CREATING THE VICTORIAN MAN

An Analysis of the New Masculine Ideals in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

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Abstract

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Sense and Sensibility

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Abstract: During the long eighteenth century there was an ongoing shift in masculine ideals which ultimately created the stereotypical Victorian man. This essay will examine Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* to find out if this shift is visible in her writing. To determine if this is the case I will do a character and plot analysis focusing on the three male characters most central to the novel, Colonel Brandon, Edward, and Willoughby. The analysis of these three characters will be done in relation to the changes in masculinity that are most relevant to Austen's writing. Specifically, they have to do with masculinity asserting itself in opposition to femininity and effeminacy in different ways. I have limited my analysis to the creation of an English national masculinity connected to manly restraint, and the increasing gap between masculinity and femininity. This essay will show that the two heroes Brandon and Edward correspond to the Victorian ideals and that the villain Willoughby does not, which ultimately shows that Austen supported the new masculine ideals.

Keywords: Jane Austen, Masculinity, National Identity, Gender, the long eighteenth century, *Sense and Sensibility*

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1. Introduction

In his essay, John Tosh establishes that there was "no greater contrast . . . than that between the uninhibited 'Georgian' libertine and his sober frock-coated 'Victorian' grandson" (218), and even though this quote is about popular stereotypes, it still reveals that the ideal masculinity changed during the 18th century and well into the 19th century. The transformation in the masculine ideals was due to many different events and alterations during this era, which affected how the ideal man was supposed to behave. Changes in the class structure of England as well as a decline of violence and bearing of arms (Tosh 222), the creation of an English national masculinity in opposition to the French national masculinity (Cohen 57), a greater divide of sexual differences between male and female (Hitchcock and Cohen 7) and, lastly, changes in manner and behaviour (Georgia 15) were all part in transforming the ideal masculine man in England during the long eighteenth century. A question that arises is whether the change from the 'Georgian' libertine to the sober 'Victorian' is visible in the work of the writers active during this era. To find this out I have chosen to analyse *Sense and Sensibility* in light of these changes to see how Austen portrays her male characters. I want to find out if Austen created male characters that suit the old concept of masculinity or if she contributes to the development of the new masculine ideals that emerged during the long eighteenth century. Of course, not all of the changes listed here are relevant to Austen's work. This is why I have limited my analysis to the creation of an English national masculinity and the increasing gap between masculinity and femininity. I am going to argue that Austen was involved in supporting the new masculine ideals that emerged in the long eighteenth century through her novels; i.e she was an author that was involved in the creation of the sober 'Victorian' man, and not the preservation of the 'Georgian' libertine. I intend to use my analysis of Austen's male characters Edward, Colonel Brandon and Willoughby to support my claim about her position in the creation of the new English masculinity.

The many different changes that affected masculinity point to a definition problem that John Tosh explains is important for researchers and historians to take into consideration, which is the fact that masculinity cannot only be considered to be a personal matter for the individual, but a political and public matter. Stephen M. Whitehead also affirms that "men, as

a gender group, are omnipresent across the social world" (5), in contrast to women, who have been defined through exclusion from certain parts of society. This omnipresence creates a general complexity when defining masculinity that does not exclude the 18th century. It is therefore a hard task to answer the question of what precisely masculinity is, since masculinity affects the whole structure of society and not just individuals. Another fact that adds to the confusion of analysing masculinity is that we tend to accept biological assumptions about gender more generally than we accept them as being socially constructed. As Raewyn Connell states, scientific claims about masculinity have a hegemonic edge over other common sense knowledge since "western science and technology are culturally masculinized" (6) and she explains that this ranking of knowledge reflects the social order of gender. Whitehead also gives us an explanation for why scientific claims are readily accepted in society when he explains that "when we turn and face the violent and dysfunctional behaviour of males and the material inequalities of gender, it is easier to excuse them as biological and functionally determined" (43) instead of being created sociologically or psychologically. However, a biological stance in the question of masculinity does not yield much truth since it stems from the idea that all men carry a biological core masculinity, which is not justifiable or realistic. Whitehead explains that the core of the sociology of masculinity is to understand the connection "between the illusory character of masculinities, the material consequences of men's practices and the influence of culture/environment on this process" (5). Therefore, when analysing masculinity it is important to keep in mind the influence of society upon men and their masculinity as well as the individual's contribution to the social order of gender. This is also true to the history of masculinity. Since society is always developing, its influence upon people and our idea of gender is always changing.

When it comes to the eighteenth-century, the contrast that Tosh points out between the 'uninhibited Georgian libertine' and the 'sober Victorian grandson' stereotypes shows how masculinity is not static or fixed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen point to a new model that changed the way people perceived gender during the long eighteenth century, which "posits a transition from a 'one-body' to a 'two-body' model of human anatomy and sex difference" (6). Even though they recommend caution while applying this model to research, it is a theory that helps explain the increasing difference between masculinity and femininity since the introduction of the two-body theory changed the biological implications of what it meant to be a man and a woman. They point out that before the introduction of this new

theory, the reproductive organs of females and males were considered to be homologous, and what determined if you were male or female was "the experiences which the body underwent and the possession of a peculiar mix of humours" (6) rather than the anatomy of your body, since the anatomy for both men and women was of the same origin. Therefore manliness was a quality that both men and women could aspire to have and be praised for. But with the rise of the new outlook on anatomy there came to be a new need for distinction between the sexes that was more focused on anatomical differences than human character. The idea that woman was different from man in both body and mind created the stereotype of the "passive and delicate Victorian woman" (8), but it has become evident that the distinction was in reality little concerned with women, but rather with an urgency to define masculinity in contrast to effeminacy and femininity. Hitchcock and Cohen assert that "the recent work on heterosexual effeminacy and masculinity suggests instead that the new construction of gender was deeply concerned with men . . . If, as increasingly appears to be the case, men possessed the more unstable and contested gender, the urge to fix the category of 'male' in the new anatomy becomes all the more significant" (8). This urgency to define masculinity was therefore not only focused on differentiating it from women but also any man who exhibited effeminate traits. Cohen makes it clear that it was commonly believed that a gentleman had to be good at making conversation and be polite in their manners; for this, men ought to speak to women and learn from their conversations. This was of course a problem in the fashioning of the English gentleman according to Cohen, since "politeness and conversation . . . were thought to be effeminating not just because they could be achieved only in the company of women, but because they were modelled on the French" (47).

However, this problem was not easily overcome for 18th century Englishmen, since they were commonly considered to be silent rather than talkative and this English taciturnity was according to Michèle Cohen "not a valued trait in the first part of the century" (48). In fact, French visitors found the Englishmen to be, not only silent, but also blunt and unwilling to please others in conversation. The necessity then to base the nature of conversation and politeness upon the French and women caused a tension in the creation of an English masculinity, since women and the French embodied the femininity and effeminacy men sought to separate themselves from. To solve this problem, Englishmen had to establish their own manliness which Cohen argues they did by embracing their taciturnity and blunt sincerity. Since politeness was still a necessary trait for the gentleman it was reworked "[by]

constructing a 'true' and a 'false' politeness" (59). The 'false' politeness was connected to a kind of pleasing but untruthful politeness used in the public space, while the blunt and sincere 'true' politeness was connected to the domestic sphere. Therefore, by the late 18th century, it became manly to be sincere rather than pleasing in conversation. The bluntness and taciturnity became critical traits for English gentlemanliness as it "was now evidence of the strength of mind and manly restraint" (57) of Englishmen. The previous advice that conversation with women was necessary to achieve politeness was also adjusted to include conversation with men as "[h]omosociality alone could secure manliness" (60).

Connell, Tosh, and Whitehead stress that masculinity is a wide subject that cannot only be understood in the private sphere but must also be understood in relation to the public sphere. However, Austen's novels are about the lives of women in the private sphere. She writes little on what is going on outside of her heroines' lives and barely enters into the world of the men. Despite this, Jennifer Claire Georgia argues that Austen was well aware of what occurred in the world. She claims that the 'restrictions' that critics believe women wrote within were not restrictions at all but "were consciously chosen by novelists who were fully aware of many other spheres about which they could write" (51). In fact, Georgia notes that Austen had insight into current events through her brothers; two "who fought in the Napoleonic wars and became admirals; another, a failed banker, who married a French countess fleeing the Terror and became stepfather to the godson of the Governor General of India" (52). Therefore, it can certainly be argued that it was not a lack of knowledge of the world that made Austen write about the private sphere, but rather an unwillingness from the authoress herself. However, the plot of her heroines are dependent on the underlying plot of the heroes, as the lack of knowledge about the hero's plot drives the story forward. In fact, E. J. Clery argues that Austen invented the modern romance narrative, as she is "the first to recognize the extraordinary narrative power of keeping the hero's point of view in reserve" (339). By having the main plot be dependent on the heroine's inability to know the hero's plotline, Austen creates a suspense in the story that is "unequalled by shipwrecks, bandits, abductions, or eerie sounds" (339). However, this does not mean that we see little of Austen's male characters and that an analysis of their masculinity would be fruitless. It is rather the opposite, as Clery previously states that by looking at any of her novels "we can establish that Austen had a great deal to say about masculinity" and "that she subscribed to a masculine ethic that underpinned her portrayal of social mores and historical change" (339). She also

describes how Austen's male characters were perceived as being "attuned to a quality of hyperrealism" (334) by her contemporary critics. She points out that this appraisal is especially strong in Austen's portrayal of young men, like Edward or Willoughby, who have just started finding their own way in the world. Similarly, Sarah Ailwood describes in her essay how Austen moves away from the traditional literary masculinities of the courtship novel to make her men more lifelike. Ailwood particularly explains how Austen addresses the romantic hero, which is supposed to be a dashing and courageous young man, in her characterization of Colonel Brandon, Edward Ferrars and Willoughby. She points out that criticism upon these characters are often based upon assumptions about desirable masculinity or a failure to specify what it means to be a proper English gentleman. However, she goes on to clarify that this criticism indicates that Austen is challenging these assumptions and archetypes, and that she uses a masculinity that is more complex and closer to real life, rather than showing her lack of understanding for masculinity and how to write male characters.

To find out if Austen promoted the new changes in masculinity I am going to focus my analysis around the three main male characters of the novel: Edward Ferrars, Colonel Brandon and Willoughby. I will do a character analysis in relation to their plot development since I believe the fate of each character tells us a lot about whether Austen wanted the reader to think the character's masculinity was desirable or not. I also believe that Elinor and her opinion of the men offer insight to whether their actions are good or bad, since Elinor frequently acts as a moral voice to her sister and others in the novel. Chapter two of this essay discusses how masculinity differentiates itself from femininity in Austen's novel. It focuses on the three characters' task of becoming men and their struggle for independence while forming a household with the heroines. Chapter three examines masculinity in connection to effeminacy and the English national identity. This is carried out by analysing the men in relation to the characteristics of the national identity and the fop. Lastly, Chapter four will contain my conclusion.

2. Masculinity versus Femininity

Hitchcock and Cohen's description of how men had to assert their masculinity in contrast to femininity shows how scrutinized masculine behaviour was during the long eighteenth century. A question we can ask ourselves as readers of Austen's fiction is whether we see this urge of asserting one's manliness in her novels. This cannot be answered without first establishing what aspects of life that was needed to assert one's manliness. Judith Wilt suggests that "[b]eing, or becoming, 'somebody' is the conventional rite of the male Mystery; becoming 'nobody' is its hell, a descent towards femaleness" (60). Being in possession of an occupation or an estate were some of the ways a man could become 'somebody' in the turn of the 19th century and set himself apart from the women and effeminate men (Wilt 73). The greater difference between the sexes also manifested itself as domestic and sexual dominance over women (Tosh 223-224). As has been discussed above, to be a man one had to have a certain amount of control over women. To become the head of a household or to live a libertine lifestyle were therefore ways to assert your manliness in the sphere of men, and to be too dependent on somebody else was to be too much like a woman, which compromised your manliness. In *Sense and Sensibility* we can clearly see how the three male characters are on a scale of independence. Brandon is the most independent, Edward becomes independent at the end of the novel and Willoughby is not independent at any time in the novel.

The situation of the three men in *Sense and Sensibility* shows us that to be a man you had to be independent and be able to provide for yourself, but you also needed a family and a wife to provide for. Brandon is the one of the three men that is the most independent all throughout the novel, though he is still in want of a wife. Edward and Willoughby are both dependent upon their relatives for their income, inheritance and future happiness. Likewise, their occupation governs how much freedom they have to control their own lives, and since neither Willoughby nor Edward have an occupation, they are very much dependent upon their relatives. This means, of course, that their manliness is at stake since it is far too much alike femininity to afford them the role of being 'somebody'.

To add to this confusion about their identity, researchers have concluded that Austen's novels were very much affected by the war with France. Many men went out to fight in the war and for those few who stayed at home it became even more important to find a

worthwhile and meaningful occupation in stead of military service (Clery 335). Therefore, being in possession of a military rank automatically grants manliness, since men who were civilians had to find other ways to prove their masculinity. Colonel Brandon is by these standards the one of the three men that has the most fulfilled masculine identity since he has a military occupation which grants him manliness. His occupation has also afforded him some sense of being well informed because of his travels, which allows him an authoritarian role. Indeed, while Willoughby and Marianne laugh at the idea that Brandon might have said anything other than that India was hot, Elinor maintains that Brandon is far more intelligent and worldly than they might expect when she answers them that "I may venture to say that his observations have stretched much farther than your candour" (53). This sense of worldliness and an informed mind which he receives from his occupation only adds to Brandon's manliness, and takes him even closer to a fulfilled masculine identity. Brandon is also the closest out of the three to being a 'real' gentleman. His masculine identity is already somewhat steady by already having an estate and an occupation, and his polite behaviour and manners adds to the picture of him being a gentleman. He is considered by Elinor to be a "sensible man" who "has seen a great deal of the world; has been abroad; has read, and has a thinking mind" (52). He is also described as having a "particularly gentlemanlike" (36) address which speaks in favour of his manliness. However, his masculinity is still lacking, since he still has no wife that helps him confirm his heterosexuality and set him apart from effeminate men. Even if Brandon is respected throughout the novel by Elinor and, eventually, by the reader also, his masculinity is still not completely fulfilled. This is one of the ways Austen drives his plot forward and entangles it with the Dashwoods. Brandon has fallen in love with Marianne but finds it completely hopeless that she would reciprocate his feelings since she is in love with Willoughby. Brandon's plot becomes a way of supporting the other characters by his actions and service towards the Dashwood sisters, which ultimately helps him win the heart of Marianne and complete his masculine identity. It is therefore clear that both an occupation and possession of a woman was needed to fulfil your masculinity and only when Brandon has achieved domestic dominance over his wife has he become a fulfilled man, a 'somebody'.

Edward's journey for achieving a complete masculine identity and becoming a 'somebody' is at the centre of Austen's characterisation of him and this journey is also what Elinor's plot relies upon. Ailwood maintains that Edward is "constructed through a series of

negatives: what he is not, rather than what he is" (77) and that he can be said to possess an unfulfilled masculinity since he has not conformed with society's demands for a desirable masculinity yet. He is not married and is in no possession of any household for himself. He also does not participate in any sport, socializes little with his peers and seems to not be making sexual conquests, i.e. he does nothing of what was important to assert one's masculinity as opposed to femininity and effeminacy. Therefore the characterization of Edward can be seen as bordering on femininity rather than masculinity because he does not conform to the standards of masculinity during this era. To make matters worse, it is clear from Jane Austen's novels that the life and happiness of a woman during the 18th century were in the hands of men. Whether or not your husband was rich, or at least had a salary that would enable the pair to have an agreeable life together, was a key point in the happiness of the heroine. For example, both Edward and Elinor realise that the income they possess between them will not grant them any happiness in their marriage if they cannot find a way to get more money. Fortunately Edward's mother bestows upon him an extra 250 pounds per year, which enables them to get married with ease and without any concern over their yearly income. However, it is strongly hinted at that would his mother not have granted him this extra income, their marriage would have been called off or at least postponed until better circumstances would arise. Austen's heroines are in this sense limited in the prospects of a future husband, and to let her heroines marry rich or with a convenient income was a way to ensure their happily ever after.

Edward's plot is therefore a journey from being 'nothing' to becoming 'somebody', not only for his own manliness but for Austen's heroine to be able to have her happy ending, and to achieve this Edward has to gain a full masculine identity. However, his secret engagement to Lucy is a way for Austen to show the reader that, even if he is an unfulfilled man at the start, this is soon going to change. We learn early on in the novel about his impending marriage to Lucy and their engagement gives him one of the signs needed for masculinity to distinguish itself from femininity, namely, possession of a woman, or at least the promise of future domestic dominance.

This is not all that Austen affords him. By the end of her novel Edward has gained a social and occupational role, a wife, a steady home and an affordable yearly income from his mother. These were all important to establish an 18th century masculinity and by letting Edward gain a full masculine identity through his marriage to Elinor and occupation of the

parish given to him by Colonel Brandon, Ailwood assures us that Austen is not "failing to conform with socially-approved models of desirable gentry masculinity" (79). She believes rather that Austen is critiquing an old-fashioned view on desirable masculinity associated with wealth and status and is instead presenting a new approach "which values domesticity, private life, and social usefulness above all else".

This new approach is very close to the new masculinity that emerged during Austen's time. It is a clue that she is not trying to keep the old standards of masculinity but rather helps to develop them into the Victorian standards that were beginning to form, when it was important to set oneself apart from femininity and effeminacy by portraying extreme masculine traits. However, Austen is not simply perpetuating masculine standards, but through her representation of Edward's plot as a journey, she shows how these masculine standards could be hard to obtain for a man and that life for a man was not so simple indeed. Edward has no way of obtaining his masculine identity by himself since the pressure he experiences from his relatives holds him back from achieving his own ideal life as a clergyman. Edward's journey is therefore dependent on forces out of his control and only through the kindness of his friends and the folly of Lucy's sister is he able to create the happy ending Elinor deserved. Even though Austen clearly represents the new standard of masculinity, she is definitely not doing it in a simple way with Edward and the complexity of his character and plot are good examples of why the praise that her work has been awarded for its 'quality of hyperrealism' is well deserved.

Since Willoughby is the closest to a villain *Sense and Sensibility* comes, his characterisation and plot are quite different from Edward and Brandon. Instead of a journey to achieve a masculine identity close to the new ideal, Willoughby's plot represents rather a standstill in old ideals and bad ways than a progressive new identity. It is also working in a way that undermines Marianne's happy ending. At first glance, Willoughby is, in all ways, the perfect man for Marianne. He expresses his feelings just as readily and strongly as she does and with the same disregard for what impact his opinion might have on the feelings and honour of the person being discussed. He is described by all the characters in the novel as displaying excellent manners, having a lively spirit, being very affable and also very handsome. He is, at least by first impressions, all a true gentleman should be. When Sir John tells them about how he stayed up dancing almost all night at Christmas, Marianne is indeed

very pleased when she exclaims that "whatever be his pursuits, his eagerness in them should know no moderation, and leave him no sense of fatigue" (46).

Unfortunately, since Willoughby is not independent and is incapable of becoming so on his own, it becomes clear to Marianne that she chose the wrong man to place her hopes upon. We find out later in the novel that Willoughby is living above his own income and is drowning in debt. His extravagant lifestyle and the reason he is in such deep debt is explained by himself as being because he "had always been expensive, always in the habit of associating with people of better income . . . Every year since my coming of age, or even before, I believe, had added to my debts" (299). Willoughby is therefore dependent on the inheritance he is to receive from his aunt, but his aunt revokes his inheritance when the scandalous affair Willoughby had with Colonel Brandon's niece Eliza is revealed and his only salvation is to marry the rich miss Grey instead of Marianne. However, Willoughby is not a character that we are supposed to like or admire, rather we are supposed to dislike him and his actions towards the two girls. This implies that Austen thought his morals were wrong just like her heroine and moral voice Elinor. Hitchcock and Cohen explain that during a period of controlled sexuality between 1650 and 1750 "only a relatively small majority of men could achieve a fully formed masculine role" (11). After this period, the new two-sex model and, as a result, the greater importance placed on reproductive sex formed the new obligatory heterosexual masculinity that created a pressure on men "both to marry and have penetrative sex outside of marriage" (11). As a result, men "increasingly participated in irresponsible sexual behaviour leading to illegitimate pregnancy, as a way of demonstrating a 'normal', and increasingly problematic, masculinity" (11). We recognize this aspect of 18th century masculinity in Willoughby and his actions towards Eliza and Marianne. If Edward and Brandon are Austen's way of showing the benefits of and promoting the new Victorian masculinity, Willoughby is a way for Austen to also show its bad sides. Willoughby has lived the life of the 'uninhibited Georgian libertine' making his masculinity more in touch with the old ideals than the new ones. It is a behaviour that lacks both self-restraint and middle class respectability. Furthermore, since Tosh, as mentioned earlier in this essay, pointed out that the libertine way of life 'ceased to be a culturally validated lifestyle,' it is no surprise that Austen doesn't let Willoughby have a happy ending. Karma catches up with Willoughby and he is no longer to receive any fortune when his aunt finds out about his affair with Eliza, causing him to have to lead a life with a wife he does not love or be ruined. Willoughby's fate tells us

something about what Austen wanted to expose with her novel, since Austen always gives her heroines happy endings with marriages of mutual affection, but leaves Willoughby with an unhappy marriage. It becomes clearer then that Austen did contribute to the development of a new masculinity and used Willoughby to expose the irresponsible behaviour and what it might lead to. Not just for the women, but for the men themselves.

The fact that Austen does not let Willoughby have a happy ending also shows the importance of letting Edward and Brandon gain a masculine identity according to the new ideals, while Willoughby does not. This indicates that Austen thought we should value the new masculine ideals over the old ones or the harmful ones and that she perpetuated these ideals through her characters. Furthermore, Austen cannot leave the reader without any explanation from Willoughby about his conduct and when Marianne falls ill, Elinor finds him calling on her to tell his own account of the story. Nevertheless, his confession does not really justify any of his actions in a way that can enable him to get Marianne back. It also becomes apparent to Elinor that if Willoughby had married Marianne they would have been without Mrs. Smith's fortune and would have been living a life in poverty and debt. Elinor suspects that, although he would have had a wife that loved him and cherished him, the poor living situation would have eventually caused them to quarrel and still become unhappy. This reveals how important it is to Austen that the husband is independent and can take care of his wife. Without the fortune of his aunt and his good reputation destroyed, Willoughby fails to be an adequate man and husband for Austen's heroine. He also never gains his full independence. He seeks out the wealthy miss Grey and marries her for her money so as not to become financially ruined. However, this leaves his masculinity compromised, since he simply goes from being dependent on one woman's money to another's. Willoughby has therefore failed to become 'somebody' in connection to the new masculine ideals. While Edward and Brandon become the two heroes because of their fulfilled masculine identity, Willoughby becomes a 'nobody'.

3. Masculinity versus Effeminacy

In addition to femininity, Englishmen had to be able to assert their masculinity in contrast to effeminacy. Over time, this created an English national identity that was expressed particularly in contrast to the French and the 'fop,' which were both associated with effeminacy in England. The characteristics of the English national identity was identified as taciturnity and blunt sincerity, rather than with the insincere politeness and the ability to make charming conversation which was related to effeminacy and the French. Taciturnity and blunt sincerity became signs of the 'strength of mind and manly restraint' that was important for the Englishmen to assert their masculinity. On the other hand, the signs related to effeminacy was what Cohen describes as "the fop" (51), a "Frenchified" (51) man that has embodied the politeness of women in the early 18th century. I believe the change from a French dishonest politeness to an English frank politeness is visible in the way Austen portrays Willoughby, Brandon and Edward. Willoughby is the closest *Sense and Sensibility* comes to this idea of the 'fop' and the French politeness, while the new English national identity is awarded Edward and Brandon, since they are perfect examples of English taciturnity and sincerity. To find out if Austen did create a novel that valued the English national masculinity rather than the French, one has to analyse the characterization and plot of Edward, Brandon and Willoughby.

As I have been discussing earlier, Edward's masculine identity is portrayed through what he is not rather than what he is, and one of the things he is not is talkative. He "was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing. He was too diffident to do justice to himself; but when his natural shyness was overcome, his behaviour gave every indication of an open affectionate heart" (17). Here Austen makes Edward's lack of confidence and shyness clear from the outset. Even though Edward lacks the kind of confidence required to resemble the Englishmen's blunt sincerity, he is in no lack of the taciturnity that Englishmen took pride in. A few chapters after this first account of Edward's character, we see again how he sees himself when he explains that "I never wish to offend, but I am so foolishly shy, that I often seem negligent, when I am only kept back by my natural aukwardness" (93). However, this is followed by Marianne commenting that she thinks he is reserved, which she believes is worse. Edward reacts quite strongly to this remark to Elinor's

surprise and she points out that Marianne "calls every one reserved who does not talk as fast, and admire what she admires as rapturously as herself" (93). This exchange draws to mind the creation of the new national identity as opposed to the French. Since Marianne always shows strong emotions and is not afraid of conversation she resents Edward's shyness and lack of showing affection for Elinor, much like the French resented the English taciturnity. The dynamic in this scene between Edward's reserved manner and Marianne's exaggerated feelings resembles the then present opposition between the French and the English. Edward's reaction suggests that he thinks that he has been ill-judged by Marianne and Elinor's reassurance confirms this.

It is clear then that Marianne still preserves the old ideals through her dismissal of Edward's character and her praise of Willoughby's and her own, which is more like the French. This might suggest that Austen is also still perpetuating these ideals. However, one has to keep in mind what the ending of the novel tells us, which is that Marianne's lack of restraint over her feelings ultimately gives her more grief than good when she pines over Willoughby, and that her happy ending is dependent on her marriage with Colonel Brandon which helps her gain a more healthy sensitivity. While Willoughby could have been the typical romantic hero who would have been marrying Marianne in the end, that role is transferred to Colonel Brandon, who is the exact opposite of the romantic hero according to Ailwood. She also points out that Colonel Brandon exhibits true sympathetic feelings unlike Willoughby and that Austen promotes this kind of sensibility which can elicit social improvement through sympathy for others. Actually, the critique of Austen's choice to have Marianne marry Brandon is, according to Ailwood, a product of "the assumptions about the courtship novel that readers have brought to the text" (73), and evidence that Austen is intentionally forcing the reader to become disappointed with the outcome by constantly dismissing the probability of them marrying, all in an attempt at opposing the traditional literary masculinity of the courtship novel. However, Ailwood reminds us that Colonel Brandon also exhibits traits of sensibility just like Marianne and that, instead of embracing Willoughby's thwarted sense of sympathy, Marianne learns "to channel [her sensibility] into social improvement" (76) with the help of Colonel Brandon.

Brandon can therefore be seen as a sensitive person, but without the exaggeration of feelings that Marianne and Willoughby possessed. Indeed, Brandon seems to be one of the most moral and sympathetic characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, alongside Elinor, which

makes him eligible to become Marianne's husband. In fact, Elinor is particularly fond of Brandon and "in spite of his gravity and reserve, she beheld in him an object of interest. His manners, though serious, were mild; and his reserve appeared rather the result of some oppression of spirits, than of any natural gloominess of temper" (51). This passage confirms Brandon's taciturnity and reserve, which is very much in line with the new masculinity that was being formed. But it also hints to him having learned to take control over his feelings and, surely, further ahead in the novel we learn about the tragic love story he had experienced when he was younger. Brandon may be a reserved person more in line with the English masculinity than the French; however, he has a clear reason for controlling his feelings. Instead of simply giving him this trait, Austen gives us a reason for why he has become more reserved, which adds to the complexity of his character.

Still, there might yet be an additional reason for why Austen chose him as Marianne's happy ending. Georgia explains that "[t]he Georgians tended to care more about appearances, while the Victorians concerned themselves with morals. All of these opposites stem from the primarily aristocratic character of 'high society' at the beginning of the period, while by the end, the emphasis was on 'good society,' the ultimate manifestation of middle-class respectability" (24). I believe this new alignment towards good society is visible in Austen's novels and the fact that Marianne ends up with Colonel Brandon is a sign of this. In *Sense and Sensibility*, it is clear that what Austen seems to value the most in a future husband for her heroines was not conformity to high society, wealth or good names; she valued good society. A well-informed mind and a good heart seem to be traits that both Brandon and Edward possess, and as Elinor declares that "sense will always have attractions for me. Yes, Marianne, even in a man between thirty and forty" (52) it is clear that we should not rule out Brandon as a good match for Marianne. Even though he does not live up to her own expectations of how a sensitive person should act in the beginning of the novel, she actually changes her mind:

> Marianne Dashwood 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, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendships, voluntarily to give her hand to another! - and that other, a man . . . whom two years before, she had considered too old to be married, - and who still sought the constitutional safe-guard of a flannel waistcoat. (352)

This makes it clear that Austen valued the type of society that was focused on goodwill and social improvements rather than 'high society'. This is why Brandon becomes Marianne's husband rather than Willoughby, even though he seemed to be the perfect match for Marianne. His fear of living below his expectations of a comfortable life causes him to marry miss Grey and shows that he valued an expensive life over a life in good and happy society, and rules him out as an acceptable husband for Austen's heroine. Brandon, however, exhibits all traits that Austen wanted for her heroine, even if he is portrayed as an old reserved man with a flannel waistcoat. In fact, Eileen Sutherland describes how readers are often fooled by Willoughby's charm and are "too inclined to ignore Jane Austen's specific descriptions of Colonel Brandon's competence and worth" (58). She explains that Marianne is naive in her presumptions when she associates a flannel waistcoat to "aches, cramps, rheumatisms, and every species of ailment that can afflict the old and feeble" (Austen 40, Sutherland 58). Instead Sutherland points out that a flannel waistcoat is to be linked to the army, and the courageous men who served during the wars that Brandon should be associated with. As she writes, "[f]ops and dandies and town beaux might consider their silk, striped or brocaded vests as the epitome of sartorial splendour, but *Real Men Wore Flannel Waistcoats*" (58, emphasis original).

In contrast to the heroes Edward and Brandon, the villain Willoughby does not exhibit the manly restraint which characterised the English gentleman. The moral voice of the novel, Elinor, does not think that he is restrained. In fact, he exhibits more qualities linked to the 'fop' and effeminacy than the other two men. Elinor's opinion at the start of the novel is to think well of Willoughby, but her critique of him is clearly the same critique she has upon her sister. She believes Willoughby to "say too much what he thought on every occasion, without attention to persons or circumstances" (50). Ailwood is one researcher that takes this critique by Elinor quite lightly. However, considering Elinor's character and that this behaviour is also disliked in her own sister, it could be viewed as rather harsh criticism by Elinor, who believes this is a fault that urgently needs to change for her sister to be happy. It is clear that Elinor regards manner and intelligence in her company higher than other qualities, especially if those qualities result in bad manner or insult towards other people. This would mean that for Willoughby to have a happy ending, he would need to change his behaviour to match the new masculine ideals. Indeed, Andrew Dowling confirms that "[m]asculinity was not questioned in the nineteenth century; rather it was natural and obvious. The meaning of masculinity was

self-evident and it involved emotional reserve and physical discipline, what was known as the Englishman's 'stiff upper lip'" (1). This quality of being reserved is connected to the English national identity and is a characteristic that Willoughby seems to lack. At the start of their attachment, Marianne and Willoughby are determined to not conceal their feelings for each other as Marianne "abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve" and "Willoughby thought the same" (54). They are also both inclined to gossip about their close relations. For example, when they converse with Elinor about Colonel Brandon, and Willoughby exclaims that "Brandon is just the kind of man . . . whom every body speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to" (52). Willoughby's flagrant courtship of Marianne, his charming conversations and the constant gossiping indicate his inclination towards the stereotype of the 'fop' which is "the quintessential inhabitant of social spaces, where he is a favourite of the Ladies whom he seeks to charm" and "like the French, he is voluble and talks too much" (Cohen 51).

Further examination of his character and actions also show his lack of the "self-control and the restraint of reckless impulses . . . [which] was a key attribute of the masculine stereotype" (Mosse 15). His inability to restrain himself when he has told Marianne that he has to leave for London is one of the clues about how he lacks the 'manly restraint' that characterised the national identity. During this scene, he is nearly unable to withhold his emotions as "his countenance shewed that he strongly partook of the emotion which overpowered Marianne" (76). His face colours as he speaks to Elinor and Mrs Dashwood, and he stops mid-sentence at the mere thought of not being able to come back to meet Marianne again. He then continues to say that "it is folly to linger in this manner. I will not torment myself any longer by remaining among friends whose society it is impossible for me now to enjoy" (77), and storms out of their cottage. Another scene that hints at his unrestrained character is his confession to Elinor near the end of the novel. When Marianne lies on what could have been her deathbed, Willoughby suddenly shows up drunk to find out if Marianne has survived her illness or not. He somewhat forces this conversation upon Elinor, who would have left the room at the sight of him had he not stopped her before she could turn the doorknob (296). These outbursts of emotion and spontaneous actions are clearly more linked to the 'fop' than to the English national identity, especially when one considers how Colonel Brandon reacts in similar circumstances. For example, he does not forget his company when he receives the letter that tells him where his niece is hiding. He walks out to read the letter,

but returns to tell them in a collected manner that he is "particularly sorry . . . that [he] should receive this letter to-day, for it is on business which requires [his] immediate attendance in town" (65). Instead of leaving hastily, he explains calmly to his company that he is unable to continue their excursion to Whitwell and that he has to leave. Furthermore, he also asks Elinor's permission to tell her the secret about Willoughby in a composed and affectionate manner rather than imposing on her. He says that "My regard for her, for yourself, for your mother - will you allow me to prove it, by relating some circumstances, which nothing but a very sincere regard - nothing but an earnest desire of being useful -" (193) and stops before completing the sentence. This shows his sincere wish for being helpful to them rather than an underlying intent to sway their mind about Willoughby. The exceptional restraint and good behaviour that Brandon exhibits is of course connected to the English national identity and the new masculinity, while Willoughby's actions are not.

However, even if Willoughby has been characterised as a Georgian libertine and a 'fop', Austen can still not let him fall into the stereotype trap. By going back to analyse Willoughby's confession, we can see that Elinor is of course very surprised at his behaviour and she responds to his sudden intrusion by saying that "your coming here in this manner, and forcing yourself upon my notice, requires a very particular excuse" (298). This excuse is undoubtedly Austen's way to redeem his character. As we have seen, Willoughby undergoes three changes of characterisation in the novel which Ailwood relates to two essential literary masculinities that were at play in the eighteenth-century courtship novel: "the ideal morally exemplary hero, and the dangerous lover or seductive villain" (69). She explains in detail how he undergoes these changes, and completes her argument by pointing out that Willoughby's confession to Elinor restores his complex masculine character by giving him some redemption of his actions towards her sister. However, his conduct has destroyed his chance of ever recovering the heroism and charm that Austen initially bestowed upon him, thus avoiding the common literary stereotypes and giving him a complex and lifelike masculinity.

4. Conclusion

With this essay I wanted to find out if Austen created male characters that were either closer to the old or the new masculine ideals that emerged during the long eighteenth century. My standpoint in this question was that her male characters were indeed influenced by the new ideal, which would mean that Austen encouraged the new ideal of the 'sober Victorian' man rather than the 'Georgian libertine'. I have argued that this is visible in the plot and characterisation of Willoughby, Colonel Brandon and Edward.

In the second chapter I claimed that Austen's drive for the plot of her three male characters is their journey towards an ultimate fulfilment of their masculinity. To do this, their masculinity had to assert itself as different from femininity, which is what I have examined in my second chapter. The discussion is centred around the male task of becoming 'somebody' which meant that you had to establish both dominance over and dissimilarity to women and femininity, respectively. I argue that we can see clearly that Austen valued these new masculine ideals when we analyse the different ways that she lets them fulfil their masculinity. Considering that the heroine's plot is dependent upon the hidden plot of the heroes, the men need to become 'somebody' for there to be a happy ending at all. Since Edward and Brandon are the two heroes of the novel, Austen lets these two men fulfil their masculine identity as it is needed for them to be eligible husbands. However, her villain Willoughby never completes his masculine identity and is therefore the one who is the most associated with femininity. He remains a 'nobody' throughout the novel.

In the third chapter, the discussion is instead centred around effeminacy and the fact that the creation of the English national identity was a way for men to show their dissimilarity to effeminacy. The characteristics of the national identity were the Englishmen's taciturnity and blunt sincerity. They became signs of manly restraint which was an important feature of the Victorian man. Both Edward and Brandon exhibit these traits in different ways and to a different extent. Edward is shy and bad at charming conversation which makes him more inclined towards the English taciturnity, while Brandon is in all ways a sensitive man with the ability to restrain his emotion. These characteristics make them good examples of the British gentleman and therefore perfect husbands for Austen's heroines. Willoughby's character, on the other hand, is more inclined towards the 'fop', a stereotypical 'frenchified'

man who exhibits effeminate traits. Which means that, in the end, he is unfit to be Marianne's husband and instead he is doomed to a loveless marriage.

However, I have also made it clear that even if my analysis is centred around ideal masculinities, Austen's male characters are far from stereotypes. I have argued throughout this essay that Austen's characters have complex and realistic masculine identities. For example, one of the major character twists in *Sense and Sensibility* is Willoughby's confession to Elinor, which gives him some redemption for his actions and shows the reader that he is not a simple libertine. That she is letting him explain himself "is vital to Austen's dual projects of reassessing socially-approved standards of gentry masculinity and dispelling the myth that men and masculinities can be categorized by or simplified into stereotypes" (Ailwood 71). Even if we can see traces of the new masculinity that was being formed through simple stereotypes in the novel, the fact remains that life is more complicated and of course these masculine traits are more complex in real life. I believe this is what Austen shows us in her novels. The quality of 'hyperrealism' that was awarded Austen's work actually shines through in her male characters in *Sense and Sensibility* just like in her Elinor and Marianne. In the end, she was just as good at creating versatile and complicated male characters as she was at creating her female heroines.

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