



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR
SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITIES

Prevalent and Emergent Masculinity Norms in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Julia Westby

Essay/Degree Project:	15 hp
Program or/and course:	EN1311
Level:	First cycle
Term/year:	VT/2025
Supervisor:	Joe Kennedy
Examiner:	Maria Olaussen
Report nr:	

Title: *Constructing Masculinities*

Author: Julia Westby

Supervisor: Joe Kennedy

Abstract: Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* presents masculine ideals of early 19th-century England. This essay examines how Austen constructs and critiques these ideals by analyzing her male characters in the novel. By applying Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, this study explores the hierarchical natures of masculinity and the societal structures that strengthen them. The male characters of Mr. Wickham, Mr. Collins, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Bingley are situated within the context of Regency England, which provides insight into the analysis of how class and social duty shape male identity. Through the comparative analysis of these male characters, this study identifies how Austen embodies and contrasts flawed, stylized, aristocratic, and emergent masculinities. Prevailing masculinity norms are both reinforced and reformed, which highlights the progressive and emotionally available alternatives Austen constructs. This essay reflects on how gender ideals of Regency England are depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*; highlights how masculinity adapts to social, historical, and material context; and emphasizes how Austen critiques and reconstructs what it means to be a man within the evolving society of the Regency era.

Keywords: *Pride and Prejudice*; Jane Austen; masculinity; hegemonic masculinity; Regency England; gender norms; social class; stylized; idealized

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction 1
- 2. Theory and Method 2
- 3. Flawed and Stylized Masculinity 5
- 4. Idealized and Progressive Masculinity..... 11
- 5. Conclusion..... 17
- References* 20

1. Introduction

There are enormous numbers of feminist readings of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, often highlighting societal constraints placed on women in early 19th century England. However, less attention has been given to Austen's constructions of masculinity within the novel. The novel's male characters embody a spectrum of masculinities, both prevalent masculinity and emergent norms that reflect and respond to the shifting societal and economic pressures of class and duty. Austen constructs and critiques masculinity norms of the evolving society of Regency England through her presentation of masculine ideals. She immediately introduces and comments on masculinity and the expectations placed on men in the opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice*:

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

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters (Austen 5).

She instantly links male identity to wealth, marital, and social status and one might ask what Austen suggests about the masculine ideals she constructs in the novel. Does she criticize the superficial and stylized ideals and how these pressures shape masculinity? Austen aids the reader in questioning the nature of masculinity through the construction of her male characters. For instance, Darcy appears to embody wealth, reserve, and a sense of duty, which are characteristics of aristocratic masculine ideals. In contrast, Bingley is seen as unreserved and emotionally available, which points to an emerging masculine ideal. The difference between Darcy and Bingley's masculinities may indicate the societal transitions of Regency England where the rising influence of the middle class and its values met traditional chivalric masculinity. How does Austen construct these contrasting masculinities and in what way do they reflect the social tensions and evolving ideals of Regency England? Moreover, characters like Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham provide additional variations of masculinities. Collins' focus on securing a marriage may suggest his strict adherence to patriarchal ideals while Wickham's initial charm, social, and deceitful manners, signal both aristocratic and emergent masculinity. In what ways does Austen critique the stylized aspect of masculinity through these characters?

This essay examines how Austen constructs and critiques masculine ideals in early 19th-century England through an analysis of her male characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. Using Connell's concept and framework of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical foundation in this

study, it will explore the hierarchical nature of masculinities and societal structures that strengthen them. It will contextualize the characters within the evolving society of Regency England and examine how the construction of masculinities in the novel challenges or conforms to the expectations placed on men during this period. By analyzing what forms of masculinities are embodied and what Austen is doing with these embodiments, this study aims to uncover how Austen questions prevalent masculine norms and explores emerging modern male identities.

2. Theory and Method

Masculinity is a product of an extensive societal structure and “social relations” (Connell 29). Connell highlights how we must examine “changes in those social relations” in order to understand masculinity historically (29). This concept and perspective form a foundation for this essay’s analysis of male characters in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. It will situate masculinity within the evolving social and cultural landscape of Regency England, which will help in the exploration of Austen’s construction and critique of masculinity. Hegemony and hegemonic masculinity are two important concepts in critical studies of men and masculinities (Howson & Hearn 41), and Connell’s concept of “hegemonic masculinity” is key in this analysis. He defines the concept of hegemonic masculinity as:

the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (77).

This concept was later revised by James W. Messerschmidt, who further stated how this form of masculinity is not static. Connell and Messerschmidt argue in their article in *Gender and Society* that it is a concept that changes over time and cultures, where it also adapts to social, historical, and material contexts (832). It is an ideal and cultural norm that legitimizes male dominance and sets a standard for being a man, which supports patriarchy. It reinforces male dominance and female subordination by presenting these roles as natural or acceptable in the culture (Howson & Hearn 41). The normative definition of masculinity is what “men ought to be” and a “social norm for the behavior of men” (Connell 70). Hegemonic masculinity was normative where it “embodied the currently most honored way of being a man” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). However, there are multiple masculinities which are a “fundamental feature of the concept” as well as the “hierarchy of masculinities” and the “relational structure”

(846). Howson and Hearn argue how hegemonic masculinity's "meanings and practices" must be recognized as given through "its radically contingent symbiotic relations with the other within the gender system" (47). Furthermore, they build on Messerschmidt and Connell in "moving away from the individuation of hegemonic character" and remove the assumptions that men inherently receive privileges and status from hegemonic masculinity, replacing them with a critical perspective that regards privilege as shaped by the evolving nature of social constructions (47). French and Rothery expand on Connell's framework of hegemonic masculinity and emphasize the distinction between "external hegemony" – the dominance of men over women – and "internal hegemony," which describes "the hierarchy of dominance that exists between men" (5). This allows for an analysis of masculine identity in upholding or challenging patriarchal norms in both interpersonal and societal relations. This concept is therefore relevant in the analysis of masculinities in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, where the novel includes multiple male characters who embody varying expressions of masculinity. These masculinities embodied in the text portray forms of elite, restrained masculinity that align with the expectations of a man like Mr. Darcy in early 19th-century England. Furthermore, Mr. Collins' stylized and dutiful masculinity helps serve as a contrast to the dominant masculine ideal. Simultaneously, there is a softer masculinity that challenges the traditional male norms portrayed through the character of Mr. Bingley. Connell and Messerschmidt emphasize how hegemonic masculinity can be seen as complicitly supported by men who receive "the benefits of patriarchy" even though they do not fully embody a "strong version of masculine dominance" but still benefit from the patriarchal structure (832). In the analysis of the novel, this theoretical lens will be applied to see how Austen embodies different masculinities and what she does with these embodiments.

As Clery suggests, Austen had a wide experience of men and "grew up in a household centered on the formation of men" (334). Her writing depicts this comprehension of men, where she constructs and reconstructs masculinity. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the societal structures and changing historical context are depicted, which, as previously stated, contribute to the formation of masculinity. Wolfson states that Austen's world reflects the societal ideals in how it was widely understood that:

Office-holders had to be members of the Church, that the power in Parliament was the hereditary House of Lords, that the districts for the elective House of Commons were controlled by conservative landowners like Mr Darcy, whose borough might amount to a few hundred souls: principal families, their employees, and tradespeople dependent on their patronage (116).

The historical context and ideals are depicted in the novel, where one can connect these to the masculinities Austen constructs. The dominant class of the 18th century was a class of landowners who were embedded in capitalist economic relations (Connell 190). Another type of masculinity that was intertwined with the state was gentry masculinity since it provided “local administrations ... and staffed the military apparatus” and upheld the tradition of violence to defend “family honor” (190). David Kuchta further examines the gentry and aristocratic masculinity following the Glorious Revolution and incorporates Burke’s notion of how ideals of gender were significant in preserving the upper-class society throughout its eighteenth-century crisis, reinforcing “aristocratic cultural and political authority” (91). Ideas on modest masculinity and new definitions of masculinity were part of the merging of “power by the English aristocracy,” where cultural hegemony was reestablished (93).

During the Regency period, there was an evolving nature of a gender order that was gradually displaced by “new hegemonic forms” where a variety of “subordinated and marginalized masculinities” emerged, which is evident in the male characters analyzed in this essay (Connell 191). Aristocratic ideas of masculinity were challenged by middle-class reformers in the early 19th century, particularly concerning wealth and consumption (Kuchta 135). Aristocrats were seen as privileged, and middle-class men created a new version of masculinity as an “explicitly political construct” to gain power and influence (135). The concept of masculinity evolved through this social change, and it is important to note the transformation in class relations and that middle-class men acquired aristocratic ideals to understand masculinity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The middle-class image of the self-made man has its “roots in an eighteenth-century aristocratic ideology of masculinity,” which emphasizes morality to critique aristocratic remnants and redefine masculine ideals (136). Kuchta observes that masculinity was constructed through cultural and political struggles, which middle-class masculinity ultimately reflects (139). He further examines the evolving aristocratic masculinity as a response to the criticism of its luxury and consumption. They were meant to embody discipline and honor to maintain their dominance in an evolving society (139). However, as previously mentioned, masculinity was redefined, and they had to adapt to the evolving norms.

A previous study on masculinity in *Pride and Prejudice* has been made by Michael Kramp in his book *Disciplining Love: Austen and the Modern Man*. He focuses on the embodiment of Burkean masculinity, which he defines through Darcy’s characteristics of being “noble, well mannered” as well as upholding “the majesty and tradition of his Pemberley estate that symbolizes his aristocratic lineage and grounds his cultural authority” and how this is

culturally significant for Austen's time (74). He emphasizes Darcy's Burkean aristocratic manner and how he anticipates "both the impending collapse of idealized Burkean masculinity and an important cultural shift in England's expectations for its male leaders" (74). Kramp contrasts Darcy with Bingley and Gardiner, who represent the emerging trade-class masculinity and the "idea of progress" (75). In relation to this study's theories of Austen's construction of masculinities, it aligns with the analysis of aristocratic masculinity and societal expectations. Kramp emphasizes the dynamics between the two masculinities in how "Darcy's close relationship with Bingley suggests that the gap between new and old money is shrinking" and that it illustrates "an important transition in the nation's conceptions of class and masculinity" which this study similarly suggests (76). However, the present study diverges from Kramp by exploring Austen's construction of masculinity, not just through Darcy and Bingley and their dynamic, but also through Collins and Wickham. It will focus more on what kinds of masculinities are embodied and what Austen does with these embodiments, where Kramp will complement the arguments with his historical perspective and analysis of Darcy and Bingley.

The main argument of this study proposes that Austen constructs and embodies the normative masculinities of her time by portraying several masculinities in *Pride and Prejudice*. This essay examines how Austen accomplishes this by using Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity to explore hierarchical structures and aims to situate Austen's characters within the socio-historical context of Regency England. Through the characters of Wickham, Collins, Darcy, and Bingley, this study highlights the contrasting masculine ideals of aristocracy and the emerging modern "middle-class" male ideal. It focuses on how these masculinities are embodied in their interactions with societal expectations and change, analyzing what Austen is presenting through these diverse embodiments.

3. Flawed and Stylized Masculinity

Austen presents different models of rejected and flawed masculinity through the characters of Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. This analysis turns to these two male characters of the novel to further examine how Austen constructs this type of masculinity by exploring the relationship to hegemonic masculinity and whether their masculinities are complicit, inferior, or theatrical.

Mr. Wickham embodies a stylized chivalric and genteel masculinity of the masculine ideal. He is a handsome and sociable man who has "all the best part of beauty, a fine

countenance, a good figure, and a very pleasing address” (Austen 71). This could be associated with Connell’s hegemonic masculinity in how it is an ideal and cultural norm that Wickham is trying to embody. Mr. Wickham is seen as a man with an “agreeable manner” who talks to people in a way that makes them feel that “the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker” (75). These qualities make him attractive to Elizabeth Bennet, as well as to society at large. In this way, his masculinity seems effective and inviting, fitting into the masculinity norm of the time, as well as a sociable emergent masculinity. However, this is later revealed to be false, where his real personality shines through his stylized version of it. Hegemonic masculinity was also achieved through a culture where the logic of the patriarchal gender system was seen as morally and socially upright (Connell & Messerschmidt 832). Seen from this perspective, Austen constructs Wickham as someone trying to uphold this façade of a gentleman by using the appearance of charm and beauty, as well as through his military status, without truthfully embodying the moral integrity that gentlemanly behavior requires. His true character is revealed later in the novel, where his lies against Mr. Darcy are revealed, and his attempted elopement with Lydia Bennet shows his irresponsibility and selfish pursuit of personal gain. Wickham fails to uphold this illusion of attaining the masculinity norm, which exposes his flawed masculinity that does not fulfill the expectations of the gentry class.

As French and Rothery argue, the ideal of gentlemanly masculinity was emphasized by moral authority (5). Wickham’s actions do not comply with these responsibilities and instead rely on the external labels of masculinity, namely the appearance of sociability and charm. Connell describes the normative definition of masculinity and how the majority of men do not “meet the normative standards” and how “this point applies to hegemonic masculinity” (79). He continues by stating that the majority of men still “gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (79). Wickham benefits and relies on this dividend, even though he does not fully conform to the masculine ideal in the end, yet he gains from patriarchy in his right to command and honor, which is how “men gain a dividend from patriarchy” (82). Wickham does not present genuine masculine responsibility. Austen notes this lack of gentlemanly qualities in Elizabeth’s narration of him where she states that both she and her sister Jane know “what Wickham is. We both know that he has been profligate in every sense of the word. That he has neither integrity nor honour. That he is as false and deceitful, as he is insinuating” (270). Their use of morally charged terms like “false,” “deceitful,” and “profligate,” suggests that Wickham lacks moral authority while trying to embody the

appearance of a gentleman. French and Rothery explain and expand on how Connell identifies the origin of the “modern gender order in four developments” and how the “sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries” were highlighted as a time of “internal civil strife and dynastic foreign wars” (8). They note how the “fiscal-military state” provided a more extensive establishment of men’s power than had ever been achieved before, which was embodied by the gentry who were “reliant on the honour code” (8). Wickham’s attempt to perform this gentry ideal through his manners and military status collapses since he fails in his moral leadership. Austen constructs a man who tries to fit into the social system’s stereotypical ideal of masculinity in the early 19th century but fails.

The true colors of Wickham are revealed by Mr. Darcy in his letter to Elizabeth, who had earlier thought that Wickham was “the most agreeable man” she had seen (Austen 142). In Darcy’s letter, he explains how Wickham was the son of a respectable man who “had for many years the management of all the Pemberley estates” (194). Darcy’s father had “the highest opinion of” Wickham and “intended to provide for him” so his profession could be in church (194). However, after Mr. Darcy’s father died, he expected to receive financial advantage and “resigned all claim to assistance in the church” and used his “studying the law as a mere pretence, and his being now free from all restraint, his life was a life of idleness and dissipation” (195). This turning point in the novel exposes Wickham’s failure to live up to either the gentry model of masculinity or the emerging middle-class self-discipline ideals. He manipulates society with gentlemanly appearances but struggles to fulfill the internal ideals. He does not embody hegemonic ideals in full, but, as previously stated, benefits from the patriarchal system, which Connell and Messerschmidt call “complicit masculinity” (832). Wickham performs traits of the masculine ideal of, for instance, a chivalric man. Kramp suggests that Mr. Darcy is an exemplar of the chivalric Burkean masculinity, which is demonstrated through his being “noble, well mannered” as well as being “disciplined” (74). Wickham tries to portray these ideals as well, which can be seen in Elizabeth’s narration of his character: “His countenance, voice, and manner had established him at once in the possession of every virtue” and she continues by questioning his real self, “in every charm of air and address...she could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess” (Austen 200). His charm temporarily authorizes him into society, but he lacks a moral foundation, which makes his masculinity flawed and rejected. His version of manhood does not conform to the masculinity norms of ethical and civic responsibility. Wickham imitates and exaggeratedly stylizes these traits and norms, which

makes him involved in the reproduction of normative masculinity and helps reinforce it, even though he fails to live up to it.

Similarly, Mr. Collins does not fulfill the masculine norms. He embodies an exaggerated complicit masculinity, where he conforms to the patriarchal norms confidently but gracelessly, which results in his masculinity being ineffective. Mr. Collins is attached to the older order, obsessed with class, and is excessively dutiful. When he first comes to visit the Bennet family, he writes them a letter stating how he feels it is his duty “as a clergyman” (61) to “promote and establish the blessing of peace in all families within the reach of my influence ... I flatter myself that my present overtures of good-will are highly commendable” (62). This portrays how Mr. Collins views himself as a moral authority. He takes pride in his sense of duty and aims for it to align with the societal expectations in the hierarchical structure. He uses overly formal language and proclamations in this passage of the novel, which reflects the ritual of being elite. His behavior emphasizes the aspects of gentlemanly duty expected from a clergyman of his standing. Collins is exaggeratedly careful to show the principles of possessing honor, truthfulness, self-awareness, and courage, which were some of the “deepest parts of the elite identity” (French & Rothery 245). These are constant principles, while the outer layers like politeness and sensibility can change over time, which Mr. Collins embodies quite perfectly. Society expects him, as a gentleman, to act as Mr. Collins does, however, Austen constructs him as theatrical in how he portrays this type of masculinity. He overdoes it and instead becomes conceited and untruthful, which goes against the gentleman's norm. He strictly follows his office's rituals and is connected to the elite value system, but his behavior is received as stylized. He is described as seeming to be “a most conscientious and polite young man,” which is seen throughout the novel in how he constantly strives to do his work or duty well (Austen 62).

Mr. Collins relies on social hierarchy rather than his individual worth, which is evident in his relationship with Lady Catherine de Bourgh. He displays excessive deference to Lady Catherine and is obsessed with praising her, unveiling his subservience to social propriety. Collins repeatedly informs society of his relationship with Lady Catherine. Through this, Mr. Bennet observes that she pays “attention to his wishes” and shows “consideration for his comfort,” and that Mr. Collins is “eloquent in her praise” (65). This suggests how Collins' expressiveness of this subject elevates him “to more than usual solemnity of manner” (65). It highlights how he acquires his sense of importance and masculinity through his association with social superiors like Lady Catherine de Bourgh, rather than his own personal qualities and accomplishments. Collins constantly praises her, which reveals how he believes that her power

reflects onto him. He feels more important by being close to someone powerful like Lady Catherine. This uncovers a masculinity that complies with Connell and Messerschmidt's theory of complicit masculinity since he benefits from patriarchal structures even though he does not demonstrate or embody an independent, hegemonic authority. French and Rothery expand on Connell's framework of "internal hegemony," which refers to "the hierarchy of dominance that exists between men" (5). Some masculinities gain power by associating themselves with authority figures, which Collins visibly does. It is evident that this places him in a position of complicit and internal masculinity, and his value is derived from his presence of social power, rather than autonomous authority. This is reflected in the quote, "he seems to be a most conscientious and polite young man, upon my word; and I doubt not will prove a valuable acquaintance, especially if Lady Catherine should be so indulgent as to let him come to us again" (Austen 62). Mr. Bennet's statement portrays how Mr. Collins' worth is dependent on Lady Catherine and her approval instead of his personal qualities. Austen has constructed his self-worth as being built through his relationship with a woman who can be seen as upholding patriarchal structures, which allows him, as a man, to maintain power by supporting her social status and the values of patriarchy. Positioning him with her instead of embodying independence makes him an example of internal hegemony. His masculinity operates through a dependence on hierarchical approval.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh advises him "to marry as soon as he could, provided he chose with discretion" (65). Collins follows her opinions and boasts in them, letting them lead him. Austen describes Mr. Collins in the novel as not being "a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society," which presents his character as lacking the intellectual and social maturity expected of a gentleman (69). This strengthens the portrayal of Mr. Collins as upholding patriarchal norms by internalizing a subordinate role in the male hierarchy as well as associating himself with Lady Catherine:

The respect which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility. Having now a good house and very sufficient income, he intended to marry; and in seeking a reconciliation with the Longbourn family he had a wife in view ... if he found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report (69).

This highlights how he supports the gender order, even though he does not take on an active leadership role and can instead be read as having a fragile and dependent personal authority. His view on marriage is portrayed in this passage, where it is evident that he positions it as

something to be achieved for status rather than love or intimacy. He follows the opinions of Lady Catherine, who, as previously stated, is a proper, respectable woman. His compliance with Lady Catherine reflects how marriage serves as an instrument for affirming his masculinity and social position rather than emotional interest. It appears that his approach to marriage is more transactional. As a consequence of this, instead of Collins being seen as the heir to the Bennet estate, which should exhibit the legal and economic structure that reinforces male power, Austen portrays him as a man who impersonates this authority without truly possessing moral and social responsibility. His approach to relationships and how they should award him personal gain, as well as social status, reveals how masculinity, as Howson and Hearn argue, is not a static identity but one concluded through relationships (47). In this, Mr. Collins can be read as rigidly employing a hierarchical approach to these relationships, which uncovers a failure to adapt to masculine norms. He is a satirical figure who is theatrical and stylized and embodies a version of masculinity that relies on hierarchical structures to assert its power. He is a clergyman who attempts to perform a model of masculinity of the rising middle-class that, as Kuchta suggests, was borrowed from an older aristocratic ideal of masculinity, as seen in his excessive formality and obsequiousness of Lady Catherine de Bourgh (137).

Austen constructs the characters of Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins to critique and expose flawed and stylized versions of masculinity in Regency England. Wickham has an initial charm and adherence to the gentlemanly ideal, which represents a stylized masculinity. His failure to uphold ethical and moral responsibilities breaks his façade and reveals his complicit masculinity that does not conform to true gentlemanly behavior. Similarly, Mr. Collins' servile behavior and rigid attachment to social hierarchy presents an ineffective, exaggerated, and outdated form of masculinity. He is reliant on external validation, specifically from Lady Catherine de Bourgh, which highlights his lack of independence and authority. He is dependent on the patriarchal structures, and as well as Mr. Wickham, portrays a complicit masculinity. These two characters are both striving to attain the idealized version of masculinity in Regency England, but instead of underlining their inconsistency with it, they unveil their flawed masculinities. Austen's portrayal of Wickham and Collins presents the societal pressures and expectations placed upon men in the Regency era. This exposes the deep-rooted vulnerabilities in pursuing hegemonic masculinity since it changes over time and is redrawn, where the stylization of hegemonic masculinity may find itself anachronistic.

4. Idealized and Progressive Masculinity

The presence of idealized and progressive masculinity in *Pride and Prejudice* is evident in the characters of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley. Austen constructs and redefines their masculinities as both aspirational and emotionally authentic. Both characters portray a masculine ideal of Regency England, yet in different forms. Darcy can be seen as fulfilling a more prevalent masculinity norm of an aristocratic man in his manners, whilst Bingley portrays more of an emerging middle-class type of masculinity. These two, in relation to each other, bridge the social order even though they sometimes contradict each other. Austen smooths out the tension between the aristocratic reserve and the emerging sociability through their complementary masculine traits and their friendship. Their masculinities differ from Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins, who, as the previous analysis revealed, tried to embody and follow the masculine norm but were too stylized and theatrical to conform to it. This part of the essay will analyze Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley to reveal how Austen presents and constructs an evolving ideal of masculinity that embraces both strength and emotional openness.

Mr. Darcy is described as having “handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of having ten thousand a year” and was marked as being a “fine figure of a man ... and he was looked at with great admiration” (Austen 12). His income of ten thousand pounds a year put him among “400 families who could be described as great landlords” and the wealthiest in the country (Mingay 19). This made him an exceptionally noble man and part of the gentry. English society after the French Revolution evolved, and men were instructed to “prevent emotion from endangering their civic identities,” where “early-nineteenth-century England actively sought strategies to curb the passionate behavior of men ... and England was especially nervous about men’s susceptibility to love” (Kramp 2). These norms and expectations placed on men are evident in Mr. Darcy in how he conforms to these ideals. Society finds him “to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased” (Austen 12) showing off his good fortune when he does not dance and “declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party ... He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world” (13). This behavior reflects his initial embodiment of the rigid ideals of upper-class English masculinity. He is emotionally restrained, which, as previously stated, was the ideal of the years after the revolution, where men were supposed to manage their emotional expressions. Therefore, Darcy distancing himself does not have to be arrogance or pride as

Elizabeth Bennet suggests in the passages quoted above, but traits of socially conditioned masculinity. These traits can be tied to hegemonic masculinity where he acts “as the pattern of practice” and “embodied the currently most honored way of being a man” (Connell & Messerschmidt 832). He refuses to dance or engage with others, which might reveal his commitment to his emotional and social distancing, indicating his hegemonic standing.

Darcy finds status important and holds firm to ideas about what is right and wrong in society, reflecting the ingrained values of the landed gentry. It is often highlighted in the novel how Mr. Darcy sees Elizabeth Bennet and her family as inferior to him. The ideal of having to marry someone of his own class is presented by his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who does not approve that Elizabeth is an appropriate match. She explains to Elizabeth how it was the “wish of *his* mother” that he would marry his cousin and continues by stating that “a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family” prevents the wishes of these sisters (Austen 336). His social conservatism is further reinforced by his family who states that “honour, decorum ... forbid” (336) this match since he and his cousin are “descended on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father’s, from respectable, honourable, and ancient, though untitled families” (337). As Clery notes, Darcy is a landowner who is “isolated by his wealth and rank, and only finds happiness when he recognizes his social responsibilities” (334). His masculinity is validated by conforming to these inherited roles and class boundaries, which results in successful masculinity, whereas Wickham and Collins’ attempts to conform result in failure. Gentry masculinity and “the class of hereditary landowners” were “reliant on the honor code,” which contextualizes Darcy as a member of the gentry (French & Rothery 8). His masculine ideal of honor and restraint reflects this older status-bound masculinity. Darcy believes that marrying Elizabeth would be “a degradation,” which reflects his adoption of these values where masculinity is closely tied to duty and to preserving lineage (Austen 185). Elizabeth wonders why “Mr. Darcy came so often to the Parsonage” and how it “could not be for society, as he frequently sat there ten minutes together without opening his lips; and when he did speak, it seemed the effect of necessity rather than of choice – a sacrifice to propriety” (176). As Sherry notes, the word “society” has nothing to do with “conventions, laws, or traditions” (611). He suggests Austen is using it as synonyms for “company or companionship.” The concept of society could suggest “for Jane Austen the presence of other individuals with whom it is either a duty or a pleasure to mix” (611). He highlights how this word is important to define before reading *Pride and Prejudice* to get a better understanding of the “limits to society and sociability” present (612). It is evident that Darcy is raised by elite masculine codes and embodies a restrained and obligated masculinity,

rather than engaging in emotions. His discomfort when visiting the Parsonage illustrates his limits as an upper-class man. He does not speak but visits because he sees it as his duty. Elizabeth believes that there can be no other reason for him to visit the Parsonage than of duty. The hegemonic norms of not being emotionally expressive suppress social connections for decorum. Austen constructs his masculinity as being seen as a limitation rather than a strength by expressing Darcy's discomfort as well as transforming his character from rigid to vulnerable.

If one looks at the concept of society from Sherry's definition, Darcy could be visiting out of pleasure rather than out of duty, which deviates from his initial masculine traits. Darcy's character progresses throughout the novel, where he moves away from his static, hierarchical masculinity and embraces his emotional side. He challenges the static model of what a man should be. Austen redefines and reconstructs the ideal of masculinity, where Darcy moves from an archetypal hegemonic authority to a man who is willing to go against social expectations, prioritizing integrity and emotional honesty. He proposes to Elizabeth and exclaims: "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (Austen 185). He acts out of love, which reflects a "psychosocial understanding of masculinity" (Jefferson 63). Jefferson states how "one consequence of reducing hegemonic masculinity to a set of traits or characteristics is to render the notion static," which Austen challenges (72). Austen moves away from these rigid characteristics that hegemonic masculinity entails and constructs a man who begins to embody a dynamic and relational form of masculinity. Darcy was first seen as chivalric and rational but develops into a romantic figure. Kramp argues that his masculinity is "an exemplar of a vanishing type of man" and that "the aristocratic tradition that Darcy embodies and Pemberley institutionalizes is waning" and that England at the time of the novel was in the process of establishing "new models of male social identity" (12). Even though he is seen as an ideal, he is at the same time criticized due to his manners at the beginning of the novel, which highlights the evolving society of early 19th-century England, where people slowly began to change their views on what hegemonic masculinity entailed. His development from following "Burke's outline for a man of ancestral heritage" as "noble, well mannered" to showing vulnerability and professing his love for a girl under his class, further strengthens this notion (Kramp 74).

Mr. Bingley, however, represents what is admirable about the emerging masculinity ideal that arises in the "important cultural shift" happening in England during this time (74). In contrast to Mr. Darcy, Mr. Bingley embodies a man who does not follow the aristocracy. He is not threatened by emotional openness, which was not the current masculine norm. He was "lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early ... such

amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend!” (Austen 12). The description of Bingley being “amiable” suggests how friendly and sociable he is, contrasting his openness to Mr. Darcy’s more reserved demeanor. As Kramp notes, he does not follow the idealized social “subjectivity” and instead creates an “individualized” subjectivity, which in his case is ordering “his aesthetic of existence around the pursuit of pleasure” to enable him to expand his social role and responsibility (75). It is evident that a new norm of a gentleman is emerging in how society, particularly Jane in this instant, describes him: “‘ he is just what a young man ought to be,’ said she, ‘sensible, good humoured, lively ... with such perfect good breeding’” (Austen 16). Masculinity is not a fixed identity but a product of a substantial societal structure that evolves with the “changes in those social relations” (Connell 29). Bingley’s masculinity exemplifies this change. He serves as a contrast to the previously dominant, hierarchical model of manhood, like Mr. Darcy, as well as the stylized masculinities of characters like Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins. Rather than embodying and replicating the reserved and emotionally restrained aristocratic masculinity, Bingley is sociable and emotionally accessible, which are key aspects of his identity. However, his masculinity aligns simultaneously with a relational model of masculinity that moves away from the “individuation of hegemonic character” (Howson & Hearn 47). He does not fully conform to the isolated and self-contained individuation which can be seen as typical of hegemonic masculinity. He challenges the “ossified” model of hegemonic masculinity by existing in relational distinction to more aristocratic figures like Darcy, as well as to his romantic relationship with Jane. His masculinity is not solely understood as an individual possession; it is also seen as relational. His masculinity is shaped through relationships rather than authority.

Austen presents masculinity as socially dynamic rather than individually fixed through the character of Bingley, illustrating what Jefferson refers to as a “psychosocial understanding of masculinity” that considers more of the emotional depth and social engagement in forming masculinity (Jefferson 76). Even though Bingley was “of a respectable family” and “inherited a property to the amount of nearly an hundred thousand pounds from his father,” he is not constructed as being bound by the rigid expectations of hegemonic masculinity (Austen 17). The masculine superiority Darcy upholds is approached by Bingley, but he “occupies a new position in the social hierarchy somewhere above the trade class and below the gentry” (Kramp 77). This position allows him to explore the emerging masculinity instead of basing his identity on his class privilege. Austen constructs a masculine ideal that is more emotionally open and adaptive. Bingley is a positive and open character who enjoys dancing and being sociable. He felt, for instance, that he:

had never met with pleasanter people or prettier girls in his life; every body had been most kind and attentive to him, there had been no formality, no stiffness, he had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and as to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful (Austen 18).

Bingley approaches social situations with ease and does not display a hierarchical pride, which distinguishes him from Mr. Darcy's aristocratic reserve and the mannered duty presented by Mr. Collins. Mr. Bingley neither embodies external hegemony nor internal hegemony since he does not strongly assert dominance over women or other men. Bingley exists within this structure but does not try to enforce it, which makes him embody a "complicit masculinity" since he benefits from patriarchy even though he does not fully embody a "strong version of masculine dominance" (Connell & Messerschmidt 832). Although he benefits from his privileges of class and gender, Bingley does not exhibit behaviors that sustain patriarchal power. He instead underscores hierarchal norms through his language and attitude, which is evident in his response to gender expectations and female accomplishments: "'It is amazing to me,' said Bingley, 'how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished, as they all are (Austen 38) ... I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this ... I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished'" (39). Austen presents Bingley as reflecting on the absurdity of the social system, where, in contrast, Darcy asserts a more rigid standard stating that "I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished" (39). Darcy reinforces the elite ideal and embodies a more external hegemony, asserting a more authoritative masculinity in comparison to Bingley's. Bingley does not seek to distinguish himself through power over others and acknowledges women's performance instead of belittling them.

New "hegemonic forms" of masculinity gradually emerged during the evolving society of the Regency Period, which Bingley embodies (Connell 191). The relationship between Darcy and Bingley bridges the shifting social order, and examining their contrasting masculinities reveals how this historical moment shaped the evolution of masculine ideals. Darcy initially embodies an aristocratic masculinity built upon internal hegemony, class consciousness, and reserve, whereas Bingley embodies the rise of a more relational and emotionally accessible masculinity. Their behaviors contrast and demonstrate a coexistence of older and newer masculine forms. Austen constructs their friendship and dynamic to reflect on the cultural shift toward another form of masculinity. Kramp suggests that "Austen's text reveals a strong cultural anxiety" about Bingley in his "penchant for destabilizing love relationships" (77). Mr.

Bingley is very attentive to Jane and is willing to follow his heart rather than uphold rigid social expectations. However, “Darcy is an active sponsor of Bingley who has taken special care to direct the tradesman’s efforts to learn proper English masculinity” (80). Mr. Darcy “saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage,” which highlights how Bingley’s position within the social hierarchy is still dependent (Austen 181). The use of “imprudent” here suggests that Darcy is trying to uphold the social conventions of class and implies that the marriage would be socially inappropriate. This further frames Bingley, as Kramp notes, as “a man who needs to be reminded of the dangers of love and the powerful social forces that ought to inform an aspiring English man’s behavior” (80). Jane Bennet notes how she “cannot believe” that Bingley would leave Netherfield without cause and questions why they would “try to influence him” insisting that “they can only wish his happiness,” to which Elizabeth replies: “They may wish many things besides his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride” (Austen 134). This moment summarizes the social and economic expectations embedded within masculinity. Bingley is caught between two masculinities, not rejecting patriarchal norms nor submitting to them.

Austen presents both idealized and progressive masculinity in *Pride and Prejudice* where the evolving gender norms of Regency England are reflected and constructed in the novel. Through Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley, Austen contrasts rigid, aristocratic masculinity with emotionally and socially adaptable masculinity. Darcy and Bingley have a “steady friendship, in spite of a great opposition of character,” where Darcy is “the superior” and is initially “haughty, reserved, and fastidious,” whereas Bingley is marked by the “easiness, openness, ductility of his temper” (18). Austen uses their friendship to bridge the gap between aristocratic reserve and emerging middle-class sociability. Darcy embodies hegemonic masculinity, following the social order and self-restraint, but gradually opens himself to vulnerability and love. Bingley’s masculinity aligns with Connell and Messerschmidt’s idea of complicit masculinity, where he benefits from patriarchy without fully embodying hegemonic ideals, even though it could be argued that he embodies an emerging masculinity that was becoming the ideal. Austen states in the novel how “the manner in which they spoke of the Meryton assembly was sufficiently characteristic,” where Bingley felt “acquainted with all the room,” whilst Darcy saw “no fashion” and “no pleasure,” which underscores their contrasting worldviews (18). By using these distinctions between the men, Austen critiques the restraining aristocratic masculinity and depicts an alternative. She constructs masculinities as being flexible and evolving.

5. Conclusion

This essay has sought to investigate Jane Austen's construction of masculinities in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* and has aimed to explore the hierarchical nature of masculinities in the evolving society of Regency England. By applying Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, this essay has examined the variety of ideal masculinities in the novel. It has situated the male characters of Mr. Wickham, Mr. Collins, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Bingley within the socio-historical context of Regency England to get an understanding of the masculine norms present at the time. Multiple types of masculinities were analyzed in the essay where the contrasting masculine ideals of aristocracy and an emerging middle-class male ideal were in focus. This essay situated and contrasted these masculinities with each other to see how they conformed to or defied the hegemonic ideal. It looked at the characters' interactions with societal expectations and change when analyzing how Austen constructed and presented these diverse masculinities.

The theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity has been essential in this analysis. It has looked at how the concept does not only function as an individual quality but as a result of social structures. Class, inheritance, and social norms are crucial in the analysis of what it means to be a man. By situating the characters in the socio-cultural realities of Regency England, the essay has looked at how masculine identities upheld or challenged patriarchal norms in societal relations. The analysis has underlined how Austen presents male characters that align with the notion that masculinity norms are a social construct dependent upon context, and has highlighted how masculinity is shaped by the social and historical context of Austen's time. The novel is set in the Regency era which was marked by a significant social transformation that shifted the ideals of gender and morality, which is evident in the male characters depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*. By contrasting flawed and stylized masculinities to idealized and emergent masculinities, Austen reflects on how masculinity is not a fixed identity but a socially constructed and adaptable ideal.

Through the characters of Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins, the essay examined the contrast between appearance and substance in how both men presented external traits and behaviors that conformed to hegemonic masculinity, while they internally lacked the moral and social depth to sustain it. Austen constructs these characters to critique and expose a flawed and stylized version of masculinity. Wickham embodies a masculinity that adheres to the gentlemanly ideal

with his charm and sociability, which later is destroyed by his moral failings that break his façade. Collins is overly attached to social hierarchy and servile behavior, presenting an outdated form of masculinity reliant on external validation. Both characters fail to fully meet hegemonic ideals, even though, they both gain from the patriarchal system, which reinforces the theory of complicit masculinity. Austen critiques and exposes societal pressures and expectations placed upon men in the Regency era by constructing these flawed masculinities. She highlights the vulnerabilities in pursuing hegemonic masculinity since norms change over time and older norms may no longer be sufficient or sustainable, which can lead to, as in this instant, failure, and ridicule.

Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley present idealized and progressive masculinities in the novel where they reflect the evolving society of Regency England. The essay analyzed how Austen presented two contrasting but complementary forms of idealized masculinity through these characters' friendship. Darcy embodies hegemonic and aristocratic masculinity, following the social order of restraint and duty. Bingley embodies an emerging masculine ideal where he is emotionally open and socially adaptive. Their friendship bridges the gap between old and new masculinities. The transition of the Regency society is smoothed out from strict class-based roles to more emotionally open ones. Even though Darcy is an exemplar of aristocracy, Austen constructs his masculinity as evolving where he changes from reserved to vulnerable. By contrasting these two characters, Austen challenges the static, hierarchal models of masculinity and offers a redefined and emerging ideal.

Pride and Prejudice presents multiple masculinities where Austen constructs prevalent masculinity norms of Regency England as well as emergent masculine ideals. A spectrum of masculinities is portrayed in the novel that reinforces patriarchal structures and redefines them. Using the theoretical lens of hegemonic masculinity, this essay has examined how Austen explores the masculine ideals of aristocracy and the emerging middle-class through her characters in how they are embodied in their interactions with societal expectations and change. It has highlighted how masculinity adapts to social, historical, and material contexts as well as Austen's construction of masculinities within the evolving society of Regency England.

References

- Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Penguin Group, 2014. First published in 1813.
- Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society*, vol. 19, no. 6., Sage Publications, 2005, pp. 829-59.
- Clery, E.J. "Austen, and Masculinity." *A Companion to Jane Austen*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 332-334.
- French, Henry, and Mark Rothery. *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900*. 1st, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Howson, Richard, and Jeff Hearn. "Hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, and beyond." *Routledge International Handbook of Masculinity Studies*, edited by Lucas Gottzén, Ulf Mellström, and Tamara Shefer, 1st ed, Routledge, 2020, pp. 41-47.
- Kuchta, David. *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850*, University of California Press, 2002.
- Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. University of California Press, 2005.
- Jefferson, Tony. "Subordinating Hegemonic Masculinity." *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2002, pp-63-88.
- Sherry, James. "Pride and Prejudice: The Limits of Society." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 19, no 4. 1979, pp. 609-22.
- G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 19-24.
- Wolfson, J. Susan. "Re: Reading *Pride and Prejudice*: 'What think you of books?'" *A Companion to Jane Austen*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 112-22.