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What Women Want:

A critical look at how Austen's commentary on masculinity still applies today

“There is nothing wrong with a man being a feminist, I think it is to our mutual advantage”
—Alan Rickman

Through the consistent resurgence of both Austenian based media and romance novels, expectations of what is considered desirable for romantic connections are very pertinent. With a rise in female authorship and readership in contemporary times, women's views are more important than ever before. Due to this, contemporary women's opinions about desirable masculinity have allowed romantic companionship with men to develop without the consequences that women in history suffered for speaking their minds. Today women do not suffer the same conscious external punishments from society

Women today, being unmarried by the age of 30 is no longer a death sentence, and is rather normalized. We have other options for which they may conduct their lives, including making their own living and choosing their romantic partners in more liberal and impermanent fashions. So much so that, according to *Psychology Today*, more women than ever are not only single, but happily so— significantly more so than single men.

Today, being single has become a choice for women. It gives us an opportunity to find our own meaning and authenticity without the imperative of landing a husband. For men,

singleness has become an inconvenience, so much so that it has put them in the spotlight, typically coined as the “male loneliness epidemic.” This phrase aims to point out not only men’s lack of romantic connections, but also the lack of connections in their lives overall. Whereas single women are happier as they “are more likely to have supportive relationships beyond romantic relationships.”

So why did, and why do, some men fail to have or keep healthy romantic relationships? According to the writing of Jane Austen, they always have, but it was never excessively notable beyond a personal level when women were not granted personal and economic freedoms to sustain their own survival. In a society where women were reliant on marriage for economic stability, social prospects, and family wishes, men had no reason to be held to any standards. Without any expectations set for them beyond at times how they presented themselves socially, there was no construct for that they were expected to follow.

In Austenian literature, the ideas of masculine and feminine romanticism are used in conjunction with her female heroines to better illustrate that a woman’s happiness is not contingent on her fulfilling a role as a wife and a mother. Rather, happiness can come from coming to peace with oneself and feeling loved by the community around oneself. It also demonstrates that women would prefer to find happiness unwed as opposed to signing a contract for their own unhappiness, therefore challenging the functionality of traditional masculinity.

According to Sarah Ailwood, “*Sense and Sensibility* challenges socially-approved models of gentry masculinity, particularly through its overarching concern with relationships between the social and economic order and the individual” (Ailwood 67). Though a woman's position in society undoubtedly was a cause of unhappiness in the Regency era, as Susan Wagle states, “Austen criticizes masculine Romanticism and asserts feminine Romanticism as an alternative

version that believes on relational self” (Wagle 5). Through the understanding of masculine and feminine romanticism, the qualities of masculine romanticism are shown to be at most temporary gratification, that when acknowledged cause women, both in Austen’s age and today, to wish not to interact with it at all, even if that means they will not interact with anyone for romantic interest. By utilizing her character Marianne Dashwood as a lens to display a woman’s coming to feminine truth. Austen uses the character of John Willoughby to demonstrate the qualities and thought processes of masculine romanticism that were societally uncontested in her time. Yet, through her example of Colonel Brandon she seeks to challenge the status quo and its ideas on masculinity. Though societal expectations are undoubtedly a cause of women’s dissatisfaction, they are not the only cause of women's hesitation or dissuasion from marriage or romance. Austen argues the men that fail to have romantic relationships do so because they do not accept feminine truth, and therefore do not accept or practice feminine romanticism.

Contextualization of Austen as Feminist Work

For many critics, feminism has become a captivating lens when discussing Austen’s work. Her novels show how the non-romantic relationships her female characters have with other characters can be and are often emotionally fulfilling, negating the preconceived notions that women can only discover such satisfaction by being wives and mothers. This raises a lot of her heroines’ expectations for love, ultimately, for the better. Women like Charlotte Lucas from Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* do marry for convenience and survival, but this does not mean she does not have love in her life. She has her family, including her parents and sister, as well as Elizabeth Bennet, who spend great time with her throughout the novel. This is also notably a conscious decision that Charlotte makes for herself with an awareness of her societal position

stating that she wants, “only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins, his character, and his prospects, they could not all be united with less happiness than I may expect in marriage” (Austen 160).

Yet, not all of Austen’s women make the decision to marry for convenience or survival like Charlotte Lucas, many of them would rather live with their families and marry only for love, or never marry at all. This idea that women should feel that their primary duty was their own personal happiness, rather than becoming a wife and a mother, is incredibly radical for a Regency society. As these characters have higher priorities than fulfilling societal expectations, it means that men must appeal to, as Laura Mulvey coined, the “female gaze”. Meaning that if men want to have successful romantic relationships they must care to learn to appeal to the internal lives of women, including their expectations, experiences, and desires.

According to Sarah R. Morrison, Austen’s novels “assert the primacy of feminine experience by reducing the characterization of men ... to their roles in the private domestic circle” (Morrison 1). Women are different people entirely when they are not societally obligated don't to chase men’s approval for any reason. However, some male critics are often upset seeing Austen’s women at the forefront of the novel and believe it makes the men within them insignificant, under characterized, and unimportant and that therefore Austen is bad at portraying men; these arguments are only half formed, and grossly underplay the significance of women’s voices. Men often appear less significant because the Austenian women are not dependent upon society’s expectations for self importance and fulfillment. By proxy this makes men seem less important as women are depicted as not reliant on them for emotional fulfillment. The male characters are not under characterized either. When male figures are present or depicted as opposed to when they are not is intentional, not only regarding the relevance to the feminine

perspective, but also about the male characters, whether that be fathers, love interests, relatives, or rakes. Austen does not have a need for grand declaration and description of character when so many of them fit into archetypal roles that are easily satirized. When understanding the motivation behind characterizations in context with the societal expectations and situations for women, Austen's work clearly portrays an advocacy that women can think and act for themselves.

Understanding Masculine Romanticism

To understand what Austen argues men must be for their own social and romantic success, it must first be known what she does not wish them to be. In this case, that would be masculine romanticism. Masculine romanticism is first literarily recognized in the Romantic period¹. Male characters who it applied to were called "Byronic heroes", after the romantic era poet Lord Byron. Characteristics of these individuals often include intense and obsessive tendencies, arrogance, cynicism, intelligence, impulsiveness, and self-defeating behaviors, all of which typically create intrigue for a story's respective heroine. One of the most famous examples of the Byronic hero is Heathcliff from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, masculine romanticism is portrayed by John Willoughby. He is first introduced when Marianne twists her ankle and he comes across her and carries her back to her cottage. His choice to pick her up, though both convenient for her physical health and sometimes viewed as a conventionally romantic gesture, could also be construed as greatly improper and impulsive, qualities that are essential to understanding his character. It is also notable that when Willoughby is introduced, he has a gun on him. This is fitting as his character

¹ This is not to say the concepts in/of masculine romanticism did not exist in either literature or historically previous the Romantic era, but rather that it is first characterized and identified prominently in that period.

often displays a “shoot first, ask questions later” mentality, where he doesn’t consider the consequences of his actions and acts broadly— typical behavior of Byronic characters. This is also displayed when he gets Marianne a horse, an extravagantly inappropriate gift. At first these gestures make him appealing to Marianne, as this sharp, handsome, literature loving gentleman courts her and her family. However, his intrigue, similar to a typical Byronic character, turns sour. Willoughby leaves the Dashwoods unexpectedly, acts untowardly distant and dismissive toward Marianne at a ball, and even becomes engaged and married without the company of people with him knowing why. Most notable of all, and the catalyst for all others of his previous actions, Willoughby seduces and impregnates the ward of Colonel Brandon, Eliza, out of wedlock and then abandons her. The impulsiveness of his actions reveal a great degree of self destructiveness. In fact, these actions cause his aunt, Mrs. Smith, to disinherit him. As a result, he leaves the Dashwoods, and knows that he must marry someone wealthy, as at the time of his disinheritance, he is already deeply in debt. Further obsession with wealth and social position leads Willoughby to marry Miss Grey for her money.

Like many Byronic heroes, and many Austenian rakes, the intrigue that surrounds Willoughby is not revealed like the ending of a Shakespearean comedy, but rather hamartias, fatal flaws that change the big picture of character to previously unknowing parties. Willoughby’s personal problems cause intense strain on his life and the lives of those around him, and his character is not shown to consider any of these things until much later. He goes to Elinor to explain himself and his behavior to be forgiven, furthering his obsession with maintaining his position in society despite his actions. Yet, Willoughby never apologizes or attempts to make right his actions with the impregnated and abandoned Eliza or her guardian, Colonel Brandon. Though he goes to apologize to Elinor, who is undoubtedly affected by her

sister's grief and Willoughby's actions, he does so to make her understand and forgive him and therefore alleviate his guilt. He does not truly respect the women around him, but seeks their companionship and approval to social climb, even if not fully consciously. Women are tools for his convenience, to seduce when he wishes, to marry when he is in fiscal need. Willoughby's actions are only ever romantic when not all about him is revealed. His deception of character not only makes him disappointing, but dishonest, in both his personal history and intentions with others. This quality, along with his obsession with wealth and social status, reveal his true colors: an unattractively Byronic irresponsible character.

Understanding Feminine Romanticism

Having female speakers is completely essential to some of Austen's most crucial arguments about love. Namely of which is feminine romanticism. Feminine romanticism, coined by Anne Mellor and originally created as a rejection of masculine romanticism, focuses on emotion and rationality that was central in women's lives, as well as female centered concepts like how there is value in family and community. According to Mellor, feminine romanticist characters often behave with honesty, display self-awareness, are emotionally complex, and have self understanding, morality, and compassion. Many of Austen's female characters are feminine romanticists. Elinor Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility* is acutely honest, self-aware, and emotionally complex throughout the novel, whereas her sister, Marianne, is still acquiring traits of feminine romanticism through her experiences. This is a critical lens of Austen refocusing a woman's ideas for her life and romantic partners from masculine to feminine romanticist views over time and through experience. In *Sense and Sensibility*, even some of the male characters display egalitarian behaviors that are best shown through Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon.

Edward Ferrars, the love interest and eventual husband of Elinor Dashwood, is pressured by his mother to enter a worthy occupation, a fact that is pointed out very early in the novel. It is stated that his mother and sister, “longed to see him distinguished—as— they hardly knew what. They wanted him to make a fine figure in the world in some manner or other” (Austen 13). Though many men in this time were expected to do what their family wished of them in their occupational and personal lives, Edward does not fold beneath the pressure of his mother and sister. This shows a great portrayal of self-awareness and honesty, as Edward greatly prefers to go into the clergy, a profession his relatives don’t find respectable, and is therefore reasonably stricken by paralysis with this conflict at the beginning of the novel, which illuminates great emotional complexity for his character early on. He also is not able to pursue Elinor openly, he secretly proposed to Lucy Steele years ago, and decides to keep true to his promises despite his happiness, showing great morality and compassion by doing so. Once Lucy breaks off this engagement to marry his brother, however, Edward soon renounces his family's wishes once and for all, both by marrying Elinor and by becoming a clergyman. Edward’s understanding of what he truly wants and remaining honest with himself is essential to him finding happiness. His own actions lend greatly to one of the early descriptions of him that states that, “His behavior gave every indication of an open, affectionate heart” (Austen 13). This continues to help describe his character’s honesty as how he is described is how he acts.

Though Edward Ferrars is a polite and simple example of feminine romanticist characterization, he is not as centrally tested throughout his physical presence in the novel beyond what was previously mentioned. This is primarily because Austen aims to use Marianne Dashwood and her coming to her own feminine truth, and therefore feminine romanticism as her central argument. This makes Colonel Brandon central to the direct dichotomy of feminine and

masculine romanticism in the novel as well as Austen's argument of feminine truth begetting true happiness with romantic suitors as he ends up with Marianne.

Brandon is immediately smitten with Marianne, yet importantly, he is the only person that "heard her without being in raptures" (Austen 30) when she was playing the pianoforte. Regardless of his personal feelings or sentiments, he remains appropriate and respectable as opposed to the others around him. Though he feels strongly he remains sensible throughout his stay at Barton Park. This is very visible in his conversations with Elinor as he states in defense of Marianne's sense, "there is something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind" (Austen 47). Here he shows a great amount of compassion for Marianne's school of thought in that moment, even though he understands her thoughts to be prejudiced. Brandon importantly shows his respect for Marianne as well as Elinor, as he speaks with Elinor as a friend and companion, as an equal, and reveres her opinion. In discussing her with Elinor, Brandon also acknowledges that Marianne has her own mind, and is capable of coming to her own decisions, and does not aim to hurt or harm her even when they come to his emotional deficit, and even feels empathy for her in her circumstances throughout the novel. Even as this pertains to Willoughby, Brandon is secure enough to separate his emotions from his convictions, solidifying virtuosity in his character. These things also show his respect for Marianne, not as a potential wife, but as capable and equal. This is necessary to feminine truth— without the acknowledgement that women are not lesser people than men, there is no acceptance that there can fully be a feminine truth.

When introduced to Willoughby, he is reserved and observant, and does not say anything until he speaks to Elinor later in the novel about Willoughby's true nature. He restrains his thoughts until he has proof of Willoughby's true character, and only does then does he approach Elinor stating, "my sole wish in desiring it— I hope, I believe it is— is to be a means of giving

comfort;—no, I must not say comfort— not present comfort—but conviction, lasting conviction to your sister’s mind” (Austen 167). Brandon continues, stating that he has no aim but, “a very sincere regard— nothing but an earnest desire of being useful” (Austen 167). By stating this, and even questioning himself whether he is justified reveal a deep emotional complexity and his acknowledgement of it. Brandon acknowledges that he still cares for Marianne, and honesty with his emotions causes him to grapple with the idea that they could cause bias towards his morality. Especially regarding Willoughby, as he reveals to Elinor, his sensitivity with the situation as it applied to the Eliza of his youth, as well as her daughter, Eliza, his ward. By not only thinking on such things but verbalizing them, Brandon speaks his emotional complexities to Elinor, and effectively explains both why he believes himself to be biased along with the history that he believes makes him so. By talking so openly with Elinor, he shows respect for Elinor and her thoughts. Brandon respecting women as equals is essential to Austen’s ideas of feminine truth. He does not pretend to respect or care for the women around him, Brandon earnestly wishes to care for the people who care for him in ways that *they* need to be cared for.

Critical Misreadings

Disregarding the situations in Austen’s novels and the impacts on their characters completely negates their development. Especially in regard to women, or characters that possess feminine romanticist tendencies, such disregard can be really harmful. Creating these preconceived notions severely damages their ability to understand Austen’s messages. So what does it look like when these things are disregarded and why does it harm someone’s ability to understand Austen?

JANSA member Geoff Chapman writes of Elinor Dashwood, saying she is, “immature and undecided about where her priorities lie”. Elinor Dashwood presumes the caretaker role for her family, as not only is her father deceased, but her mother is much like her younger sister Marianne at the beginning of the novel, is shown to lack matured emotional depth, and is thus juvenile. She is the only person being responsible for herself, her mother, and her two sisters. Elinor, though she is neither actively seeking or against the idea of a fulfilling marriage, understands that she cannot rely on being fiscally and situationally rescued by a man. Her struggle balancing what she wants for her life with her situation shows awareness and maturing. Chapman describes Elinor’s character as having a “female version of a sense of honor”, By gendering a concept like honor, Chapman fails to acknowledge historical ideologies that cause gendered separation and sexism that is not typically deemed acceptable today. This hurts his argument, as it paints his idea of Elinor as secondary to men, not in the historical context of the novel, but in his own mind.

Chapman continues, speaking about Edward Ferrars (Elinor’s love interest and eventual husband) next, calling him an “insignificant microbe”, and calling her love for him “immature”. Not only does this undermine the purpose of his character, but it also undermines Elinor’s abilities of discernment. Edward’s character is never meant to represent masculine romanticism, and in fact is seen in Elinor’s eyes as respectable because he is aware of himself and honest about who he is, even when it comes to his uncertainty with his life. The only opinion that really matters besides Elinor’s in concern with Edward in the beginning of the novel is Marianne, as she declares she could not like a man like Edward saying that “Elinor has not my feelings, and, therefore, she may overlook it, and be happy with him. But it would have broken *my* heart, had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility” (Austen 15). Marianne’s opinion matters as

it reveals her character at the beginning of the novel, stating not only her opinion of preferring the grand gestures and masculine romanticism tendencies, but with it her awareness of the differences in sensibilities between herself and others around her. This self-awareness, regardless of her youthful naivete, states that she is able to discern her sister's preferences, and in doing so, though she rejects them for herself, reinforces Elinor's feelings and therefore Edward's position with feminine romanticism.

Beliefs like Chapman's that lack critical thought and the ability to perceptively engage with a text are egregiously harmful habits that impair a person's ability to understand Austen on a scholarly or productive level. Without looking through the many lenses in which it is written, understood, and adapted by factors such as time, social expectations, history, etc. one is not able to grasp the weight of characters, circumstances, or outcomes. In both negating Marianne's importance as well as the standard that figures like Edward Ferrars fulfill, Chapman not only rejects Elinor's sense, but Marianne's growth as a character. By doing so, Chapman is inherently denying female experience and therefore feminine truth by only stating what he thinks. His commentary is a great example of something that Austen would criticize. Chapman's unawareness is reflective of Willoughby's and because of it his argument lacks feminine truth.

Connection to Austen's Analysis

When the actions of feminine and masculine romanticism can be resolutely discerned, dissecting the interactive dichotomy of the concepts and their effects become much simpler. In *Sense and Sensibility*, much of this is done through circumstantial parallels to contrast the characters of Willoughby and Colonel Brandon, especially as they relate to the nature of Marianne throughout the novel. Before doing so however, it is important to establish Marianne's

independence of person. When the novel begins Marianne asserts her opinion of herself showing her independence of thought and therefore rejection of some societal expectation as she states to her mother, “the more I know of the world the more am I convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love” (Austen 15). By declaring such, Marianne turns expectations on their head, as she begins to expect things from a man for herself that men demand from women for them to be considered distinguished ladies, exhibiting her strength and independence of mind early on. This is important as Marianne’s own free will is what drives both her experiences and her eventual change in the novel. Marianne’s self determination and respect is how Austen shows that even though masculine romanticism can seem romantic it never wins the day. So why is this important in the context of Austen’s men and her commentary on men in general?

When it comes to Brandon and Willoughby as examples for broader contexts and concepts, what they communicate and how they communicate it is essential to show what their characters reveal regarding Austen’s message on men as well as how they impact Marianne.

When Brandon receives a letter and must leave the company in Barton unexpectedly, his departure is polite. He “again repeated his sorrow at being the cause of disappointing the party; but at the same time declared it to be unavoidable” (Austen 54). Though this is not important to Marianne as she has yet to go through her character development, Brandon begins to build his character more virtuously regardless of his circumstances. When Brandon is called away, Willoughby begins to mock him, and Marianne, inclined to agree with his sentiments as she already believes Brandon to be boring and old, listens to him say, “there are some people who cannot bear a party of pleasure. Brandon is one of them” (Austen 54). By displaying this childish arrogance, Willoughby assists the picture of his character that is later revealed. While he acts and speaks boldly, he is also building the very character that damns him. Willoughby also leaves

unexpectedly from the company of the Dashwood's, leaving Marianne in tears. This first emotional outburst from Marianne is an important foreshadowing element of his lack of honesty causing more emotional distress.

Marianne next sees Willoughby at a ball, and when he attempts to ignore her coldly without explanation, she declares to Elinor that she "shall not have a moment's peace till this is explained" (Austen 144). This makes her more distraught, as she writes him one final letter demanding clarity on their situation. By doing so, she shows a great deal of self respect, and her vulnerability and self-exposure in doing so is also a sign of her emotionally maturing. Through this growth and this action, Marianne declares that the way she was treated— without honesty, is completely unacceptable and undeserved.

Though Willoughby had appealed to her sensibilities, his character fails beyond that, and can be stripped by his actions. Whereas Colonel Brandon's honesty and clarity of self champions himself a character unfettered by one circumstance. This very character— ripe with ideas of the relational self, is what allows Marianne's growth and comprehension of what she truly deserves in a companion. It reveals Austen's key critique of masculinity, especially as it pertains through the eyes of her female protagonists.

Marianne's character is a lens through which Austen argues why the way men act when women act on ideas of feminine truth in their lives. Through her heartbreaking experience with Willoughby, Marianne comes to understand what she previously wanted was not unhealthy for her, as it nearly drove her to death. For her, the text states she "was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen" (Austen 311). Austen's sardonic nature in pointing out Marianne's age at seventeen

being considered “late in life” for a girl “born to overcome an affection” is direct criticism on masculine ideals for women and women’s youth. In reality, seventeen is several years away from a person having a fully developed brain, and possibly only a couple of years after a girl has hit puberty or had her first menstruation. Austen comments on this in her novel through the development of Marianne, and by doing so she tests not only the ridiculous expectations for juvenile female perfection, but also the characters (and their characteristics) that they admire.

Just as Austen follows through with her set up of Marianne’s character, she does so with Willoughby. She explains that had Willoughby “behaved with honour towards Marianne, he might at once have been happy and rich” (Austen 312). The first part of Willoughby’s repentance is that he must live with knowing that he is the one that got in the way of his own happiness. Though this happens because he does not concern the happiness of others, Willoughby does not know or even consider this. Instead of any introspective considerations, he continues to obsess over Marianne. Austen states that Willoughby, “always retained that decided regard which interested him in every thing that befell her, and made her his secret standard of perfection in woman” (Austen 312). By continually romanticizing Marianne without understanding what of his actions towards her were wrong, or even trying to rectify it properly, Austen shows that his character does not change. In doing so, she also reveals the absence of a key part of feminine romanticism and feminine truth: self understanding. By not understanding himself and his own emotions and actions, he cannot fully understand why the women around him, namely Elinor and Marianne, don’t like him. Willoughby does what he believes he should do, which means he disregards what expectations or ideas that women have in regards to themselves. This commentary is really important because Austen is stating that if men want successful attachments, they must pay attention to these expectations.

Colonel Brandon however, does pay attention to these expectations. He does not try to change himself for Marianne, nor does Marianne end up expecting him to. Not only does she acknowledge her past criticism of him, but in regard to her marriage to Colonel Brandon she, “found her own happiness in forming his, was equally the persuasion and delight of each observing friend. Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby” (Austen 311-312). In this way, Marianne finds an equal in partnership that she did not have with Willoughby. Through this as well Austen reveals that true masculinity comes in looking after others, in caring about how they impact other people. Without self understanding born of feminine romanticism’s qualities, comprehending anything outside of the self becomes even more elusive and uncommunicative. Colonel Brandon constantly communicates his emotions and intentions both when describing his past to Elinor and in the events present in the novel.

Conclusion

Austen’s criticisms are still relevant to how genders interact today. Today, women wish to be surrounded by feminine truth, notably through honesty and open communication, especially as it relates to emotions, we easily turn away from people who cannot provide it. As men struggle with having meaningful relationships, they too struggle with the qualities present in those relationships, like honesty and open communication. These qualities are incredibly important, not only due to how they impact the events in Austen’s novels, but because they affect people today in their everyday lives. Without feminine truth and its attributes, humanity lies to itself, on individual and societal levels. Though not always simple, Austen proposes solutions to these issues. First, be honest with oneself as feminine truth would do, so that through reflection,

contemplation, and growth, one can be genuine with others and open to growth. No one finds themselves and the communities they surround themselves with alone. Austen argues that in order to find happiness individually, communally, and romantically, one needs to be open to all the truths of the world, especially those different from their own. Perhaps one of the best framed ideas of self discovery comes from Emily Dickinson who states “I am out with lanterns looking for myself.” With such a mantra and a propensity for growth, perhaps we as a society could be just as, if not more successful as Austen’s heroines at finding happiness for ourselves and those we love.

Works Cited

Ailwood, Sarah. "Austen's Men, Immortality and Intertextuality." *Romanticism*, vol. 29, no. 2, July 2023, pp. 152–64. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.3366/rom.2023.0596>.

This source describes how Austen creates male characters that allow romance by not denying or shifting off from female agency, and how this view is important as it is not only a distinct view from men being under portrayed, but it is also a key identifier of Jane Austen's work. Her portrayal of men is distinct and shows that an audience of men interpreting Austen as underwritten or underdeveloped is a gross misreading of both authorial intent and historical literacy.

Ailwood, Sarah. "'Too Much in the Common Novel Style': Reforming Masculinities in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*." *Women Constructing Men: Female Novelists and Their Male Characters, 1750 - 2000*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, NY, 2009, pp. 67–82.

This source details how the previous depictions of masculinity are challenged, specifically through *Sense and Sensibility*. One of the concepts it discusses is how the good men in the novel are not perceived through prior understandings of attractiveness, and how this is often misunderstood by audiences. It explains that because Austen asks people to challenge their assumptions of what a man should be, that are often wrought by societal expectations or traditions, to instead embrace the "complexity of masculinities". This adheres nicely with the ideas of complex masculinity, or even the concept of people being complicated as humans themselves, as this is more of a feminine romanticist and therefore realistic and healthy point of view.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Penguin Books, 2019.

Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. Penguin Books, 2021.

Chapman, Geoff. "Colonel Brandon: An Officer and a Gentleman in *Sense and Sensibility*." *Geoff Chapman*, www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol21no1/chapman.html. Accessed 27 Nov. 2025.

This article is more of an opinionated piece, and therefore rather presumptuous and historically and socially unaware as a source. It details the author's not liking *Sense and Sensibility* for a variety of reasons, including the subversion of his expectations, the perceived unattractiveness of male characters, as well as a general displeasure with the ending of the novel. By only addressing his opinions on a superficial level, the author reveals that he does not comprehend it. Though the source is not academically inclined, it helps prove my argument that societally instituted pride and prejudice have prevented and continue to prevent people from proactively participating with Austen's texts.

Morrison, Sarah R. *CRITICAL READINGS: Of Woman Borne: Male Experience and Feminine Truth in Jane Austen's Novels*. Salem Press, 2010. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=0bbe8775-5ca7-3bda-8b68-268ff329e214.

This source largely discusses the relation between genders in regards to Jane Austen novels and how embracing the “feminine” is a measurement of success for men and women. The article discusses how the community that surrounds people in their lives is significant, and that personal fulfillment within oneself and with those around them is more important than patriarchal or societal accepted measurements of success. This source demonstrates how the feminine perspective of Jane Austen novels not only reveal truth about feminine conditions, but how it defines what true success is, and how that impacts what the true ideal of a man, separate of those “traditional male values” should be. In context of my paper, this source helps not only to identify what qualities are truly important in male characters, and how that is important to the perception of male characters as a whole in the novels.

Wagle, Susan. “ Critique of Masculine Romanticism in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.” *Https://Elibrary.Tucl.Edu.Np/Items/Ac1ac7cb-6b2c-48bd-81f0-2140bdf48e10*, Tribhuvan University, 2013,

<https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/JQ99OgQlizUxyjI9nB0on9OyLkqsGIf4/api/core/bitstreams/00a4b93d-0d38-4646-b629-4283c5fe6940/content>.

This source discusses masculine romanticism and states that feminine romanticism is healthier and more realistic as it allows for individuals’ awareness of themselves and others as opposed to disregarding them. The general argument assists with mine as it is able to identify how and way masculine and feminine romanticism affect people, and how those characters who fit with feminine romanticism fare far better.

“Why Women Like the Single Life More than Men Do.” *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living-single/202410/why-women-like-being-single-more-than-men-do. Accessed 11 Dec. 2025.

This source was useful for setting up connections from Austen’s literature to today. It argues that women are happier being single as compared to men. The article also discusses the differences between men and women that could cause these things.