact that "women are the main characters, they gain identity only through association with men, for their values center on love, marriage, family, and social life" (1993: 558). This is not necessarily true for Bridget and Kelly's protagonists, since they learn about themselves by thinking and exploring their thoughts and feelings by themselves and with their female friends. It is true, however, that Bridget really wants to find the perfect partner and fall in love. She is much more focused on relationships and marriage than Kelly's protagonists: even though they too

want to be in committed relationships and find love, that is not the only or even the most important objective in their lives. Above all, they want to learn to know who they are and they do not need men to tell that to them. These women want to be able to make themselves content and men and relationships are nice perquisites on their way to self-discovery.

Even though it is clear that the role of the heroine has changed from what it was a few decades ago the heroines in traditional romance novels, chick-lit novels and in Kelly's novels still have certain features in common; for example they are quite emotional and they are aware of their appearances. In traditional romance novels, the heroine is a beautiful object, who is controlled by the men around her. She is less experienced, sexually and in life in general, than the hero and her main goal is to find a husband who will look after her and start a family. The heroines in chick-lit novels are quite the opposite: they are outgoing career girls, who date multiple men and even have sex with them. They too want to eventually fall in love and get married, but they want to have fun with their friends while searching for the perfect man, who will treat them as equals. The heroines in Kelly's novels are a mixture of these two categories. They are more focused on love than sex, but they are not as chaste as the heroines in traditional romance novels. Kelly's heroines are not as liberal and frivolous as some of the chick-lit heroines, but they too want to make it on their own instead of depending on any man, who will treat them as his inferior. They do however want to get married and have children more than the chick-lit heroines do.

2.2.3 Subgenres of Romance Genre

According to Hamlett, romance novels can be divided into seven subgenres: gothic, regency, romantic suspense, westerns, paranormal, young adult and mainstream (2002: 2). What separates these subgenres from each other is the era they are set in, ranging from the turn of the 19th century in gothic novels to the indefinable future in paranormal novels. The setting in romance novels can vary from a cultivated French castle to an urban setting in America. The main thing that is common to all traditional romance

novels is that there is a couple who has to go through all kinds of difficulties before they can fall deeply and passionately in love with each other.

Contemporary, or in Hamlett's words "mainstream" (2002: 2), romance novels are quite realistic compared to the other subgenres because they deal with similar kind of problems that real people do today, and this helps the readers to identify with the characters. According to Hamlett "mainstream novels often include multiple marriages, divorces, deaths and sometimes unhappy endings" (2002: 2). They have changed the mould of a traditional romance novel, where the couple lives happily ever after. Out of the seven subgenres that Hamlett listed, Kelly's novels resemble mainstream romance novels the most. Hamlett's discussion about the viewpoint of the narrator in romance novels indicates that Kelly's novels are in the borderline of this genre:

Romances are generally restricted to two points of view: his and hers. Older books of this ilk were written from only one perspective – hers – the reasoning being that whatever the man was thinking at any given time probably wasn't very important. On occasion, a third point of view – the antagonist's – can be introduced. If you jump into too many heads, however, you're breaking a cardinal rule of the genre. (2002: 3)

Kelly uses a third person narrator in her novels. Each chapter focuses on one of the protagonists at a time and the narrator describes her thoughts and feelings thoroughly.

In her article "Guide to the Evolving Genres of Women's Fiction" (2005) Monica Harris argues that romance and mainstream are two different genres instead of mainstream being a subgenre of romance, as Hamlett (2002: 2) suggested. According to Harris, mainstream novels can also be called *chick-lit* (2005: 14). The term emerged in the 1990's and Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* was one of the pioneers in this category. Harris does not define this term, but Diane Goodman does that in her article "What is Chick-Lit?" (1996: 2). According to Goodman

Chick-Lit is hip, stylish, confident and sharp – it's also honest and very brave. It battles and conquers the term *Chick*; it explores, explains, sometimes gives into and sometimes blows away the notion of a chicklet,

trapped by birth to imprint its parents; it is sexual and sensual in dear or savage or shocking ways. And it proves itself structurally, lyrically, and formally as literature.

Harris says that romance and mainstream genres have become closer together and that often readers are confused about whether they are reading a romance or a mainstream novel. In her article Harris gives advice which helps the readers to make a distinction between the two genres:

Although both romance and mainstream titles show how conflicts can be overcome, mainstream titles are often funny, gossipy, dramatic, weepy or scandalous. These novels offer readers less formulaic story lines, so the language can include profanity, sexuality can be fully explored, and emotions such as jealousy and vengeance can be examined in a way that won't violate the reader's expectations. The satisfaction for the reader comes when the heroine finds all her battles are won, all her lessons are learned, and she feels strong enough to shape her life the way she wants. (2005:15)

The titles of Kelly's novels *Never Too Late*, *Someone Like You* and *Just Between Us* do not reveal to which category the novels belong. The first title indicates that you should grab a hold of the opportunities that life presents, even if they are scary, instead of living a dull and a predictable life. However, the title does not indicate the area of life in which the main character/s make/s the change; it could be related to work, living arrangements or personal relationships. The second title indicates that there is a very special person in someone's life, but it could be a relative or a friend just as well as a lover. The third title indicates that the novel is about relationships, but again it is not clear whether the relationships are platonic or not. The titles do sound like the typical titles of both romance and mainstream novels, but they do not reveal much about the contents of the novels.

2.3 Significance of Romance Novels to Their Readers

In the British edition of *Reading the Romance* (1987), Janice Radway illustrates the meaning of romance reading to their readers. After interviewing the Smithton women Radway concludes that they read romance novels to escape their normal routines and everyday lives:

[The Smithton women] explained that their reading was a way of temporarily refusing the demands associated with their social role as wives and mothers. As they observed, it functioned as a ‘declaration of independence’, as a way of securing privacy while at the same time providing companionship and conversation. (1987: 300–301)

Radway argues that the Smithton women read romance novels in order to have some private time, when they could concentrate on their own emotional needs instead of the needs of their children and husbands. The women found it comforting that in the novels the hero takes care of the heroines emotional and physical needs, because in real life it is the women who have to be the caretakers. (1987: 302) Radway also noticed that the women used the romantic events of the novels as a substitute for their own need for romance and companionship. Even though the women said they were happily married and Radway did not question this, their needs for care and nurturing were not satisfied by their partners: “Romance reading, it appeared, addressed needs, desires, and wishes that a male partner could not” (1987: 302).

Angela McRobbie criticizes Radway’s study in her article “Jackie and Just Seventeen: Girls’ Comics and Magazines in the 1980’s” (1991). She argues that Radway does not discuss the sexual feelings that the novels may arouse in the Smithton women. According to McRobbie “The absence of material on the respondents’ sexual identity and sexual activity also lends a onesidedness to their strenuous activity as romance readers” (1991: 140). McRobbie says that because the romance readers are often rooted at home, they do not get to express and vent their sexual energy at the workplace by flirting with for example colleagues. Instead they channel it “into the private act of reading” (1991: 140). McRobbie thinks that by not discussing the Smithton women’s

sexuality, Radway's study remains too prim. Since sexuality is an important part of womanhood, people reading the study do not get the full picture of Radway's examinees. McRobbie presumes that the Smithton women felt uncomfortable discussing their sexuality and they did not want to talk about perhaps "the less cheery circumstances of their lives" (1991: 140), and that is why Radway has not dealt with the topic in her study.

Often women reading romance novels want to concentrate on the romantic aspects of the novels instead of the sexual ones. Perhaps this is because sex has such a heightened position in today's western society. Women are often treated as objects of desire, or "eye candy", and advertisers and the media support this objectification by selling everything from cars to kitchen appliances with the help of the woman's body. The relationships between men and women, especially in their twenties and early thirties, are expected to center around sex. It can sometimes feel fairly overwhelming, and perhaps that is why women turn to romance novels: to get a dose of old-fashioned romance where sexual tension is present, but displayed in a more discreet way than in contemporary women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*.

The desire to focus on romance and courtship instead of sex is in the minds of not only romance novel readers, but of the late 18th century Regency-era novel readers as well. Lianne George discusses the fascination that many modern women feel towards the austere and conciliatory world of Jane Austen and her peers in her article "The Opposite Sex: Why We're Obsessed with Jane Austen and Regency-era Romance" (2007). George argues that the main attraction in the Regency-era is that it is the opposite to modern culture (2007: 35). Women who are tired of their hectic lives and being valued on the basis of their sex appeal, want to escape to a world of leisure and tranquility. They want to read about men who say nice things to women because they mean it rather than just trying to get them into bed:

Courtship in Austen's day had weight and carried real consequences in a way that it doesn't today. Readers are well aware of Austen's mistrust (even horror) of unbridled passion. One misstep and a woman winds up destitute and unloved, a social pariah. Today, by comparison, nothing

seems to have weight. Dating, co-habitation, marriage – everything's undoable. It's a hard-won freedom that does have its downside. (2007: 35)

Romance novel and Regency-era novel readers are alike in the sense that they use literature as a way to escape the reality they live in. Literature offers them a glimpse of what it would be like to live in a different era or setting even though they probably would not like to stay there permanently.

Even though many people today presumably find the Regency-era women's lives to have been very restricted and the idea of maintaining immaculate reputation in order to be good wife-material strange, some people still think that it is important for girls to be good and proper and take care of their reputation, so that men would find them worth marrying. Angela McRobbie discusses the bourgeois and archaic attitude with which girls were raised as late as in the 1980's in her article "Settling Accounts with Subculture: A Feminist Critique" (1991: 33):

The working-class girl is encouraged to dress with stylish conventionality; she is taught to consider boyfriends more important than girlfriends and to abandon the youth club or disco for the honour of spending her evenings watching television in her boyfriend's house, saving money for an engagement ring. Most significantly, she is forced to relinquish youth for the premature middle-age induced by childbirth and housework.

McRobbie criticizes the fact that boys were encouraged to be active and experience different things (1991: 27), whereas girls were taught to think about themselves as future wives and mothers instead of independent and thinking individuals. Even today many girls are brought up to think that the key to a happy and satisfying life is to find a husband and start a family. When these girls grow up and do just that, they notice that the traditional marriage is not the answer to all problems after all. Having made this realisation they may feel betrayed and disappointed. Perhaps the reason why many of these women turn to romance novels, is that they do not want to let go of the dream that it is possible to find a relationship that answers to all of their hopes and needs. Even though their relationships are not perfect, they can experience "the perfect love story"

through the heroine of a romance novel and thus get a sense of satisfaction, even temporarily.

Radway (1987: 201) suggests that romance novels present women a distorted image of love and relationships and make women believe the delusion that they too can experience a similar romance they read about and that “men are able to satisfy women’s needs fully”. In other words, romance novels can also do harm in that they feed the illusions that women have in their minds if they are disappointed in their everyday lives. By believing in these illusions their lives may seem even more disappointing and boring than if they did not know about the fairytales in romance novels.

Romance novels have a low status compared for example to the “classics” of literature. Despite of this and the fact that they can create false expectations in the minds of the readers, romance novels serve an important function to the people who read them: they offer a way to escape the everyday life with all its problems and create hope, that there is “ideal” love in the world. Radway (1987: 305) concludes by saying that romance reading can sometimes lead women to challenge their roles as “just” wives and mothers, and transform them from readers to writers. These women have possibly acquired much needed comfort and pleasure from reading romance novels and they want to share their positive feelings with other women by writing romance novels of their own. By their writing process these women often demand more independence and time for themselves, and according to Radway they “clearly begin to challenge in a fundamental way the balance of power in the traditional family” (1987: 305).

2.4 Formula of Romance Genre

Formula literature is literature that follows the generic conventions of the genre to which it belongs. The basic plots in formula stories have a fixed structure depending on the genre, for example in detective novels a crime takes place, the detective starts to investigate the case and finally the offender is revealed. Formula stories feature certain stereotypical characters, for example in westerns there is always a villain and a hero.

Also the settings and locations are often similar between novels in the same genre, for example the events in chick-lit novels take place in major cities, such as New York and London. Arthur S.A Berger studies the concept of formulaic texts in his book *Popular Culture Genres* (1992: 31), and quotes John G. Cawelti's definition of formula stories:

We can best define these formulas as principles for the selection of certain plots, characters, and setting, which possess in addition to their basic narrative structure the dimensions of collective ritual, game and dream.

Stories in a certain genre, for example the detective stories, the Westerns and the romantic stories, have many features in common despite of the varying writers. Based on these re-occurring features readers are able to tell what kind of a story they are reading; for example cowboy hats and boots refer to Westerns. Berger prefers to use the term *genre* to cover all the texts that Cawelti calls *formulaic* and argues that formulas "involve the various conventions found in various genres and subgenres" (1992: 31). According to Berger the aspects of texts that the formulas involve are time, location, heroes, heroines, villains, secondary characters, plots, themes, costume, locomotion and weaponry (1992: 31–32).

Christina Hamlett says that most romance readers are faithful to the genre and keep reading the books, because they usually follow a certain familiar formula: "boy-meets-girl/boy-loses-girl/boy-gets-girl-back" (Hamlett 2002: 1). Radway (1984: 569) argues that "category or formulaic" novels are based on a certain pattern and that each new novel includes "the essential ingredients" that a traditional romance novel consists of. She points out that "category literature is *also* characterised by its consistent appeal to a regular audience." In other words the regular readers of romance novels know what to expect when they begin reading a new novel. They know that there are going to be beautiful people, exciting adventures, passionate love, jealousy and a happy ending. Knowing what to expect makes the readers feel safe and they can be confident in that their needs will be satisfied.

The story lines in Kelly's novels are indeed less formulaic than in traditional romance novels and she writes about things that could happen to anyone. In other words Kelly's

novels are more realistic than the traditional romance novels, where people are either good-looking, rich and living in castles in different places all over the world or their lives change radically from rags to riches when they meet their saviour. This being said, Kelly does have a formula of her own, which she applies in all of her novels. In Kelly's novels the protagonist is faced with a problem, that she tries to solve on her own. As the protagonist notices that the problem is only getting worse and that she is unable to solve it by herself, she feels discouraged. She thinks about the situation realistically, admits that she needs help and solves the problem with the help of others. She learns that she is a stronger person than she gave herself credit for and that it is acceptable to ask for help instead of trying to do everything on her own. The women in Kelly's novels take control of their own lives into their hands instead of letting someone else decide what to do with it. They admit that they *want* love in their lives, but they do not *need* it and that makes all the difference. Empowerment through action is a key concept in all of Kelly's novels. The protagonists do things that build up their self-confidence and make them appreciate themselves more. Examples of such actions will be discussed in the character analysis section of this thesis.

Ien Ang criticises some of Janice Radway's (1984) views. In her opinion, Radway has not paid enough attention to the pleasure that romance reading generates in the readers. Ang herself is interested in the feeling of safety that keeping to a familiar genre creates in the readers of romance novels and she discusses her views in her essay "Feminist Desire and Female Pleasure" (1988). According to Ang, Radway thinks that the Smithton women wanted to see all the novels they read as new and unique instead of different versions of the same story (1988: 528). This observation is interesting, because it indicates that in the minds of the Smithton women there would be something wrong or embarrassing with wanting to read similar stories continuously, and that is why they try to convince themselves that every story is different with their varying heroines and venues. Perhaps this feeling of embarrassment is linked with the fact that romance novels have a low status compared with high literature. By assuring themselves that there is indeed diversity between the romance novels, the Smithton women gained justification for their taste in literature.

Ang (1988: 528) argues that Radway was puzzled by the Smithton women's habit of making sure in advance that the novels they were reading had happy endings. Moreover, she says that Radway considered this reading method as a negative thing and as a sign of fear for the unknown. Ang's interpretation of the Smithton women's behaviour is more positive. She argues that by verifying the outcome of the novel in advance, they maximized the pleasure of the reading experience:

When the reader is sure *that* the heroine and the hero will finally get each other, she can concentrate all the more on *how* they will get each other. Finding out about the happy ending in advance could then be seen as a clever reading strategy aimed at obtaining maximum pleasure: a pleasure that is oriented towards the scenario of romance, rather than its outcome. (1988: 528)

This aspect of the Smithton women's behaviour supports the notion that romance readers want to find comfort and a feeling of safety and familiarity in the uniformity of different novels in the same genre. By knowing that everything will end well, they can fully enjoy reading about the obstacles and difficulties that the hero and the heroine are faced with. This applies to Kelly's regular readers as well. They know the basic structure of Kelly's formula and are confident in that the protagonists are strong and resourceful enough to overcome all of their problems. Not having to worry about whether or not the novel will have a happy ending enables them to have a pleasurable reading experience.

Even though the formulaic nature of romance novels still generate feelings of comfort and safety in many readers today, attitudes have begun to change and readers are open to variation. In her article "Textually Promiscuous. Romance Readers Definitely Read Around" (2007) Sarah J. Robbins argues that romance readers do not want to read the same story over and over again. Robbins says that contemporary romance novel readers want variation and that the publishers and book sellers are doing their best to satisfy their needs by offering different subgenres, for example science fiction, religion or politics mixed with romance (2007: 23–28). After interviewing professionals in the publishing industry, such as senior editor Shauna Summers at Bantam Dell publishing house in 2007, Robbins claims that these subgenre romance novels are so popular today

that they are in fact threatening the number one position of a traditional, contemporary romance novel:

If there's a catch in this ever-widening, perpetually cross-pollinating category, it's this: all this variety may have crowded out a so-called subgenre that was once the staple – contemporary romance. It seems that writers are so dazzled by werewolves and castles that a modern-day hero and heroine is simply not so common. "We're actively looking for stand-alone single titles, and we're just not seeing them," Summers at Bantam Dell says. "Part of the reason may be that contemporary romance has cross-pollinated with women's fiction. In the books that come close, the tone, structure and focus of romance is hard to find." (2007: 28)

2.5 Strive towards Equality Instead of Patriarchy

The traditional romance novels have been claimed to promote patriarchal values and define woman's place in society according to them. Our society is still governed to a great extent by patriarchal values and conventions and therefore we still today, in our lives, implement them although we might be unconscious of it.

Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson studied Kate Millett's definition of the term *patriarchy* and redefined it in their book *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (1993: 214) as follows:

Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women.

In a prototypical image of patriarchy men are seen as being more valuable than women, who function as their vassals and obey their orders. It is the men who bring food to the table and protect the women and the children, who are obliged to serve men and be grateful for the food and protection. With responsibility comes power: since men bear the primary responsibility for their families livelihood, they are seen to have authority over the rest of the family. Often men's responsibilities extend beyond the family to cover entire communities and they end up in positions in politics and public offices.

Even the titles that are given to men are usually connected to the public position they hold in their communities, whereas women are defined by relationships and connections to other people. Aili Nenola discusses this phenomenon in her article “Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective” (2001: 25):

[...] men – in simpler cultures, too – are defined through status and role categories, such as ‘warrior’, ‘hunter’, ‘elder’, which are in no relation to women, or children. Women, by contrast, are wives, mothers, sisters daughters etc. – all names that center around women’s relationship to other people.

The ideal woman in patriarchy knows that she is not equal with her man and accepts her inferior position. She feels it is her duty to be a good wife and mother and leave the politics and decision making to men. She may educate herself and become for example a secretary, a nurse or a teacher, but her main goal in life is to get married and stay at home with the children. This means that women are not very independent outside their homes, because they cannot earn their own money. The ideal woman is obedient and loyal to her husband. She keeps the house in perfect condition and her appearance is always well-groomed. Lindsay German discusses patriarchy and its impact on women’s lives in her article “Theories of Patriarchy” (1981). According to German, the content of the term patriarchy is often oversimplified and it is used as a synonym to the oppression of women (1981: 1). German argues that patriarchy is connected with capitalism and it is the capital, not men, who benefit from the oppression of women, since men are physically stronger and thus capable of working harder than women (1981: 6). Since women carry and give birth to children, it is only natural that they are the primary caretakers to children, at least when they are small:

Women’s roles as mothers and childrearsers structure their whole lives. Part-time working is a product of their role as mothers. Unequal and generally low pay is a product of them not being considered as breadwinners. From the beginning of their lives in capitalist society, the assumption is that they are going to be something different from men. Their pinnacle of achievement is presented as motherhood and marriage. (1981: 10)

Until the romance novels began to change in the 1980’s, patriarchal values influenced the roles of women in them more clearly than they do in contemporary romance novels.

Male protagonists were portrayed as alpha males, who guarded the weak female protagonists moving straight from their father's care into the care of their husband's. Even the front covers of traditional romance novels affirmed the strong man–weak woman –composition, explains Lucinda Dyer in her article “The Forever Clinch” (2008: 29). According to Dyer, traditionally romance novel covers have featured a *clinch*, meaning a handsome hero with “his brawny arms around a bountifully buxom damsel” (2008: 29). Moreover, the man is usually placed above the woman, which conveys a patriarchal message of men being on a higher level than women. Even though the clinch covers are considered to be old-fashioned, they enable readers to distinguish romances from other novels, even if they are not familiar with the authors name (2008: 29).

The strive for equality has replaced openly patriarchal values in contemporary romance novels; men and women are portrayed as more equal with the same rights and responsibilities, although some patriarchal values and ways of thinking still exist today. The female protagonists are not expected to be young and innocent virgins, who have a very naïve conception of the world. Instead they have gained independence and courage to stand up for themselves and make it on their own. (Hamlett 2002: 1) They are also allowed to express themselves more freely. The protagonists in Kelly's novel break the rules of “good girls” by showing and talking about their negative feelings despite the fact that it causes turbulence in other people. Expressing negative things is not thought of being desirable feminine behaviour:

Women are assumed to be whimsical, impulsive, weak, helpless and in need of protection, particular, submissive, attentive to other people's needs but also dependent on them, and very interested in their own appearance. [...] Traditional feminine virtues are patience, conscientiousness, tidiness, modesty, intuition and sociability. [...] Men are not encouraged to show their emotions except in the sportfield, while drinking in company, or while alone with their partner. Aggressive emotions are thought to be more easily expressed than tender or loving feelings. (Karppinen 1989: 79)

In other words, expressing negative feelings is more acceptable for men than for women, who are expected to act in a way that does not create unpleasant situations.

However, Kelly's protagonists are tired of always staying in the background and putting on a happy face. Instead, they want to be accepted and valued as they are.

Contemporary romance novels also feature current issues, such as single parenthood, addictions and infidelity. They are not as glamorous as they were before and the ugly side of people and life in general is more visible. Even the front covers of romance novels have changed; for example in Cathy Kelly's novels the covers feature photographs of beautiful young women on their own or in groups smiling at the camera. The covers of romance novels also feature landscapes or venues that the events take place in the novels instead of a man and a woman kissing in an exotic environment with the woman placed lower and the man arching over her.

3 DISCUSSION ABOUT CHARACTERISATION

According to Annas et al. (2000: 10), characterisation is “the means a writer uses to reveal what a character is like”. They continue by saying that writers “can not only tell but also show us what their characters are like” and that readers learn about characters through their actions, dialogue and thoughts (2000: 11). In other words, writers use different narrative techniques to create characters, and readers interpret the clues that are provided by the text. Characterisation enables the readers to go deeper into the text and find new layers and discover things that are not visible at first.

In my thesis I analyze one of the most central aspects of characterisation, i.e. agency. What characters are like is to a great extent expressed in literature through what they do. I introduce some important terms within the study of characterisation and some aspects that relate to character and agency: difference between character and characteristic, flat and round characters, characters and plots, characters and action and themes.

3.1 Important Terms in Study of Characterisation

Some of the most central terms that are used in the discussion about characterisation, are *character*, *characteristic*, *impression* and *flat and round characters*. Jonathan Culpeper has defined these terms in his book *Language & Characterisation. People in Plays & Other Texts* (2001), where he analyses how the impression of a character is formed in the reader’s mind through the words in a text. He also presents a general theory of characterisation. Culpeper has used many different theories in his research from linguistics, social cognition and literary stylistics, which give the book many viewpoints to the topic. Even though Culpeper concentrates on play texts in his book, he introduces a great deal of terminology which can be used in dealing with prose texts as well.

Firstly, Culpeper wants to make a clear distinction between the terms character and characteristic, because according to him they get mixed up easily:

The problem with the word ‘character’ is that it is ambiguous. Amongst the various usages, it can be used to refer to the qualities – the characteristics – that combine to form a person’s personality, or the people that inhabit the fictional worlds of books, plays, films, and so on. (2001: 2)

Culpeper uses the term “characteristic” when he discusses the qualities of characters, and with the term “character” he refers to people in texts (2001: 2).

Secondly, Culpeper discusses the way in which readers form “impressions of characters” in their minds. He is interested in the characterisation process instead of characters themselves. (2001: 2) Culpeper says that he has borrowed the term “(character) impression” from a research done in the field of social psychology, where it means the way in which people “form impressions of people in the real world” (2001: 2). Culpeper also wants to make a distinction between the concepts *impression* and *conception*. According to him, the former concept is less stable than the latter and this is useful because it:

[...] enables me to better maintain a distinction between our evolving impression of a character and the background concepts stored in memory that may be used in shaping that impression. (2001: 3)

3.2 Flat and Round Characters

The concepts of flat and round characters have been much discussed in books about characterisation. E. M. Forster discussed them in his book *Aspects of the Novel* (1968), which was first published in the 1920’s. He describes a flat character as being basically very simple: “In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round” (1968: 75). Forster says that in their simplest form the essence of flat characters may be expressed in a simple sentence. He gives an example sentence and its explanation: “‘I never will desert Mr Micawber.’ There is Mrs Micawber – she says she won’t desert Mr Micawber; she doesn’t, and there she is.” (1968: 75) Forster says that there are many advantages in flat characters:

One great advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized whenever they come in – recognized by the reader’s emotional eye, not by the visual eye which merely notes the recurrence of a proper name. [...] A second advantage is that they are easily remembered by the reader afterwards. They remain in his mind as unalterable for the reason that they were not changed by circumstances. (1968: 76–77)

Flat characters are easy from the writer’s point of view, because they can bring information to the story and then disappear. The writer does not have to worry about creating a history for them or explaining them to the reader. They come and go and are quickly forgotten. Forster argues that flat characters are at their best, when they exist to entertain the reader: “For we must admit that flat people are not in themselves as big achievements as round ones, and also that they are best when they are comic. A serious or tragic flat character is apt to be a bore.” (1968: 80)

Round characters, or “two-dimensional people” as Forster calls them, are more complicated and multidimensional than flat ones. They have a central role in the story and their existence and actions have to be explained in order for them to make sense. According to Forster, only round characters “are fit to perform tragically for any length of time and can move us to any feelings except humour and appropriateness” (1968: 81). Round characters allow the readers enter into the world of the novel and make them feel something. If they do not succeed in this, they are flat:

The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it – life within the pages of a book. (1968: 85)

A round character is more life-like than a flat character. It contains the element of surprise just like real people do, and that is what makes it interesting. The protagonists in Kelly’s novels are round characters. Kelly explains their appearance and personalities in detail so that the reader can form a detailed image of the characters in her mind. She makes them humane and fallible which creates more interest than reading about perfect people living perfect lives. Vulnerability enables the readers to identify with the characters and make them feel compassion towards them.

3.3 Characters vs. Plots

What is an interesting character like then? Noah Lukeman attempts to answer this question in his article “Characterization” (2000). He says that it is important to concentrate just as much on the characters as it is on the plot, because: “Characters are your plot – their goals, wishes, developments” (2000: 21). According to Lukeman a good character is original and stands out from other characters and stays in the readers minds. He stresses the importance of creating characters that the readers care about, because that is what makes them continue reading the novel. The character does not have to be nice or sweet, but there has to be something likeable about him/her:

One of the hardest things to do in writing is to create characters that readers will care about, that will make them have to read on. Occasionally one encounters the entirely unsympathetic protagonist – the bully or wife-beater or child molester – who will make a reader want to put the book down immediately. Protagonists can be compelling – even likeable – without being upstanding human beings (Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*, for example). But if you’re going to create such a character, you must make him likeable. (2000: 24)

Kelly stresses the importance of characters over plots, and that can be seen in her novels. There is of course a basic plot in every novel, but instead of explaining it candidly, Kelly moves it ahead by describing the events in the characters lives and the choices they make, so that the plot is in the background. Kelly’s intention is that even though an active reader of her novels can predict the outcome of the plot, she will be so enchanted by the characters and their actions, that knowing how everything is going to end will not disturb her or stop her from finishing her reading process.

Annas et al. (2000) take on a somewhat different approach to the status of plots. They do not deny the importance of good characters, but they want to emphasize the importance of good plots in creating a successful story. Besides interesting and appealing characters, a good story must have a capturing plot that arranges the events of the story in a logical order and makes the story meaningful to the readers (2000: 9–10). Annas et al. continue by arguing that plots in fictional stories are generally based on

conflict, meaning that there is “opposition or antagonism between two elements”. These conflicts can be either intra- or interpersonal and there can be several conflicts in one story. (2000: 9) They suggest that readers pay attention to the shape of the plot, for example to the ending of the story. A happy ending can “tie everything together neatly”, whereas an unhappy ending may leave “conflicts unresolved, questions unanswered, problems continuing.” (2000: 9)

Even though Kelly in her novels favours the characters over the plot, she has paid attention to it as well and realizes the plot’s importance. She uses the plot like a vehicle that the characters move forward. The events in her novels occur in a logical order, which helps the reader to stay focused and understand what is happening. Her formula, in other words the basic plot that she uses repetitively, includes a certain set of events, that have a clear beginning, climax and an end. At first she introduces the characters and their problems to the reader, then she describes how their problems are solved, and finally she tells how the characters and their lives have changed and in what conditions they will continue living on. Kelly’s plots are plausible and realistic, and they always have a happy ending, which may be one of the reasons to why her novels are so popular among average women. Because of their realistic events and characters women can identify with them, but they also get comfort and satisfaction in knowing that everything will end well. To sum up, in Kelly’s novels characters and plots are intertwined and both of them are essential to a successful story.

3.4 Characters and Action

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2002), H. Porter Abbott argues that the two most important components in novels are characters and action. Abbott says that for over two thousand years there has been a discussion going on whether *character* and *action* can be separated from each other and which one is more important (2002: 123). Abbott makes a distinction between these two concepts but points out that they are closely connected and affect one another:

Characters, to put this in narratological terms, have *agency*; they cause things to happen. Conversely, as these people drive the action, they necessarily reveal who they are in terms of their motives, their strength, weakness, trustworthiness, capacity to love, hate, cherish, adore, deplore, and so on. By their actions do we know them. (2002: 124)

In other words actions define the nature of the characters. By reading what the characters in a novel do, we get to know who they really are beyond the surface. Actions can also shape the nature of the character and change his/her life. In Kelly's novels the characters' actions make them become more powerful and confident women. Getting in touch with your feelings and finding your true self is what Kelly's characters strive for. The things they do and the ways in which they adapt to new situations also reveal a great deal about their personalities, which enables the readers to identify with the characters.

3.5 Themes

Annas et al. (2000: 14) encourage the readers to look for a theme, that is the "central idea or statement" of the text, because that will help them understand what the text is about. They argue that finding the theme can be difficult due to the complex and open-ended nature of fiction, but it enables the readers to connect with the writer and the text on a deeper level:

Trying to distill a theme from a work of fiction raises important questions about its essential meaning and is therefore an important step in coming to understand it (2000: 15).

Kelly has a consistent theme in all of her novels: the empowerment of women through their actions. She brings it forward by showing how her characters conquer their difficulties thus sending a message to her readers that they too can be strong and sort out their lives. The purpose of Kelly's novels to the people who read them is to offer them encouragement, comfort and a momentary escape from their everyday lives, all of which work as instruments of empowerment.

3.6 Interpretation of Texts

Because every reader recreates the story and its characters in his/her mind and all imaginations are unique, the interpretation of a story is never the same from reader to reader. Things that affect the reading and lead to different interpretations of the text are the background of the reader, for example age, gender or ethnicity, and his/her previous experiences in life. Jonathan Culler discusses the interpretations that readers make of their reading in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2000). He argues that in non-fictional writing, for example in instruction manuals and newspapers, the context defines the interpretation, but this is not the case in fiction, where the context “explicitly leaves open the question of what the fiction is really about” (2000: 31). In other words fiction makes the readers to think about what they are reading and draw their own conclusions.

Annas et al. (2000) argue that both the reader and the writer affect the interpretation of a text: the reader’s background affects the things s/he pays attention to, and the writer may for example favour one of the characters and make the others seem less likeable, or choose between one or multiple narrators for the story. They also emphasize the importance of order of narration, because the order in which individual instances are told can for example change the meaning of the story or shift the object of the reader’s sympathy. (2000: 5–12) Annas et al. argue that the point of view from which the story is told is central, because with diverse use of narrators, writers shape our attitude towards events and characters not only by controlling distance between reader and character but also by the choice of *which* character’s thoughts to reveal, and when. (2000: 8) According to Annas et al. a “correct reading” of a text is impossible to determine, but they encourage readers to pay careful attention to the text in order to see what the writer has wanted to say:

We can never say with any finality that one reading is the correct reading, but with an understanding of the ways writers work to shape our responses, a community of readers, through discussion, through argument, can begin to distinguish a careful and persuasive reading from one that simply ignores what the author has written. (2000: 6)

Thinking and analyzing what has been read is an efficient way to understand the writer's perspective. Characterisation activates the readers and makes them think instead of just being passive recipients who accept everything that is being told to them, as N. Alexandra Bluestein explains in her article "Comprehension Through Characterization: Enabling Readers to Make Personal Connections with Literature" (2002: 431):

Characterization is a strategy used to enhance comprehension. Readers may use characterization to evaluate a character's personality as well as to analyze many aspects of a character's life, problems, situations, feelings, and actions. Use of the characterization strategy further encourages comprehension and student interaction with the text.

3.7 Emotional Relationship between Readers and Characters

Barbara B. Stern (1993: 560) argues that women do not consider the "means and ends" of the writer to be as important as is the compellingness of the story. Stern states that "the female reader's orientation centered on her personal growth and [...] her response to fiction was based on her sense of participation in the characters' lives." In other words women want to read stories that have events and characters that they can relate to. They want to *feel* something when they are reading a story, because that helps them to forget about their own lives and problems for a while. One of the main reasons why readers find Kelly's novels moving, is that she makes the readers care about her characters. As an active reader herself, Kelly has noticed that realistic characters move and affect the readers more than unrealistic, plastic characters. She explained her views in an interview that can be found on her home page:

I've always been a voracious reader and the sort of books I hated most were ones about these gilded, glamorous people who had loads of money, buckets of self-confidence and were stunningly beautiful. They never seemed real to me. So when I started to write, I wanted to write about people who were the opposite of that. My characters are normal people, with problems paying the mortgage and a huge load of ironing waiting to be done. (2007)

4 ANALYSIS

Cathy Kelly is an Irish writer who has worked as a journalist and a critic before becoming a novelist. She writes romantic but still realistic novels using the same formula repeatedly. Her first novel *Woman to Woman* was published in 1997. It became an international bestseller and since then she has written nine novels that have been translated into several languages. Kelly's romantic novels are set in the urban environments of her home country Ireland, and they deal with everyday topics, such as problematic relationships and issues between parents and their offspring. Her novels are popular because they portray the contemporary urban women's lives in a romantic, yet realistic setting.

In this chapter I will analyze the main characters of the three novels from Cathy Kelly: *Never Too Late*, *Someone Like You* and *Just Between Us*. I will divide them into the categories I introduced earlier. Most of the characters could be placed into several categories, but I have chosen the one that suits their personality and characteristics the best. I will discuss the similarities and differences of the protagonists in relation to the traditional romance novel heroines as well as to the traditional models of femininity. I will also discuss how they implement their roles as emancipatory characters and the ways in which they communicate agency to the readers.

All the protagonists in these novels struggle with the lack of self-confidence and finding their independence. They have set rules and boundaries for themselves and behave in ways they think are expected of them. The protagonists wish that they could just let go and be the persons they really want to be. Cathy Kozlowicz (2007: 66) writes about the expectations and pressure that women are put under by themselves and by the society:

The inconsistency between who women are personally and who society wants them to become affects women and happiness. Dr. E. Tory Higgins, a social psychologist at Columbia University, developed the "self-discrepancy theory" to explain emotions and self-esteem. He used the terms "actual self" (how an individual views herself), "ideal self" (what she would like to become) and "ought self" (what a person feels it is her duty to become) to describe the inner tensions women (and men) face in

their self-perceptions. [...] Feminist movements can affect women's happiness by providing women with a high bar for their ideal and ought self, which can be too great a gap to bridge for a person's actual self. This gap provides a source of women's stress and unhappiness.

Women are faced with numerous demands they are expected to fulfill. If they fail to do that, they experience negative feelings, "such as sadness, disappointment, guilt and anxiety", argues Kozlowicz (2007: 66). Even though society can be blamed for a certain amount of pressure put on women, they themselves are responsible for a considerable portion of it as well. Most women have high expectations for themselves: they want to be professionally successful and economically independent but they want to be good wives and mothers as well. If they do not succeed in acting out all the roles perfectly, they feel a sense of failure. Of course there are women who want to concentrate on being either a career woman or a house wife, but nevertheless they want to be perfect in the role they have chosen. In Kelly's novel the protagonists struggle with finding a balance between who they pretend to be and the lives that they are living and who they would like to be and the lives they would like to be living.

4.1 Relinquished Conformer

The relinquished conformer is a beautiful but insecure woman in her thirties whose life seems to be in order, but who has suffered a tragedy in her past and is dealing with emotional problems. She is usually a kind and caring person who is dominated by her boyfriend or husband.

4.1.1 Olivia

Olivia's character develops from a submissive housewife, who looks pretty, keeps the house in perfect condition, is a good mother and submits to her husband's will, into a successful and confident career woman. Hers is a story about emancipation from the roles that women are tied to. It conveys a message to the readers that they too can become what they want, if they take action and empower themselves. Activity and

freedom are characteristics of contemporary romance heroines (“Renovating Romance” 2009). These are also traits promoted by Kelly’s protagonists. Realizing her human dignity is an empowering experience to Olivia and enables her to take action and do something about her situation instead of just accepting it silently.

Olivia has a problematic relationship with her abusive mother who never supports her. That is why she wants to be completely opposite and fulfil her part as an ideal mother, who is warm, cosy and loving. Because her mother never gave her unconditional love and acceptance, Olivia has become an overachiever, who has to be perfect at everything. Olivia’s parents are alcoholics, who have poured their family fortune down their throats. They used to fight all the time when Olivia was a child and she had to endure the situation on her own since she did not have any siblings. Olivia’s mother is jealous of her looks and success and puts her down every way she can:

Sybil, who’d been a great beauty before she got stuck into drinking a bottle of spirits a day and developed more spider veins than a spaghetti junction road map, loathed other good-looking women, as Olivia knew to her cost. Her mother hadn’t been able to cope the year Olivia had turned thirteen and changed from a scrawny ugly duckling into a slender Nordic swan. (Kelly 2000: 90)

The mother is usually the most important person in a child’s life. Especially girls look up to and aspire to be like their mothers. According to Sari Näre in her article “Heroism and Gender” (1989: 33), particularly girls associate their mothers with heroes and out of nearly 500 children “88 per cent of them admired or liked their mother”. Even though Olivia realizes that her mother is bitter and jealous, her dismissive comments have made Olivia feel very unsure of herself.

Olivia is married to Stephen, who is extremely controlling and aggressive and wants Olivia to act as a trophy wife and live her life according to his rules. Olivia has agreed to do that for a long time because she loves him and wants them to be a happy family with their daughter Sasha, whom Olivia adores. The reason why Olivia is so determined to make her marriage work is that she wants to give Sasha the safe and loving home she never had when growing up. Olivia submits to Stephen’s controlling behaviour because

she hates arguing and wants to please him. She is afraid that Sasha will be traumatized if she hears them arguing and does not realize that allowing Sasha to see how Stephen dismisses her is just as harmful. Since Olivia does not want Sasha to live her childhood in fear like she did and grow up to be a timid woman, she banishes Stephen out of their home, until he learns to treat her with respect and listen to her opinions:

‘The final reason I want you to go is that you scare our daughter. When I disagree with anything you say, or when I don’t immediately do what you’ve ordered, you go berserk. You change, fly into a rage. That rage terrifies her and me. I grew up in a house where I was always afraid: afraid my parents would get pissed and go crazy after me; afraid there’d be no money for food or bills; afraid of what terrible things my mother would say to me when she was in a rage.’ [...] ‘I don’t want Sasha to go through all that,’ Olivia said. ‘I don’t drink,’ protested Stephen, looking strangely vulnerable for the first time. ‘That only makes it worse,’ she said simply. (Kelly 2000: 389)

When Stephen agrees to go to therapy to sort out their issues, Olivia decides to give him another chance to show that he really has changed. Olivia is surprised to learn that the reason why Stephen is a bully is that he is insecure of himself, and thinks that the only way he can keep people around him is to control and order them to do so. This is typical behaviour for patriarchal traditional romance heroes (“Renovating Romance” 2009). In therapy Stephen learns that he should be giving Olivia support instead of discouraging her. By taking agency and demanding Stephen to change his ways, Olivia’s character conveys activity and empowerment to the readers.

Olivia loves cooking and is good at it. She likes her job as a home economics teacher but has difficulties with some of the disobedient pupils. An opportunity for emancipation opens up to Olivia when her friend Max suggests that she apply for a position as a TV cook in a popular morning show. Olivia is horrified because she does not think that she would be able to talk in front of millions of TV viewers. In the end she agrees to go to a test shoot and succeeds really well. Her new work gives Olivia more self-confidence and a feeling of satisfaction. Stephen does not want his wife to appear on TV, because he has seen the changes in Olivia and is afraid that she will fall in love with someone else and leave him for good. Since Stephen is portrayed as man

who advocates patriarchal values, to him Olivia represents a beautiful object pleasurable to look at (Meijer & van Zoonen 2002: 331). Stephen is not willing to share his wife with anyone. For once Olivia does not listen to Stephen and she tells him that he cannot control her life any longer. Olivia is so popular among the TV viewers that her boss suggests that she get her own show. Olivia is excited because she has finally found her professional calling. Even though Olivia is proud of her role as mother, she wants to achieve her professional goals as well. This is typical for contemporary romance heroines, who are often able to be mothers as well as career women (“Renovating Romance” 2009). They are the prototypes of ideal contemporary women, who are capable of handling the challenges and demands that they encounter.

Olivia’s character wants people to think that her life is in order. From an outsiders perspective Olivia lives a comfortable life with her perfect family in a nice house. For a long time Olivia keeps up the appearances, but then she gets tired of being a door mat and lets people know that she is not happy. This is an important step for Olivia, because she feels that she is a failure and to blame for everything that is wrong in her life. Admitting her failures is very hard to do, but finally she manages to open up to her friend Evie:

‘I couldn’t tell anyone. I don’t know where it all started to go wrong, but it did and it has.’ Her eyes filled with tears. ‘I love him, Evie, but he doesn’t love me, not really.’ The words came out in a rush. ‘He loves having a wife who looks like me and knows how to say the right things but he doesn’t care anymore about me as a person. It’s as if I don’t exist, I’m just another thing in his life. Like the car or the apartment or his state-of-the-art laptop. I hate it all.’ (Kelly 2000: 293)

Realizing that it is acceptable to admit her own and other people’s failures is the most important lesson Olivia has to learn. She realizes that it is not the end of the world and that the people who matter do not judge her even if she is not perfect all the time. It is normal to experience and express negative feelings instead of bottling them inside. This was not a typical feature of traditional romance heroines, who were encouraged to passively accept the situation they were in instead of actively trying to solve the conflicts and thus act as agents of their own lives (“Renovating Romance” 2009). When

Olivia learns to express her negative feelings, she begins to value herself more and see that she is just as good as everyone else. In other words she becomes emancipated. Kelly's romance heroines express themselves and complain about their lives, but they usually confide to their girlfriends instead of their husbands or boyfriends. In Kelly's novels women are an important empowering resource to each other because together they form a female community within which problems can be shared.

Olivia's character combines features of traditional and contemporary romance heroines: she is a beautiful and attractive woman, who also possesses an interesting personality ("Renovating Romance" 2009). Olivia has a good sense of style and she is aware of her good looks, but does not want to emphasize it because she is shy and getting a great deal of attention makes her feel uncomfortable. Instead she wants to focus people's attention to her character rather than her looks. This conveys that Olivia is a contemporary romance heroine, who does not want to be treated like a beautiful but mindless doll. Kelly communicates through Olivia's character that youth, beauty and external characteristics are often given too much emphasis in today's Western society. Girls are being taught from early on that if you are attractive, good things will happen to you automatically. For example in fairytales such as Snow White, the heroine gets the prince and lives happily ever after, whereas the old and ugly step mother is not as fortunate. Snow White is portrayed as not only young and beautiful, but also as a kind and caring girl. The old step mother is not only ugly on the outside, but on the inside as well. In other words youth and beauty equal positive personality and old age and unattractiveness equal negative personality. However, in contemporary romance novels the heroines have gradually become older and more experienced (Hamlett 2002: 1-2), and their personality is given more emphasis than their appearance.

Olivia's lack of self-confidence has affected every part of her life: she does not believe that she is worth of anything good, she has chosen to marry a controlling and demoralising man and she has a job where nobody respects her. Getting a job in television is a breaking point in Olivia's life. Noticing the admiration and respect for her talents from her colleagues and viewers give her self-confidence and make her feel valuable. The feeling of success in her profession excites Olivia and makes her want to

reorganize other areas in her life. She begins to believe in herself and does not let her mothers negative comments affect her as strongly as before. Olivia even feels sorry for her mother for wasting her life and is proud of her own achievements as a mother. Because Olivia has allowed other people to control her life for so long, it is very difficult and scary for her to take the control back into her own hands. When she manages to do that and realizes that she is able to stand on her own two feet, she feels liberated and empowered.

4.1.2 Hannah

Hannah's character is portrayed as a contemporary and active romance heroine, who is not modest about her achievements. Instead, she has a compulsive need to succeed. Hannah is an ambitious woman who has worked her way up on the career ladder: she started as a sales person in a dress-shop, moved on to working as a receptionist at a shabby hotel and now works in an estate agency. At first she works as an office clerk, but once she realizes that she is good at selling apartments, she becomes a real estate agent. Hannah is a resourceful employee who likes her job; she has many ideas about how to improve the business, and her boss David respects her and allows her to carry out her plans. Being successful at her job is very important for Hannah and she is proud of her accomplishments. However, despite her professional achievements, Hannah is slightly embarrassed about her modest background and wants to educate and cultivate herself by travelling and going to the theatre. She wants people to see her as a smooth and sophisticated woman and she succeeds in her attempts. By her ambition and her cultivation of herself Hannah communicates agency to the readers, and that it is possible to change and evolve as a person.

Hannah's character is portrayed as a self-sufficient and mistrustful woman, who relies a great deal on herself and finds it difficult to talk about her problems with other people. Instead she tries to hide them behind a smile so that no one would see behind the polished facade. This is a less feminine feature in Hannah's character, since inability to talk about one's emotions is usually considered to be masculine; the romance heroes often concentrate on pure action instead of talking (Meijer et al. 2002: 331). The reason

why Hannah does not want to rely on other people too much is that she has both seen and been in bad relationships, where the other person restrains the other and makes her feel bad about herself. Disappointments in past relationships have made Hannah guarded. The only people Hannah can really confide to are her friends Leonie and Emma. Traditionally romance heroines have had little experience of relationships and that is why they are open and trusting towards men, argues Hamlett (2002: 2). In contemporary romance novels it is common for the heroine to have been in relationships or even married. Contemporary romance heroines are thus more experienced and realistic in matters of the heart than the traditional heroines. (2002: 2)

In traditional romance novels the heroine idolises and obeys her father, who looks after her until she marries and becomes dependant of her husband. Hannah is portrayed as a contemporary romance heroine in that she criticises and blames her father for not supporting their family. Hannah has poor relations with her drunkard father Willie. She thinks that he is a useless and weak man who is only happy when drunk. Hannah loves her mother Anna but condemns her for standing by her husband's side even though he is no use to her. Hannah cannot understand how her mother can feel anything but resentment towards her husband, and thinks that Anna would do much better on her own. Hannah has an older brother Stuart but she is not close to him. She thinks that he is just as feeble as their father because of his drinking even though Stuart at least goes to work. Hannah also thinks that her mother prefers Stuart to her, but she finds out that this is not the case after all:

‘Of course I’m proud of you, but you could never see it.’ ‘You were always so tough on me,’ protested Hannah. ‘Stuart was your golden boy.’ Her mother snorted. ‘Lads will always be golden boys because they have it both ways. They’re men and they get what they want in life. If a woman gets what she wants, she’s seen as some tough old bird who couldn’t get a man. Stuart didn’t need help, you did. I didn’t want you turning out soft. I treated you hard to *make* you hard, so you wouldn’t go through what I did,’ explained Anna. (Kelly 2001: 334)

This makes Hannah appreciate and love her mother even more and she realizes just how strong and wise she is. Knowing that her mother is proud of her accomplishments lifts

Hannah's self-confidence. She also understands that Anna has made a conscious choice to stand by Willie's side and that he has not forced her to stay with him. There is a clear generation gap between Anna and Hannah and their views on marriage. Anna represents the traditional woman, who thinks that marriage is for life no matter what, whereas contemporary Hannah thinks that it is acceptable to get a divorce and move on if the marriage does not work. Realizing that Anna is determined to stay with Willie makes Hannah a little more sympathetic towards him. She does not feel as much resentment towards him anymore because he realizes that Willie is not a bad man; he is just weak and she has to accept her parents and their relationship as they are.

Despite the critique she gives to her mother, Hannah too tends to fall in love with weak men, who manipulate and use her for their own benefit. Even though Hannah is strong, she loses a sense of herself in relationships and wants to please her man and make him feel good about himself. Hannah has been with her ex-boyfriend Harry for ten years and she supports him in his futile dreams of becoming a writer. When Harry leaves Hannah to go to South America to find himself, she is furious with him because she has lost ten years of her life. She is even more furious with herself for allowing so much time to go to waste:

Life was one long *Little House on the Prairie* fantasy of delicious meals and lazy evenings toasting their toes in front of the fire while Harry discussed the novel he was going to write and Hannah stopped caring about leaving her dead-end job in the dress-shop to pursue her dream of being rich and utterly independent. (Kelly 2001: 9)

Anger is often connected with agency and female emancipation in Kelly's novels. By getting angry with themselves, Kelly's protagonists gain the energy they need to begin solving their problems.

By concentrating on and doing things for herself Hannah's character communicates to the readers that sometimes it is best to be the agent of your own life instead of waiting for a man to give meaning and purpose to it. After getting over the shock of the separation, Hannah decides to make up for lost time and puts her life back on track. She

starts exercising and applies for a job at a real estate agency. She vows to herself that she will concentrate on her career from now on and forget all about men. She wants to get to know herself again and retrieve her independence. Hannah also begins to harden herself because she realizes that she is not as hard as she thought she was. Even though she thinks that Harry is a loser, she is upset because he does not want to be with her. Hannah does not want her self-confidence and peace of mind to be dependent of another person; she wants to be in control of her own life like most contemporary romance heroines (Hamlett 2002: 1).

At first Hannah's new life seems to be going according to her plans: she gets her figure back at the gym, she is successful at her job and she goes on a cultural holiday to Egypt where she meets Leonie and Emma and becomes friends with them. This makes her happy since she has not had girlfriends for a long time. However, everything changes when she meets her boss' friend, a handsome actor called Felix Andretti and falls in love with him. Hannah begins to live her life according to Felix's plans: she goes to parties that last all night long and associates with his friends neglecting her own friends and work. Hannah does not realize or care how selfish Felix is and how badly and neglectfully he treats her. For example when Felix says to Hannah that she is successful in her work only because she is so good looking, she explains to herself that Felix was not vicious on purpose and that he did not really mean it. It is typical for the male characters to evaluate female characters based on their sexual attractiveness (Mills 1995: 162).

Hannah is blind to Felix's faults and she wants to believe in the good in him. She forgets about her plans of being an independent woman and clings on to Felix demanding him to call her when he is away on set. At this point Hannah's character resembles more a traditional romance heroine than a contemporary one, because her illusions of independence and sovereignty come crumbling down and the readers see that her self-worth depends on a man and she desperately wants him to love and accept her. Hannah's submissive behaviour continues as Felix gets a role in a TV-series and wants to move to London. Hannah leaves her whole life behind and follows Felix. Even though Hannah thinks of herself as a modern woman, her ideas of gender roles are very

traditional and even patriarchal: she is willing to invest in her career, but after meeting Felix, she is ready to move with him to another country and forget about everything she has achieved professionally. Hannah also believes that it is the man's job to bring food to the table and that a man should be more successful than a woman.

Hannah's attitude towards children deviates from that of a traditional ideal woman; she has always thought that she does not want to have children, whereas motherhood has traditionally been regarded as a natural role for women (German 1981: 10). Hannah is horrified when she gets pregnant by accident. However, she has a romanticized image in her head about how happy she and Felix will be after their daughter is born, and she does not realize that Felix only wants to have a family because it is good for his career. Hannah's friends try to warn her but she thinks that they are only jealous and that they do not know the real Felix. After her daughter Claudia is born, the mother in Hannah comes out and she adores her daughter realizing how much she would have missed if she had had an abortion like she initially planned. In the end, Hannah's character confines to the image of a traditional ideal woman and mother after all.

Because Hannah is a contemporary woman, she does not want to follow in her mother's footsteps and stay in an unhappy relationship for Claudia's sake. She tries her best to make her marriage work, but she is not willing to accept betrayal; when Felix cheats on her with their au pair, she leaves him and moves back to Ireland. By making this difficult decision and leaving Felix instead of submitting to the situation Hannah's character communicates agency to the readers. She has had enough of bad boys and when she realizes that her reliable and caring boss David is still in love with her, she decides to give their relationship a chance. She prefers stability and tender love to excitement and passion and knows that David will never betray her:

She felt safe with David, that was it. In Felix's company, she'd always felt as if she was standing on the edge of a glacier, ready to ski down into its vast, dangerous depths. With David, she felt protected, sheltered. Like sitting by the fire in a log cabin listening to the snow outside. (Kelly 2001: 668)

The problems that Hannah is faced with are finding a balance between the side of her that conforms to the stereotypically feminine values and the one that does not do that. Hannah's character has quite many characteristics of a traditional romance heroine and the ideal woman: she is pretty with her dark hair and toned body and takes care of her appearance. She likes to buy pretty clothes that accentuate her best features. She also wears plenty of make-up. Hannah's character is portrayed as feminine yet motherly. She is a romantic, who wants her man to take care of her. However, her character is portrayed as having masculine features as well: firstly she has difficulties in accepting her weaknesses and talking about them. Secondly, she concentrates on building her career and collecting wealth and power, which are often thought of as being masculine features, since men are usually defined through their position in the society (Nenola 2001: 25). Men are often afraid of ambitious women who might threaten their status in the corporate world. Hannah tries to soften her hard business side by investing a great deal of time and effort on her appearance, so that men would not be so threatened by her. It is mentioned in the novel that Hannah tries to look hard and professional for example by wearing glasses, but her natural softness is apparent (Kelly 2001: 11–12). Since Kelly's novel claims that Hannah has natural softness, it simultaneously claims that softness is an inherently feminine quality and a positive feature in her. The softness that Hannah's character possesses enables her to feel love for her daughter; it also makes her susceptible to insults, which angers her and activates her to change her life. The third masculine feature in Hannah is her disinterest in having children. Women are traditionally expected to want to have children at a certain point in their lives, but Hannah's childhood experiences have made her not want children of her own.

Through Hannah's character Kelly wants to show that although women may think that infatuation lasts forever and that love is enough for a woman to have a good life, it is not necessarily so. You can make mistakes but you can survive and start all over again. You need to have self-confidence and believe in your capability to overcome the conflicts in your life. In Hannah's case, David helps her to find a balance, because he treats her with respect and makes her feel like a woman without standing in her way as she fulfils her professional goals. He also teaches her that it is not a sign of failure to ask and accept help when needed. David is a typical contemporary male character that Kelly

uses frequently in her novels: although his appearance is very physical and masculine, he also possesses a soft and caring side which is not hidden (Meijer et al. 2002: 333).

4.1.3 Tara

Tara is a character who shows agency in three ways: first, she is a loving daughter and sister, who takes an active role in her family life and tries to solve the problems between her parents. Second, she is a loyal wife, who intends to stand by her alcoholic husband and help him overcome his addiction. Third, she reconstructs the image she has of herself after making mistakes and learns that she is not flawless. Through these developments and complex situations Tara becomes an agent of emancipation.

At the beginning of the novel Tara is very confident about herself and she strives for perfection in everything she does. She is portrayed as a successful career woman working as a scriptwriter for a popular soap opera. She is good at her job because she is ambitious and hard working. Tara is not a typical romance heroine because she cannot rely on her good looks: she is a personal looking, tomboyish and thin woman in her early 30's. She wears stylish clothes that accentuate her best features. Instead of her looks Tara charms people with her compelling personality and her intelligence that she is very proud of. However, as the novel progresses, Tara's character is faced with conflicts relating to her family and her marriage. Her self-confidence crumbles when she has to accept that people, including her, make mistakes. Letting go of the total control over her life is difficult for Tara, but when she manages to do that, she is able to enjoy the unpredictability of life more and is prepared to take risks. Kelly deals with current and common topics in her novels to make the readers see that they are not the only one's suffering from difficulties such as infidelity and alcoholism. She describes how the heroines in her novels react to and overcome the problems they are faced with. By acting in a way that shows agency and resolving her problems, Tara's character conveys empowerment to the readers.

Tara is a contemporary romance heroine in that she is not very girly; instead she has features that are usually combined with male characters in traditional romance novels:

first, she is not interested in having children. In traditional romances women are portrayed as nurturing characters (“Renovating Romance” 2009). Second, Tara is quite a carefree person who does not cry easily. Third, she is not a very tidy person. However, she does possess features that are thought of being typical for women: she is polite and kind to people and she wants to make other people feel good about themselves. Because the traditional models of femininity and masculinity have fused together partially in contemporary popular culture (Meijer et al. 2002: 333), it is common for the heroines to have characteristics combined with male characters in earlier romance fiction: they may for example be technically skillful, interested in sports or find it difficult to talk about their feelings.

Tara does not have many friends outside her workplace and that is why she feels especially close to her family. She loves her sisters and niece and has good relations with both of her parents, although she is closer to her mother Rose than her father Hugh. Tara has always believed that her parents have a healthy and satisfying marriage. That is why it is difficult for her to accept that Hugh has cheated on Rose. Tara has considered her father to be intelligent enough to appreciate his marriage and stable life and cannot believe that he almost threw it away by having an affair. At this point of the novel Tara cannot imagine that she would ever make the same mistake as Hugh.

Tara has been married to Finn, a handsome computer salesman, for nearly a year. Tara is very much in love with Finn and she cannot believe her luck in finding such a wonderful husband. She especially admires Finn’s appearance and considers him to be better looking than her. Men functioning as objects of desire is a typical trait in contemporary popular culture (Meijer et al. 2002: 333). At first Tara’s marriage seems to be happy, but after a while she begins to notice that Finn drinks plenty of alcohol. He tells her that he has to drink at business meetings, but after observing his behaviour Tara realizes that her husband is an alcoholic. Tara would like to run away and deny the problem, but when Finn’s drinking becomes heavier she has to admit that he really has got a problem. Tara blames herself for not noticing anything and thinks that perhaps Finn is so unhappy with her that his drinking has gotten worse:

How dumb could any one person get? Finn was an alcoholic and she must have been an utter idiot not to have noticed until now. Nobody slipped from being a social drinker to being an alcoholic in a few short months. There were signs, warning signs, and Tara must have seen them. She and Finn had been together for nearly eighteen months, married for nearly a year. Had he always drunk this much and had she been too blinded by love to notice? Or, even worse, had it only started since they were married because their marriage was the reason he drank? (Kelly 2003: 317)

Because Tara adores her husband, she wants to help him get better, but does not know how, since Finn will not admit the problem to himself. They begin to fight continuously and Tara finds out that Finn has emptied their joint account to buy alcohol. This makes Tara extremely angry and she ends up cheating Finn with a colleague. Tara feels extremely guilty about what she has done and tries to hide it. She finds it almost unbearable not to have control over the situation and she cannot believe that she has repeated her father's mistakes. Finn realizes what has happened and says that their marriage is over. Tara is horrified about Finn's decision and blames herself for their break-up even though Finn is just as guilty to their problems.

Although Tara condemned her father's affairs harshly, her own infidelity helps her to understand Hugh's infidelity better. She realizes that it is possible to hurt someone even if you love them:

'I understand.' And she did. She'd loved Finn and yet blindly gone off and betrayed him. At the time, she hadn't thought of how much it would hurt her husband. She'd just done it impulsively. It was only afterwards that she'd realised how much that unguarded moment had hurt him. She'd primly condemned her father for his infidelity, then she'd done the same thing herself. Under the circumstances, she understood what it was like all right. (2003: 611)

The main reason why Tara cheats on Finn is that she feels that the trust has been broken between them and she seeks comfort from her colleague. She never stops loving Finn but she does not want to be in second place after alcohol in his life. In contemporary romance novels both men and women commit adultery, whereas in traditional romances only men were allowed to be unfaithful. Women however were expected to be moral

and chaste (Hamlett 2002: 2). Even though Kelly does not encourage adultery in her novel, Tara's character is portrayed in a compassionate way. Her reasons are explained and she is not labelled as a bad person. The situation is an opportunity for her to grow as a person and learn from her mistakes. This is the lesson Kelly wants to convey to the readers.

By learning to appreciate herself and demanding respect from Finn, Tara's character is portrayed as an empowered woman, who knows her strength and capabilities. She knows that she can survive anything as long as she is active and makes decisions for herself. Kelly frequently creates female characters who discover their own inner strength and make good use of it instead of resorting to passivity like traditional romance novel heroines ("Renovating Romance" 2009). Through her characters, Kelly conveys the importance of agency to her readers.

The ending of Tara and Finn's story is typical for Kelly's novels: happy but realistic. The couple ends up together, but they do not expect love to solve all their problems; a good relationship also requires flexibility and strong faith. Since most romance readers are adult women who have previous experience from relationships (Simpson 2007), they appreciate realistic stories, as long as there is a considerable amount of romance and a happy ending in them. When Finn tells her that he has stopped drinking, Tara wants to try again with him even though she knows that there will always be a fear in the back of her mind. However, Tara has changed considerably during their separation; she expects honesty, openness and equality because she does not want to go back to the same relationship they had before. She realizes that she deserves to have a good life. Tara has matured so that she does not expect their life to be perfect anymore; she knows that there will be difficulties ahead, but she is confident that she is strong enough to handle them together with Finn. They decide to move to America where Tara has been offered a job and build a new life together.

4.2 Mother Figure

The mother figure is an overweight woman in her thirties or forties, who is usually a single parent and a hopeless romantic. She is funny and outgoing, has good relationships with her children and is content with her life, but thinks that finding a man, her soulmate, would make her life complete.

4.2.1 Evie

Evie is a character who struggles with finding a balance between motherhood and womanhood. A great challenge for her is learning to be more selfish and putting herself first. This is an issue that all of Kelly's characters, especially the mother figures, struggle with. They conscientiously aspire to fulfil the needs of their families and feel guilty for doing things for themselves. Evie realizes that even if she always thinks about other people and their feelings before her own, she might still end up hurting them. She learns that it is not possible to please everyone and that in life, she has to be active and take risks if she wants to achieve something instead of always settling for the safest option. Evie has internalized the role of "mother hen" as she fusses around her family, especially around her widowed father until he remarries. Taking care of other people's needs makes Evie feel needed and useful and takes her mind away from her own problems, for example her love life. Evie does not confine to the image of the traditional romance novel heroine because of her age, weight and single-parenthood. Traditionally romance heroines are slim, attractive and childless young women who have little experience on relationships (Hamlett 2002: 2). Evie is an older experienced woman with weight problems, which portrays her character as contemporary and realistic to the readers.

Although Evie is proud by nature, she is also portrayed as a traditional ideal woman who puts herself down, is modest about her achievements and finds it difficult to emphasize her professional accomplishments. Traditionally women have been "marginal to work because they are central to the family" (McRobbie 1991: 3). In other words traditional women were supposed to let men aspire their professional goals, while

they concentrated on raising the children. Evie has a steady office job as a personal assistant. She is good at her job, because she is by nature an organized and assertive person. She is also intelligent and has a good sense of humour. In her professional as well as in her personal life Evie is hard working, meticulous and a tidy person who does not like disorder.

Evie's character confines to the traditional models of femininity in that she is a caregiver, who likes to fuss around her family and make them feel safe and looked after. Traditionally women have been "known and understood in terms of their domestic role" (McRobbie 1991: 41). Women acting as caregivers either to their children, parents, siblings or spouses is a recurring theme in Kelly's novels. Evie's appearance confines to the image of a traditional ideal woman and mother as well. She is a somewhat overweight woman in her mid-fourties who is pretty with her brown wavy hair and curvaceous body. However, Evie is very insecure about her looks and most of the time she feels ugly and clumsy and tries unsuccessfully to lose weight. The juxtaposition between womanhood and motherhood becomes apparent in her attitude towards her appearance: Evie would like to feel like and be seen as a sexually attractive woman instead of an overweight mother figure.

Evie is a mother figure who has a teenage daughter. Evie was in her twenties when she gave birth to Rosie, who is now seventeen. She and Rosie have a good and open relationship and Evie is worried how she will cope when Rosie moves away from home to go to study. Evie wants Rosie to experience all the things she missed out on and wants her to stay away from boys. In contemporary romance novels it is common for the heroines, especially the ones with children, to be guarded and careful because of poor experiences in the past. They are adults with a realistic outlook on love and relationships, whereas in traditional romance novels the heroines were young virgins who were "brought to sexual awakening and subsequently indoctrinated into the hero's world view" ("Renovating Romance" 2009). Because Evie is a caring mother who loves her daughter very much, she wants to protect her from getting hurt in relationships.

At the beginning of the novel Evie is dependent on her father Andrew, who has lived by himself since his wife died twenty years earlier. Evie visits her childhood home frequently and is used to taking care of her father, who submits to her command knowing how important it is for Evie to feel herself needed. Evie loved her deceased mother Alice and she does not want or expect her father to replace her with anyone. When Andrew marries Vida, a beautiful, intelligent and kind American woman, Evie is furious and acts childishly, because she feels threatened. Evie wants to be the most important woman and caregiver in her father's life. She thinks that Vida is trying to take advantage of her father and refuses to see that the two are really in love with each other. When Evie gets to know Vida better, she realizes how happy she makes her father and gives her blessing to their union. Evie has also been the caregiver and a mother figure to her younger sister Cara, who was only six years old when Alice passed away. Evie and Cara have a good relationship even though she tries to tell Cara what to do with her life too often. This irritates Cara, but she tries to remind herself that Evie just wants what is best for her.

Evie is loyal to her friends and family and defends them every way she can. When they are in trouble, she listens to them and tries to give advice. For example when Evie's best friend Olivia tells her about the problems she has in her marriage, Evie comforts her and tells Olivia that she can count on her support. Evie is a traditional romance heroine in that she is soft and womanly; she is a good listener and comforter. Traditional romance heroines were nurturing by nature and women who did not confine to the motherly image were "understood as evil and trying to disrupt the natural romance of the couple" ("Renovating Romance" 2009). Evie is a typical Kelly's heroine in that she expresses her negative feelings, for example towards Vida, and that she attempts to hide her sensitivity from people. In other words Evie's character is a soft mother figure with a prickly exterior.

Evie acts tougher than she really is to avoid getting hurt by anyone, especially in matters of the heart. Evie is suspicious of all men who show interest in her, because she does not understand what they could possibly see in her and thinks that they only want to take advantage of her. The reason for Evie's suspiciousness is that she has been hurt

badly in the past by her daughter Rosie's father Tony, who was in love with another woman and only agreed to marry Evie because she was pregnant with Rosie. When Tony died in an accident, Evie felt relieved that she did not have to spend her whole life trapped in a cold and loveless marriage. She has not told Rosie the truth about her father, because she does not want to make her feel bad. Thoughts of Tony's betrayal still haunt Evie and she does not trust anyone but herself to be able to take care of her and Rosie.

Evie is a contradictory character in that despite of the hard exterior she puts on in front of men, she is a romantic and dreams of a Prince Charming who will make her feel beautiful and valued. She frequently reads Harlequin novels and invents new stories in her head. To her the reading of romance novels signifies an escape from her everyday life and the demands of being a working single mother. In other words, reading is her "declaration of independence" (Radway 1987: 297). Evie feels somewhat guilty for her dreams because she has her trustworthy but boring fiancé Simon, whom she intends to marry within the next year. Because she is 37 years old, Evie feels old and she does not want to end up as a lonely spinster. This is the main reason why she agrees to Simon's proposal. She loves him, but there is not much passion in their relationship:

Simon Todd, a forty-one-year-old loss adjuster with a stylishly decorated town house complete with courtyard garden, and an obsession with squash, was no romantic hero. He wasn't the sort of fantasy man who'd flirt with a beautiful stranger on an Italian jetty or fall to his knees in front of a packed restaurant and ask her to marry him to the sound of gypsy music. But then, Evie smiled wryly to herself, she was no supermodel either. Unless they came in thirty-seven-year-old versions with cellulite, stretch marks and a teenage daughter. (Kelly 2000: 8)

At first Evie tries to convince herself that Simon is the one for her and that safety is more important than passion. However, gradually Evie begins to realize that even though security and the feeling of safety are important to her, she does not want to settle for a dull life with Simon. Instead she wants to feel the passion and excitement with Vida's son Max, who she falls madly in love with. Max represents the ideal male in contemporary Western culture: he is portrayed as possessing "an attractive, romantic

and caring male sight” (Meijer et al. 2002: 333). Even though Max is adventurous, he is also safe, but not in a boring way. Once again motherhood and attractiveness are juxtaposed in Evie’s character: Max makes Evie feel like a beautiful and sensual woman instead of a mother. He offers Evie adventures and safety at the same time and Evie opens up to him in a way she never did with Simon. Max is a contemporary romance hero, because he is intellectual and sensitive instead of being just a domineering alpha-male, who wants his woman to prepare his meals and give birth to his children. Max treats Evie like an equal and is interested in her feelings and thoughts. He also makes her see that she needs to live her life according to her own expectations and wishes instead of those of others. Max has seen his mother Vida living that way happily and that is why he encourages Evie to do the same.

Because Evie knows how bad it feels to get hurt by someone you love, she does not want to hurt anyone intentionally herself. Even though she knows that breaking off the engagement is best for both her and Simon, she feels a lot of anxiety knowing that she has to crush his dreams:

‘I needed love, true love, romantic love like in my novels. I’m sorry, so sorry.’ [...] Evie cried all the way home, barely able to see the traffic lights or the other cars because of her tears. She cried for poor Simon who’d loved her but who’d accepted that she loved someone else. Guilt and self-hatred mingled with sheer, blessed relief. She’d done it, it was over, finally over. (Kelly 2000: 549)

Evie feels guilty for not being able to appreciate the stability that Simon offers, because that is what she has been hoping for all her life. She also feels guilty and irresponsible for her romantic feelings towards Max. In her opinion, “proper” women do not follow their hearts instead of their heads. However, traditionally literary heroines have been portrayed as being “concerned with emotion rather than action” (Mills 1995: 170). In this aspect, Evie confines to the image of a traditional romance heroine. By being active and breaking off the engagement Evie’s character carries the story forward and thus acts as a “plot mechanism” (1995: 170). She also communicates agency to the readers; she knows what she wants and acts upon it. Like a typical Kelly’s heroine Evie is active and takes the control of her life into her own hands. By breaking the mould of a traditional

“good girl” who is kind, considerate and unselfish, she is able to achieve emancipation and live her life the way she wants to. Evie’s character learns to let go of the control and of the fear of being labelled as a bad mother and a contemptible woman for thinking about herself first. This is a central message of Kelly’s that is conveyed through all of her protagonists.

Even though *Never Too Late* is a contemporary romance novel, it includes elements of traditional romances in its descriptions of relationships: heroines fall madly in love with handsome men who make them feel beautiful and precious. The contemporary aspect comes from the fact that the heroines are not so innocent and naïve that they would expect everything to go smoothly all the time. Even though they are overwhelmed with emotions, they put their head over their heart and stay realistic looking out for possible problems.

4.2.2 Leonie

Leonie’s story is that of a relinquisher who develops into an empowered woman and acts as an agent of her own life. Kelly shows that motherhood is all right and that not all women have to correspond to the ideal of the independent, thin business woman. She also conveys a message that there is nothing wrong with wanting a relationship and that being together with a man can be empowering; a relationship with a man does not automatically mean subordination and exploitation. Just like Evie, Leonie’s character too struggles with balancing the traditional and contemporary models of femininity: she wants to be, and is, the mother, but she also wants to be a sexually attractive woman. Leonie needs to learn to be more selfish and not feel guilty about fulfilling her own needs.

Leonie is a big, tall and voluptuous woman. Even though she is told that she looks good with her big blue eyes and long blonde hair, Leonie feels unattractive because of her size. She makes jokes about herself and wears plenty of make-up, jewellery and perfume to hide her insecurity. She likes to wear colourful and showy clothes because she thinks that they will take people’s attention away from her size. Leonie’s character

does not confine into the mould of a contemporary ideal woman who is supposed to be slim. Instead, she is a prototype of the traditional ideal womanhood: the woman as a nurturer (“Renovating Romance” 2009). Leonie’s size emphasizes her motherliness: she is big, cosy and caring. In this aspect Leonie’s and Evie’s characters resemble each other considerably.

Leonie is afraid to show anyone how insecure she feels about her looks and that is why she pretends to be more dashing and adventurous than she really is. An example of this is when Leonie tells about her trip to Egypt to her friend Anita:

‘Watch those souks and markets though,’ warned Anita, a distrustful traveller who believed that anywhere beyond the English Channel was off the beaten track. ‘They love big women in the East, you know.’ ‘Oh goodie,’ growled Leonie, instinctively reverting to the Leonie Delaney: wild, sexy, earth goddess image she’d been projecting for years. If Anita guessed that the image was all fake and that most of Leonie’s hot dates were at home with the remote control and a carton of strawberry shortcake ice cream, she never said anything. (Kelly 2001: 40)

In a large fragment of contemporary literature the descriptions of female characters “are concerned with establishing a degree of sexual attractiveness and sexual availability” (Mills 1995: 162). Kelly’s description of Leonie’s attempt to play a sex goddess confines to this notion and portrays her as a contemporary ideal woman, who is supposed to be comfortable with her body, adventurous and open about her sexuality. However, this is not the real Leonie; she pretends to be more uninhibited than she really is so that people would admire and even envy her way of life instead of feeling sorry for a big and lonely single mother of three.

Leonie loves children and most of the time she has good and open relations with her three teenagers. Danny, Abby and Mel are the most important people in her life and she would do anything for them. Leonie’s characteristics emphasize the stereotypical features of the traditional female and mother: she is kind, caring and compassionate. As a mother she is strict but fair and even though she adores her children, she does not spoil them. The role of a loving mother is natural for Leonie and enables her to satisfy

her need to nurture, which is considered to be a typically female feature (“Renovating Romance” 2009). When Leonie finds out that Abby is suffering from bulimia, she panics and thinks that she has done something wrong. This is typical behaviour of Leonie, the mother; she is very sensitive and tends to blame herself when something goes wrong, even if she had nothing to do with it.

Kelly has a certain formulaic way of structuring the protagonist’s development. These stages are important structural characteristics of Kelly’s strategy of creating characters that display empowerment. The first stage is the feeling of inefficiency the protagonist feels as she tries to solve the problems on her own. The second stage is realizing that getting help from other people is not a sign of failure or weakness. Leonie agrees with Ray’s suggestion that Abby and Mel move to America with Ray and Flissie. Letting her girls move out of the country is the most difficult thing that Leonie has ever done, but she wants them to be healthy and happy. Leonie is afraid that the girls will stop loving her and their old life, but she is prepared to take that risk if it means that Abby’s sickness will be cured. When the girls are gone, Leonie has some time to think about her attitude towards herself and she realizes that it is not healthy. She does not appreciate herself; instead she puts herself down and makes jokes about her size. She understands that this kind of behaviour has made chubby Abby feel that she is not as good as her thin sister Mel, even though this has not been Leonie’s intention at all.

Leonie has good relations with her mother Claire, who gives her advice and consolation when needed. Leonie’s father is not in the picture and she never refers to him. Claire thinks that Leonie made a mistake by divorcing Ray and that she should have appreciated the steady relationship she and Ray had:

‘There aren’t as many fish in the sea when you’re actively looking, Leonie,’ she had said gently at the time. ‘You love each other: can’t you get on with it and stop looking for true love? I’m so afraid you’ll regret this.’ (Kelly 2001: 151)

The generation gap becomes apparent in Claire’s and Leonie’s views of relationships: Claire represents the traditional woman by thinking that Leonie should have settled for

Ray instead of cherishing thoughts about true love. Leonie represents the contemporary Kelly's woman who does not want to settle for anything; she wants her man to be safe and exiting at the same time. She was married to her first love Ray for ten years, but after their relationship had lost its passion, she told him it would be best to get a divorce and continue as friends. By taking the initiative and making this decision, Leonie communicates agency to the readers. Leonie and Ray have good relations and they have maintained their friendship even though Ray was against the divorce initially.

The fear of being replaced is a typical feature of the mother, who wants to be the most important person in her children's lives. When Ray announces that he is getting married to Fliss, who is beautiful, thin and intelligent, Leonie feels inferior to her and thinks that she is a threat to her motherhood:

Fliss rested her hand on Abby's waist and Leonie was horrified to see that Abby was smiling radiantly. Jealousy curled around Leonie's heart like a starving boa constrictor clutching a small animal. They were her children, yet they were smiling at this woman with love and affection. And yes, Leonie could see it in all their eyes, admiration. (Kelly 2001: 356)

After Leonie gets to know Fliss better and realizes that she does not want to take over her children, Leonie calms down and does not feel as envious anymore. She understands that even though her children, especially the twins, adore Fliss, it does not decrease their love for her.

Leonie is a romantic and she is looking for a relationship after being single for many years. She is a passionate person who wants to experience grand emotions instead of settling for something only because it is safe. In this aspect Leonie is a perfect example of a round character who "has the incalculability of life about it" (Forster 1968: 85). Like most traditional romance heroines, Leonie believes in true love and soulmates. Even though she is capable of running her household on her own and enjoys the company of her children and friends, she wants to find a man who will take care of her and fulfill her romantic needs. Leonie's character incorporates both traditional and contemporary ideals of womanhood in that she wants a man to take care of her, but she

is also independent and capable of taking care of herself and her family by herself. Even though Leonie wants a relationship, she is not willing to settle for someone incompatible just to have a man in her life. This is a typical way of thinking for an independent contemporary woman.

Leonie's character conveys agency to the readers by taking action and placing an ad in the lonely hearts section of a local newspaper. She gets some answers and goes on a date with Hugh. Their relationship gets on to a promising start but when Leonie discovers that Hugh is under the thumb of her possessive daughter Jane and does not care about her children at all, she breaks up with him. By putting her children before Hugh indicates how strongly Leonie values her role as a mother: she wants to be with a man who appreciates and loves her children almost as much as she does. Leonie realizes that after all she had not been in love with Hugh, just the thought of him:

Hugh had been a nice idea: a lovely man to go on dates with, see films with and have sex with. But he'd been nothing more than that. He wasn't the one to fill her with passion and longing. If he had been, she'd have been sobbing her heart out now. She'd have fought tooth and nail to loosen Jane's stranglehold over him. And he'd have understood how much she loved her kids. He wasn't the One after all. (Kelly 2001: 582)

The fact that Leonie had sex with Hugh and even enjoyed it is not typical of traditional romance heroines, who are ideally virgins until they marry the hero (Hamlett 2002: 2).

In the end Leonie finds love closer than she would have thought. Her friendship with neighbour Doug eventually deepens into a relationship. Leonie feels that Doug is her soulmate, who makes her feel fine as she is. She feels comfortable and natural with him and Doug gets along with her children. Doug is a combination of two important things that Leonie, as well as other traditional romance heroines, has been looking for: safety and excitement. Doug, just like Evie's companion Max, is an ideal contemporary hero, who is "a little bad, a little domineering, a little rugged or a little rough but completely devoted to the heroine" ("Renovating Romance" 2009). Kelly frequently uses heroes such as Doug and Max in her novels.

Leonie is portrayed as a character who has to deal with issues that are familiar to many people today. Solving these issues helps Leonie to grow as a person and discover her inner strength thus empowering her. This is Kelly's way of making Leonie seem realistic. Realism enables the readers to relate to literary characters (Bohnhoff 1997: 1). The first major problem that Leonie has to solve is dealing with Abby's eating disorder. Since Leonie is a woman of action and has common sense, she resolves the problems she faces instead of hiding from them. For example in Abby's case she agrees to send the twins to America to be with their father for a while, even though it is extremely difficult for her to be apart from her daughters. By doing this, Leonie communicates action to the readers; it is best to take control of the situation even if it means that you have to make difficult decisions that go against your nature. The second issue that Leonie must deal with is realizing that she is worth of a good and meaningful relationship. With the help of Doug's love and admiration Leonie begins to value herself more. She learns to appreciate the good things in her instead of always concentrating on the bad. This newly found self- confidence and the ability to trust Doug to be there to share everyday responsibilities are the most notable signs of Leonie's empowerment.

4.2.3 Rose

Rose's character conveys agency in two ways: firstly, she leaves her husband who has been adulterous throughout their marriage. Secondly, she disengages herself from her family in order to find out who she is and what she wants to do with the rest of her life. By making these changes Rose becomes emancipated and realizes that she is a strong and independent woman who does not have to define herself solely through her role as a wife and mother.

Rose is portrayed as the epitome of a traditional ideal woman: she is a beautiful woman who has devoted her life to raising and looking after her family, disregarding her own dreams of becoming a career woman. Even though being a wife and a mother has not satisfied her professional ambitions, she has aspired to perfection in her role as a homemaker. Traditionally women have been encouraged to find a man at a young age

and start “saving money for an engagement ring” (McRobbie 1991: 33). After they got married, girls were expected to procreate and their early adulthood often consisted of raising their children and doing housework (1991: 33). Rose is a devoted mother who loves her three grown-up daughters Stella, Tara and Holly very much. Even though she is happy and proud of being their mother, she encourages her daughters to live on their own and experience the world before settling down. Like Evie’s character, Rose wants her children to experience all the things she missed out on.

Rose has a modest background compared to her husband Hugh’s and throughout their marriage she has subconsciously felt lower to him. Belittlement of oneself is a common feature of traditional romance heroines who look up to and are dominated by the men in their lives (“Renovating Romance” 2009). Hugh’s sister Adele thinks that Hugh should have married a girl from a rich family:

The Miller family had always had lovely flowers in the house, of course. They’d had a maid, for God’s sake, when nobody else in the country had one. But Rose came from a tumbledown house on some backroad in Wexford; a house with slates coming off the roof and plumbing out of the ark. There hadn’t been enough money for food in the Riordain house, never mind flowers. Marrying Hugh had been Rose’s ticket out of there. (Kelly 2003: 4)

Rose knows that Adele is discontented with her own life as a childless spinster and that she is envious of Rose, who seems to have the perfect life: a handsome and successful husband, three beautiful and loving daughters and a gorgeous house. It is a common feature of traditional romance novels that the spinster is bitter and envious of the women who have managed to fulfil their most important mission in life: get married and procreate. A woman who is not a nurturer is considered to be defective (“Renovating Romance” 2009). Since Rose is portrayed as an ideal traditional woman who is kind, caring and unselfish, she does not want to make Adele feel bad about her life and that is why she listens calmly to her complaints and vicious remarks, even though on the inside she wishes she could speak her mind. Rose knows that she has been lucky and blessed in her life and wants to show her gratitude by helping other people who are not as fortunate.

Rose's character struggles with the same issues as Olivia and Evie: she finds it difficult to discuss her problems with anyone and prefers keeping up the appearances about her perfect life as a rich and respected housewife. Rose is afraid of what people might say if they knew the truth about her life and she does not want to be the topic of gossip. That is why she has never told her friends that she has suffered from depression after her youngest daughter Holly was born and that Hugh has had multiple affairs during their marriage. Traditionally women have not been encouraged to talk about their problems, since it would take time and energy away from their daily duties of cooking, cleaning and childcare. Women cannot afford to get depressed or stop and analyze their feelings profoundly. Instead they have to stay focused on getting through the daily routines and put their thoughts and feelings aside. That is why traditional women have been such enthusiastic romance readers; since "no one within the patriarchal family is charged with *their* care" (Radway 1987: 301), they find the compassion and care they need from the pages of a romance novel, where the heroine is allowed to be weak and is looked after by the hero.

When Hugh wants to arrange a great party to celebrate their 40th anniversary, Rose agrees to it, even though she thinks that it is false and pompous to celebrate their "happiness":

She knew she shouldn't have gone ahead with this day, knew it was asking for trouble. Some 200 guests were arriving to celebrate the fortieth wedding anniversary of Hugh and Rose Miller when both Rose and Hugh knew that their marriage wasn't of the fairy-tale variety. (Kelly 2003: 348-9)

At the party Rose decides to tell the truth about their marriage, because she is tired of pretending that everything is fine. She gives a speech in front of all the guests and tells them about Hugh's affairs and announces that she is leaving him. Everyone is shocked because this kind of behaviour is very unusual for Rose, who is normally calm and composed. Hugh is petrified because he thought that Rose had not known about his affairs and because he really loves her. Rose is furious with Hugh for embarrassing her with his indiscreet behaviour, but she is even more furious with herself for not saying

anything earlier. She was afraid that if she had told Hugh to choose between her and the other women, he would have chosen them. Keeping the secret to herself has made Rose lose her self-respect and made her feel worthless. The anger that Rose feels enables her to take action and leave her husband. By doing this Rose's character communicates agency to the readers: it is not sensible to stay in a bad situation only because you have grown accustomed to it and that it is never too late to change your life.

After the confrontation Rose decides to take time to herself for the first time in her life and moves to her aunt Freddie's home. The time she spends there is emancipating for her: she reflects her life and emotions and realizes that she has lost herself somewhere along the way. She has become an extension to Hugh and his life as a successful and valued lawyer. She has forgotten about her own dreams of becoming a nurse and living the life of an independent career woman. Rose's story resembles that of a typical romance novel heroine: she worked as a secretary until she met Hugh through work, married him and became a housewife (Hamlett 2002: 1). However, sitting in committees and organizing parties does not seem important to Rose anymore. She wants to do something useful and that is why she helps Freddie do volunteer work by delivering meals to older and disabled people. Rose realizes that she has missed the feeling of being useful and she decides not to fall back to her old ways as a lady of leisure. Helping others makes her feel better about herself and gradually she begins to get her self-confidence back and feel empowered. Freddie makes Rose see that she is not entirely blameless for her marital problems:

‘Why didn't you confront him?’ ‘I don't know.’ ‘Pride, Rose. Pride kept you from saying anything. You didn't want to admit that there was anything wrong in the Miller paradise.’ [...] ‘I know you won't like me saying this, Rose, but you are partly to blame for what went wrong with yourself and Hugh.’ ‘Me?’ ‘ Yes. You should have put a stop to it years ago or else left him. Hugh loved you but he was always a bit of a charmer.’ (Kelly 2003: 503–505)

Female friendship and support is a recurring theme in Kelly's novels. Kelly's protagonist listen and support their friends, but they are also honest about their opinions instead of just trying to please one another. Kelly promotes through her protagonists

that compassion, sincerity and a sense of reality are important qualities in women. Even though Freddie's comments irritate Rose and she feels that she is being blamed for something she has not done, Rose realizes that Freddie is right. At the beginning of her marriage she wanted her mother to be proud of her because she had managed to move up in the world and she did not want to burden her with her worries. After her mother passed away, keeping up the appearances had become a habit to Rose. She understands that problems have to be talked about and solved instead of being buried. Rose stops thinking herself as a victim and realizes that she has equal rights and responsibilities as Hugh regarding their marriage. Seeing that she does have influence over her life and relationships is empowering to her and it conveys emancipation and freedom to the readers.

Gradually Rose begins to realize that she has changed drastically from a submissive housewife into a liberated and active woman, who is not dependent on anyone. When Rose hears that Hugh has had a heart attack and thinks that he is dead, she realizes how much she really loves him despite of everything he has done. Rose promises that they can try again, but tells Hugh that she will not tolerate bad behaviour any more. If Hugh has another affair, she will go away and never speak to him again. Rose knows that she is finally strong enough to leave Hugh and make it on her own if necessary. Hugh is extremely happy to get Rose back because he has realized her value during their separation and promises to be faithful to Rose for the rest of his life. A happy ending where the couple gets together is a typical trait of a traditional romance novel (RWA 2009). What makes Rose and Hugh's romance a contemporary romance story is that in the end the woman takes the control and dictates the rules of their relationship. She knows her value and she wants him to acknowledge and appreciate her as an equal partner.

The greatest challenge that Rose is faced with is to find herself again. Her life resembles Olivia's life considerably, since both women must struggle for their independence. For a long time they have been living by the patriarchal values, where the woman is subordinated to the man (Selden et al. 1993: 214). Rose and Olivia have been defining themselves according to their family roles, which is still typical in contemporary

societies (Nenola 2001: 25). Through her protagonists Kelly promotes that women should see themselves as subjects instead of being defined through the man or children as wives or mothers.

Moving out of her home and spending time at her aunt's house is an important time for Rose, because for the first time in ages she does not have to put her family first. She is allowed to be selfish and take the time to reflect her feelings of the people and the circumstances of her life. Rose realizes that it is not too late to start doing something meaningful with her life. She feels stupid for wasting her time in bumptious committees instead of actually helping people in need. Doing something useful helps Rose feel valuable and improves her self-esteem. Rose also begins to open up to people about the negative feelings and thoughts she has carried within her. She is not willing to tolerate condescending behaviour from anyone anymore and is finally able to tell her honest thoughts and demands to Adele and Hugh. Talking to Holly about her depression and their relationship makes Rose feel relieved because she loves her daughters very much and wants to have honest and open relations with all of them. Opening up and talking about her thoughts makes Rose realize that she has a right to think and feel whatever she wants to. The right to self-expression is a theme that Kelly promotes throughout her novels. Another recurring theme is emancipation from traditional roles. Rose's emancipation from her old restricted role and becoming the person she wants to be is typical for Kelly's romance heroines, who want to be, and often are, in control of their own lives.

4.2.4 Stella

Stella is portrayed as a rational woman, who is able to combine her roles as a single-mother and a career woman successfully. However, her ideas of love and relationships are very naïve and idealistic. This is because she has observed her parents marriage and thinks that they are blissfully happy with each other. Watching them closely has made her expectations and hopes towards love and relationship unrealistically high. Stella resembles Evie's character in that they are both romantics, who initially believe that love can overcome all obstacles. When Rose eventually tells everyone about Hugh's

infidelity, Stella is most shocked. She cannot believe that her parent's love story is not perfect after all. She has to realize that a perfect and uncomplicated relationship does not exist; instead you have to persevere to make it work. This is the main problem that Stella's character struggles with.

Stella is a single-mother of her seven-year-old daughter Amelia whom she adores. Stella is a good and caring mother who wants to protect Amelia from everything that may hurt her. Single parents are a common feature in contemporary romance novels, since the heroines are older than the ones in traditional romances and have therefore been in relationships before (Hamlett 2002: 2). Amelia's father Glenn is forgetful and away on business trips constantly. Stella is angry that Glenn does not maintain more contact with Amelia, but she tries not to show her resentment to Amelia so that her relationship with Glenn would not suffer. She wishes that Glenn would finally grow up and start acting more maturely:

Stella could never comprehend how her ex-husband didn't understand children, seeing as he was such an absolute kid himself. At this rate, Amelia would be a grown-up long before her father. (Kelly 2003: 27)

Stella's apprehensions about motherhood are somewhat archaic and traditional; she thinks that a mother should be close to her children at all times. This is because Rose has been both physically and emotionally close to her children throughout their lives. Like Leonie, Stella has a warm and loving relationship with her mother, through whom she models her own behaviour as a mother. When Rose moves to live with Freddie, Stella is afraid that her mother will love her new life so much that she will forget about her family. She knows that Rose has been the force who has kept their family so tightly together, and she is afraid of losing that fundamental unit from her life. Eventually Stella realizes that she was selfish and that her mother deserves to spend some time by herself. Stella has warm and close relations with the rest of her family as well. She loves her sisters and wants to protect them because she is the oldest of the three sisters. Sometimes she acts as a mother figure to Holly and Tara when they come to her with their problems.

Stella is portrayed as a sympathetic protagonist, which is a recurring feature in Kelly's novels. She is a good listener, tolerant, mature and has a good sense of humour. She is a very compassionate person who wants to help other people in any way she can. Stella is pleased with the little things in life and she knows that having people you love around you is the most important thing in her life instead of collecting material possessions. What separates Stella from other Kelly's protagonists, especially the mother figures, is that she is able to talk about her problems instead of keeping everything to herself.

Even though Stella's character confines to the ideals of traditional romance heroines by being womanly, warm and nurturing ("Renovating Romance" 2009), she is also portrayed as a contemporary romance heroine who wants to use her intelligence and be more than just a mother. Stella is a conscientious and hard working lawyer, who likes her job and is good at it. Women who are successful in and devoted to their careers is a recurring feature in Kelly's novels. Even though her protagonists often have low self-esteem, they are proud of their professional success which gives them self-confidence thus empowering them.

Stella confines to the image of a traditional romance heroine in that she is a romantic. Stella has never been deeply in love and she would like to know what true passion feels like. Of course she loved Glenn, but more than anything they were used to each other's company and that is why they got married. Stella has only been with one man since her divorce years ago, but it ended when the man suddenly left her. Stella was so shocked and embarrassed that she has not wanted to get intimate with another man ever since. Most of the time Stella is satisfied with her life with Amelia, but sometimes she feels jealous when looking at happy couples, for example her friend Hazel and her husband Ivan, who are very much in love:

You didn't miss what you'd never had, as her mother often said. But it *was* possible to miss something you'd grown up with, even if it hadn't been yours exactly. Stella had grown up with parents who adored each other. And she saw true love every day with Ivan and Hazel, who teased each other, had arguments about eardrum-splitting opera, and yet still each worshipped the ground the other walked on. Stella had spent years

claiming that love was the last thing on her list, but occasionally, just occasionally, she wished it wasn't. (Kelly 2003: 32–33)

When Stella meets Nick Cavaletto, a handsome customer of hers, she does what most romance heroines do when they encounter the hero: she falls head over heels in love with him. She feels that he is her soulmate who genuinely understands her. Their relationship deepens quickly, which scares Stella:

'I have to be cautious, Nick,' Stella said honestly. 'Because I have to think of Amelia. I don't want her to be injured, and the next step is you becoming a part of her life too, so I have to know that you mean this and that I'm not some rebound fling you're having. Sorry,' she added, seeing a bruised look come into his muddy green eyes. 'But Amelia is everything to me and I have to protect her. And, let's face it, you have your daughters to think about too. Between us, we've enough baggage to start our own suitcase company.' (2003: 175)

Stella questions the stability of her relationship with Nick and wonders what he sees in her. In this sense Stella is a traditional, even patriarchal woman: she defines herself through him and seeks his approval. It is a typical feature of romance heroines to lose themselves in relationships; they want to conform to the man's expectations and be part of "us" so much that they forget who they are. In other words they become passive objects instead of being active subjects. Passivity is typically considered to be a feminine feature and in contemporary popular culture women are represented as objects more often than men (Meijer et al. 2002: 328–331).

Since extended families are common nowadays and they are a popular source of conversation and controversy, Kelly too deals with the topic in her novel. Nick has two daughters, fourteen-year-old Jenna and nineteen-year-old Sara, and a bitter ex-wife Wendy. Stella gets along with Sara but has conflicts with Jenna, who thinks that Stella and Amelia are trying to take her father away from her. Because Stella loves Nick, she tries her best to get along with Jenna, but when her rude attitude towards her does not change, she decides to break up with him, because she is tired and cannot stand being hated for no real reason. Stella is angry at Nick because he allows his daughter to behave abruptly towards Stella and Amelia, and does not understand when he explains

that he does not want to hurt Jenna's feelings. Stella does not want to be number two in Nick's life forever, even though she knows how important Nick's children are to him. Stella's childish behaviour is not a typical feature of contemporary romance heroines and it reveals a new side of her. On one hand Stella is a traditional selfless mother figure, who thinks about everyone before herself, but on the other hand she is a selfish and jealous woman, who wants undivided attention from her man. In contemporary romance novels the mothers rarely rage; if they are upset about something, they talk about it rationally.

After hearing about their break-up, Jenna finally opens up and says that she is sorry and that she does not want them to separate because of her. At the same time Stella realizes that she is pregnant and Nick proposes to her. Stella accepts because she loves Nick and wants to make their relationship work despite of all the obstacles. Stella's character grows during the novel and her perception of love becomes more realistic than in the beginning. She understands that even people who are meant to be together encounter problems, which are not necessarily a sign of incompatibility. Stella admires her mother's strength as she gives Hugh a second chance and realizes that love is also about forgiving and understanding. To see that kind of act of love empowers Stella and gives her confidence in her own abilities in surviving the difficulties she faces in her relationship.

4.3 Self- Sufficient Worrier

The self-sufficient worrier is a pretty, but very shy and insecure woman in her thirties, who has a healthy relationship with her boyfriend or husband, but has some other major problems in her life, e.g. she cannot conceive or she has troubles with her parents.

4.3.1 Cara

Cara's character develops from a timid and mistrustful woman into a confident woman who is not afraid or ashamed of her sexuality. The reason why Cara is initially sceptical

and scared of men is because her teacher Owen Theal tried to rape her when she was a student. The incident has caused her to be afraid of all men who try to approach her and ever since Cara has been building a wall around her to avoid from getting hurt ever again. The main challenge for Cara is learning to trust men again and opening up to them in order to be able to have a meaningful relationship.

Rape is a recurring theme in traditional romance novels. By raping the heroine, the hero “asserts his power over her and her body”. The rape cements the patriarchal position of dominant heroes above the passive heroines. (“Renovating Romance” 2009) However, in contemporary romance novels rape occurs rarely and its significance and consequences have changed drastically. In traditional romance novels, such as Katherine Woodiwiss’ *The Wolf and The Dove* (1974), “where the heroine is repeatedly raped by the hero until she falls in love with him, becomes pregnant and they eventually marry” (“Renovating Romance” 2009) rape was considered to be an acceptable way for the hero to demonstrate his control over the heroine. By contrast, in contemporary romance novels the rapist is condemned and punished for his crime and the rape is not glorified or accepted.

Cara blames herself for the incident thinking that she led him on. She tries to hide her feminine features by wearing ugly, sagging clothes so that men would not pay attention to her. Women are often made responsible for their victimization and they are accused of leading men on for example by wearing little clothing. Even though Cara’s self-accusations are unfounded, she feels ashamed and has told the truth only to her friend Zoë. Although Cara and her sister Evie are close to each other, she has not told her about the evening of the attempted rape, because she is embarrassed about her own stupidity. This secret has left its mark on the sister’s relationship:

She’d never told her sister about Owen Theal. [...] She couldn’t bare to have her sister blame her; she wanted Evie to comfort her. She wanted Evie to know instinctively that something had happened. Which was madness. Evie never knew and, irrationally, Cara had not been able to forgive her sister, her surrogate mother, for not knowing. She’d never quite got over it and she never forgot. (Kelly 2000: 164–165)

Since Evie is a mother figure to Cara, she blames her for not being able to protect her from Owen's attack. Often the mother is associated with omnipotent characteristics and expected to make everything all right. Especially young children see their mother as a hero. The only difference is that the mother acts in private whereas "real" heroes act in public (Näre 1989: 33):

The hero takes on in public life tasks that belong to women in privacy. Saving, rescuing and ensuring the continuity of society are similar characteristics of the hero and the mother: what the woman performs in the profane, the hero takes on in the sacral. He provides public, sacral care for society, where she supplies private, profane care for the family.

Even as adults people sometimes find it difficult to understand that their mothers are only humans, who do not possess supernatural powers. An example of this is that Cara is upset at Evie for not knowing about the attempted rape, even though she was not present and therefore had no way of knowing. Blaming the mother or the mother figure is a recurring theme in Kelly's novels. Usually the mothers blame themselves the hardest for not being able to control everything. Losing her mother at a young age has made its mark on Cara and left her feeling insecure and unprotected. Even though Evie has done her best to make Cara feel safe and loved, she cannot replace their mother. Cara loves and appreciates Evie, but she has not been able to forgive her for not noticing what had happened. That is why she feels irritated when Evie tries to interfere with her life. She does not understand that Evie wants her to make something of her life and take advantage of the opportunities that she never got:

She'd have been so pretty if she'd looked after herself properly and bothered with make-up. But Cara had never been interested in making the best of herself, Evie thought in exasperation, and never listened to her elder sister's advice when it came to self-improvement. [...] If she didn't make an effort soon, she'd be stuck on the shelf watching endless repeats of *Ally McBeal* with a tub of ice cream for company while other people led fulfilled lives. And that wasn't much fun, as Evie could testify. (Kelly 2000: 11–12)

Zoë thinks that Cara should finally get over her guilt and fears and start dating men instead of sitting at home thus letting Owen win. Like most romance heroines, Cara

would like to be in a committed relationship, but she is finding it really difficult to let go of the past. The negative experiences in the past are hindering her from being emancipated and opening up to another person. She is afraid of revealing anything about herself to men, because she does not want to get hurt. Instead she has one night stands every now and then, because that way she gets her physical needs satisfied without having to open up her heart or mind to anyone. Having casual sex is not a feature of a traditional romance heroine, who preserves her purity and often remains a virgin until she marries (Hamlett 2002: 2). In contemporary romance novels the heroine is usually sexually experienced. However, it is important that the contemporary heroine has not had too many partners, since it would make her appear frivolous (2002: 2). Cara's character differs from other Kelly's protagonists in that she is the only one who has sex with men whom she is not romantically interested in, although she seldom does it and feels guilty about it afterwards. Through her protagonists Kelly conveys a message that it is best to preserve yourself to someone special.

Finally Cara decides to be active and pursue a relationship with her colleague Ewan. At first Cara gets scared and wants to run away, but she stays and opens up because Ewan does not pressure her into anything and he understands how Cara feels:

‘You’re not going to run out on me?’ he asked. ‘I have this gut feeling that’s your instinct.’ Cara’s eyes met his. ‘No,’ she said. ‘What makes you ask that?’ He shrugged. ‘I can see it in your eyes. You’re like a hedgehog, all prickly on the outside but soft and scared inside. When somebody gets to see the inside, you want to get away from them as quickly as possible.’ ‘I’m not going to run away,’ she repeated. ‘I promise.’ (Kelly 2000: 207–208)

Ewan's character belongs to the category of typical contemporary romance heroes, who are “much deeper and more sensitive than they appear” (“Renovating Romance” 2009). He is portrayed as a sensitive and open man who is interested in Cara's thoughts instead of just her body. Ewan makes Cara feel safe, loved and accepted for the first time in her life. Because Cara and Ewan are colleagues and she is afraid of getting fired if her boss finds out that they are seeing each other, Cara tells Ewan that they should keep a low profile on their relationship. At first Ewan agrees to do this, but eventually Cara's

cautiousness begins to irritate him and he feels that she is embarrassed of him. He tells Cara that he does not want to hide their relationship anymore. Cara is not ready to tell everyone about them and they break up. Later on Cara realizes what she has lost, apologizes and they get back together.

Cara has many features of a typical Kelly heroine. Firstly, she is a career woman working as a graphic designer. She is good at her job and used to supporting herself instead of being dependent of her father or husband. Secondly, she is outspoken and honest to her friends. She does not want to hurt anyone's feelings but she feels obliged to tell people the truth if she thinks that they are doing something stupid. By vocalizing their real opinions Kelly's protagonists promote honesty and solidarity between women. For example when Cara's roommate Phoebe falls in love with a handsome but stupid man who takes advantage of her, Cara tells her that she could do much better. Thirdly, Cara is sensitive and good at reading other people and their thoughts. She is also a friendly person who wants to make people feel good about themselves.

Even though Cara appears hard on the outside, she has remained soft on the inside. She is a sensitive and caring person, but she does not want to reveal that side of her especially to any man. Cara thinks and analyzes things too much sometimes and she tries to learn to relax and trust her heart more instead of her head. At first Cara is afraid of her strong feelings for Ewan, because she has convinced herself that love will eventually hurt and destroy her. She has never been in love before and the bad relationships she has seen around her have affirmed her belief that being in love is not a safe state of mind. She has seen the pain her father experienced after her mother's death and she remembers Evie's struggles to get back on her feet after her husband died. Like most Kelly's protagonists, Cara's low self-esteem complicates her life and makes her feel worthless. She is afraid of being happy because she does not think that she deserves it. Empowerment through love is a recurring theme in Kelly's novels. Like for example Evie, Leonie and Stella Cara realizes through her man that she is valuable and deserves happiness. Ewan also shows her that love can be a good and empowering thing and retrieves her trust in men by treating her respectfully and kindly. Taking a risk by falling in love with Ewan makes Cara see the void she has had in her life and it begins

to fill up. Getting over the trauma of the attempted rape and learning to trust men is a breaking point to Cara's character and a beginning towards her emancipation.

4.3.2 Emma

Emma's character conveys agency in two ways. Firstly, she begins to object her dominant father instead of always relinquishing to his will. Secondly, she stops bearing the responsibility for everything and begins to share it within her marriage as well as within other relationships. By not accepting responsibility and guilt for everything that happens to her and other people in her life, strengthens Emma's self-confidence and makes her feel empowered.

Emma, like most of Kelly's protagonists, is suffering from low self-esteem, which complicates her life. Even though Emma is attractive, she is insecure of her looks and tries to blend in with the crowd by not wearing colorful clothes or jewellery. She is quiet and modest and very conscientious: she feels obliged to solve everybody's problems. Emma is afraid to display any negative feelings, because she wants to please other people and does not want them to be angry at her. However, the shy and timid "private" Emma is contradicted by the capable and successful "professional" Emma who is proud of her accomplishments and just like Olivia, manages to hide her insecurities thus making people respect her abilities:

The problem was that she was two people: with her parents, she was clumsy Emma, the elder, less successful daughter – Kirsten was the prodigal – and the one who'd sidestepped a job in her father's business (the only time she'd ever refused him anything). In the office, she was Emma Sheridan, the much admired Special Projects Co-ordinator of the CrisisKids Charity who had several people working for her and who organized the charity's confidential child phoneline as well as two conferences a year. (Kelly 2001: 22)

Emma has contradictory relations with her parents. Her undermining and disrespecting father Jimmy is the main reason for her lack of self-confidence. Jimmy is portrayed as a traditional romance hero, who were "dominating alpha-alpha males who did whatever

they wanted with very little emotional development until the end of the story” (“Renovating Romance” 2009). Although Jimmy seems cold and insensitive, he is not necessarily a mean person; he is just overpowering and does not realize the effect that his constant critique and narrow-minded opinions have on his daughter. Because Emma hates fighting and is afraid of her father, she does not tell him how much he hurts her feelings. In patriarchy the woman is seen as “an inferior male” (Selden et al. 1993: 214). Since Jimmy is a patriarchal character, he has imposed his views about the ideal patriarchal woman on Emma. That is why Emma attempts to avoid conflict and submit to her father’s will. Emma’s mother Ann Marie has also submitted to her husband’s will and become an insecure woman with low self esteem. She resorts to Jimmy on everything and feels unprotected without him. In other words Ann Marie represents the traditional ideal patriarchal woman, who looks up to and obeys her man instead of thinking for herself. Although Emma loves her mother, she resents her for not being independent and does not want to become like her.

Jimmy’s respect for the patriarchal model that the man’s social position is the measure stick of a woman’s success, becomes evident in his attitude towards Emma’s younger sister Kirstin. Kirstin is a beautiful, selfish and confident woman who is married to a wealthy man. Jimmy favours Kirstin and thinks that because of her husband’s money she is more successful than Emma, even though Kirstin does not even have a job. Kirstin is not afraid to stand up against Jimmy and she encourages Emma to do the same. Despite the fact that Jimmy favours Kirstin over Emma, the sisters get along well most of the time. Sometimes Kirstin’s carefree attitude towards everything, especially their mother’s illness, irritates Emma, but she really loves her sister and does not envy her because of her money and spare time. This kind of thinking affirms Emma’s image of a traditional “good girl”, who is supposed to be happy for everybody’s success instead of feeling envious for what other people have got. Emma’s good relations with Kirstin also convey the message of solidarity between women, which recurs throughout Kelly’s novels.

When it turns out that Ann Marie has Alzheimer, Emma’s whole world turns upside down. The disease makes Ann Marie even more dependent of Jimmy, who refuses to

acknowledge his wife's condition for a long time. In the end, Emma shows agency by taking care of her mother's needs, because she is attentive by nature. By being able to take care of her mother shows that Emma is a much stronger person than Jimmy, who tries to hide his weakness by being a loud bully. Even though Emma would like to run away from her problems and think that they are not real if she does not talk about them, she shows agency and begins to solve the problems by doing something when action is needed. This empowers her and strengthens her self-confidence. Women as nurturers and care givers is a recurring theme in Kelly's novels. Although Kelly's protagonists are often tough business women, there is a "mother" inside all of them, even if it is not visible at first, like in Hannah's case.

As Emma begins to gain self-confidence she realizes that she has a right to her opinions just like everyone else. She shows agency by going to see a therapist who helps her to open up and talk about her feelings. Emma realizes that it is not the end of the world if everyone does not like her. This kind of indiscretion of other people's opinions and obstinacy is novel for her character and not typical for traditional romance heroines who are usually flexible ("Renovating Romance" 2009). Finally Emma is able to act in a way that shows agency and confront Jimmy about his dismissive and condescending behavior towards her. She demands respect and gratitude for all the hard work she has done. When she does this, she feels liberated and relieved:

She'd been seething with anger and resentment for all her life but had kept it to herself. Anger was bad, unfeminine, destined to make people hate you. Or so she'd thought. Today, she'd discovered that wasn't true at all. Pete, whom she loved, would be delighted with her for standing up to their father. Did it matter if her father was angry with her? He'd been angry with her since the day she was born, for no apparent reason. She'd given him a valid one, that was all. And he needed her more than she needed him. She didn't need him at all. It was a heady feeling. (Kelly 2001: 625)

Breaking free from the image of a "good girl" and standing up against her fathers will are emancipatory experiences in Emma's life. Aggression is not regarded as a feminine trait, since traditionally women have been supposed to be submissive (Karppinen 1989: 79). However, through anger Emma gains self-confidence and shows agency by

standing up for herself. Emancipation through anger is one of the themes in Kelly's novels. By getting angry either at themselves or at other people, the protagonists begin to actively solve their issues, whether they are with their fathers like in Emma's and Hannah's stories or with their husbands like in those of Olivia's and Tara's.

Having a family of her own is very important to Emma, because she feels that having children is what she was meant to do and she has a lot of love to give. This is a typical feature of the traditional woman, who is expected to settle down and commit her life to her family (McRobbie 1991: 33). However, problems with conception begin to affect her otherwise happy marriage to Pete, whom she adores. She cannot believe her luck in finding a husband who gives her everything she did not get from her father: unconditional love, comfort and support. The contradictions in Emma's character appear in relation to her problems with the men in her life: on one hand she is the submissive patriarchal woman who feels inferior to her father and husband; she obeys overpowering Jimmy and feels gratitude towards Pete for loving and respecting her as if she did not deserve it. On the other hand Emma is the contemporary confident woman who thinks that she is mentally stronger than her husband and wants to protect Pete from grief by not telling him about her worry of being infertile when she fails to conceive after several attempts. The guilt theme reappears once again as Emma is convinced that there is something wrong with her body. She feels inadequate as a woman because despite all her success and good looks she still thinks that the nurturing role is an inherent part of femininity and that women who do not procreate fail to fulfil their life's purpose.

Emma does not tell Pete about her hopes of a large family, because she does not want him to feel bad about the situation. In the end they talk about it, get tested and she ends up getting pregnant "by accident". Emma's protective attitude irritates Pete, because he does not want her to carry all the worries on her shoulders:

'There are two of us in this marriage, you know. Nothing annoys me more than the way you feel you have to shoulder all these things on your own,' he said fiercely. You've never let me stand up to your father, even though he bullies you; you insist on keeping secrets like this to yourself and you

let Kirsten get away with murder when it comes to family responsibilities. You just won't let me help. Why the hell are you pushing me away? You're destroying our marriage, in case you hadn't noticed. Stop locking me out of your life!' (Kelly 2001: 507–508)

By forcing Emma to discuss her thoughts and sharing her problems strengthens their relationship. Kelly uses contemporary romance heroes like Pete in her novels repetitively. Just like for example Max, Ewan and David, Pete's character is portrayed as a thoughtful and caring man who is able to discuss about things instead of resorting to mere action like the alpha-males do in traditional romance novels ("Renovating Romance" 2009).

Being just a person instead of the epitome of ideal femininity is empowering for all women because then they can really do the things that they have potential for and exist as real persons. Emma always demands more from herself than from other people and takes the need to show her competence to the extreme, because that is what she thinks her family expects of her. Breaking free from other people's expectations and learning to share responsibility are empowering experiences for Emma. Through her character Kelly conveys the message that women should allow themselves to be weak sometimes instead of always striving for perfection.

4.3.3 Holly

Through Holly's character Kelly conveys the message that the relationship a woman has with her mother is so important that it affects her whole life; if the mother openly loves and encourages her daughter, she grows up as a confident and self-assured woman. If they have distant and formal relations, the daughter often suffers from emotional distress and has difficulties in trusting herself as well as other people. Since Holly thinks that she is a disappointment to her mother, their relationship has remained distant, which in turn has affected negatively on Holly's self-image. The most important issue that Holly's character has to solve is gaining self-confidence.

In Kelly's novels, the relationships between mothers and daughters are often examined closely and the feelings and thoughts of the mother are taken into consideration. Even though the mother is often to blame, she is granted an opportunity to explain her motives. Holly has reserved relations with Rose, because she thinks that her mother had wished that Holly had been a boy. Holly does not know that Rose suffered from depression after her birth, and that is why she was not able to establish a warm and loving relationship with her from the beginning:

‘If only I’d told you what I’d gone through, then you might have understood. I felt such huge guilt that I wasn’t a very good mother for probably the first nine months of your life. And when you were a teenager and we weren’t getting on, I felt as if it was all my fault for how I’d behaved when you were a baby. I thought you somehow knew and blamed me.’ (Kelly 2003: 555)

When Rose tells her about the depression, Holly understands that her mother loves her just as much as she loves her sisters and that she is not a disappointment to her. After their conversation, Holly gradually begins to open up to Rose instead of keeping her at a distance and hiding her true feelings from her. Often the generation gap between the mothers and daughters causes problems in Kelly's novels. The mothers are portrayed as worriers who give old-fashioned advice about relationships and the daughters as modern women who listen to their mothers but ignore their suggestions. Kelly encourages mothers and daughters to get to know each other as *persons* regardless of their age or kinship.

Because Holly has thought that she is a disappointment to Rose, she undermines herself in every area of her life. Firstly, even though Holly's appearance does not confine to the image of the ideal woman, who is slim and delicate, she is still portrayed as attractive and sexy. However, she is unable to see the good things about her appearance and she puts herself down every day by thinking that she is clumsy and fat. Secondly, she belittles her job as a shop assistant at the children's section in a big department store, even though she is good at it because she is conscientious and interested in helping people. Holly thinks that she could have done better than staying in a job that barely enables her to pay her bills. Her dream is to work in the international fashion

department but she does not have the courage to apply for a position there. Thirdly, she is unable to stand up for her rights and wants to please other people thus acting as a door mat for them. Just like most of Kelly's other protagonists, she is afraid to express negative feelings and often she does not think that she is strong enough to handle the negative people and situations that she encounters.

Through Holly's close relations with her sisters Kelly once again promotes female solidarity and encourages women to come together and support each other. The protagonists in her novels talk about and solve problems together and as loyal friends they offer each other compassion, warmth and understanding. Holly is the youngest of three girls and she loves and looks up to her older sisters Tara and Stella, who realize that Holly has problems with her self-confidence and try to encourage and support her. Holly wishes that she could be as confident as her sisters, who are not afraid of making themselves heard.

Holly's relationship with her father Hugh is somewhat patriarchal: she admires him and sees him as an infallible god-like creature. For a long time Holly thinks that he cannot do anything wrong and she loves her father blindly. After she hears about Hugh's affairs, she feels more sympathy towards him than her sisters do. Holly tells Tara and Stella that when she was sixteen, she found out for the first time that Hugh was having an affair:

She'd always adored her father. Hearing him murmuring endearments on the phone to a woman clearly not her mother had shocked her sixteen-year-old soul, but she still loved him. She didn't want him to split up with her mother, which was what happened when people went off and had affairs. So Holly had kept the secret to herself. (Kelly 2003: 382)

The strong father is a recurring theme in Kelly's novels. However, Holly's relationship with Hugh differs from other protagonists in that for most of the time she admires him, whereas some protagonists, such as Hannah and Olivia, feel fear and contempt for their fathers. Other protagonists, such as Leonie, do not have a relationship with their fathers at all.

As most of Kelly's protagonists, Holly too begins to gain more self-confidence through a man. Although Holly has been single for many years, she would rather be in a committed relationship. However, bad and humiliating experiences with men in the past have made her shy and insecure. Holly differs from the other single protagonist, Cara, in the way that she has had no contact with men at all for many years. Cara's physical needs are discussed and explained, whereas Holly is portrayed as a prim and abstinent character. When a new neighbour Tom moves into the building, Holly falls in love for the first time in her life. When she finds out that he has a girlfriend, Holly tries her best to see Tom only as a friend, because she does not want to break up his relationship, and she does not think that Tom would ever even be interested in her. By respecting Tom's relationship, Holly confines to the image of a "good girl", who does not want to hurt other people's feelings. Traditionally girls have been encouraged to act properly and behave in a respectable manner in order to protect their "reputation" (Giles 2002: 31). In traditional romance novels good girls are rewarded in the end and they get the man of their dreams. This is what happens to Holly as well: when Tom in the end breaks up with his girlfriend and tells Holly that he loves her, she cannot believe her luck:

He moved his mouth from hers, just far enough so that he could see her face. 'Do you love me?' Holly stroked his dear face, astonished that he couldn't feel the love flowing from her fingertips. 'Love you? Are you crazy? I love you so much it hurts.' (Kelly 2003: 587)

Tom and Holly's story has a traditional romance novel happy ending (RWA 2009). Tom is the first man who makes Holly feel safe and fine just as she is. He gives her more self-confidence and she is not afraid to open up to him. She feels that Tom is the man she has been waiting for her whole life and he completes her.

Appearing as a model in her friend Joan's fashion show is the most significant act that elevates Holly's self-confidence. By exposing herself to other people's gaze and getting a positive response, Holly's character communicates that most of the time women are their own worst critics. Through Holly's self-contempt Kelly underlines the relentless expectations that women align themselves with and reminds them to be content with themselves. When Holly sees the admiring looks she gets from people, she understands

that she is beautiful and is proud of her courage. Moreover, falling in love with Tom and straightening things out with Rose give Holly more self- confidence and she begins to value herself. Getting love and support from these two important people make her feel empowered and capable of doing anything.

7 CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have studied the development and empowerment of Kelly's female characters throughout three of her novels: *Never Too Late* (1999), *Someone Like You* (2000) and *Just Between Us* (2003). I studied how their lives represent and promote female emancipation and how their agency affects their personal development.

Kelly's characters promote female agency in several ways. Firstly, the relinquished conformers regain their independence by realizing their dreams instead of submitting to the will of their fathers and husbands. Secondly, the mother figures stop feeling guilty for putting themselves before their families and learn to balance motherhood with womanhood. Thirdly, the self-sufficient worriers begin to share responsibility instead of taking care of everything on their own and accepting that it is acceptable to ask for help. Being in control of their own lives empowers the protagonists and their ways of showing agency can be regarded as emancipatory strategies that Kelly promotes in her writing. Her novels show to the readers that by being active women and expressing themselves, they can influence their lives and shape them to fit their wishes.

There are particularly two areas of life that stand out as sites of empowerment for Kelly's protagonists. The first one is their father-daughter relationship. Many of Kelly's characters struggle with problems in their relationships with their fathers. Either their fathers are absent from their lives or they try to control their daughters. This is a way in which Kelly embodies the idea of patriarchal control in individual characters. By freeing themselves from the control of their fathers they symbolically free themselves from patriarchal control. This is one way of promoting emancipation, used by Kelly. Being belittled by their fathers makes Kelly's protagonists feel ambivalent, which leads to them having to deal with the complications that their low self-esteem entails. For example they are often unconfident about themselves in their relationships with men. However, most of Kelly's protagonists are successful in their professions, which provides them self-confidence thus empowering them and giving them the strength to solve the problems they encounter in other areas of their lives.

Another area of life in which Kelly promotes emancipation is the strength and support that women gain from their friendships with other women. Being able to express their negative feeling freely relieves the stress they are under and reduces their anxiety. Open discussion also strengthens their friendships and empowers them when they notice that they are not alone with their problems. By encouraging women to be open with each other, Kelly promotes the idea of not keeping up the appearances.

A third, less important area of life in which Kelly's protagonists are emancipated through is their romantic relationships. When they receive love, nurture and respect from their men, they gain self-confidence which in turn empowers them.

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