

# Compare and contrast two authors' representations of masculinity

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Compare and contrast two authors' representations of masculinity Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* comment on the political, social and cultural issues of their time through their representations of masculinity. The authors' challenged conceptions of class and patriarchy that shaped their society, by demonstrating what their protagonists' desired in a potential husband. They emphasised the importance of this, allowing men to live complete, moral and content lives. The authors' used their protagonists' interactions and conflicts with Darcy and Rochester to delineate the ideal model of masculinity through their emotional maturity, allowing them to join in a unity of equality with the protagonists'. Furthermore, Sarah Ailwood contributes (2008: 9-10): ... socially sanctioned and publicly approved models of masculinity ... [are examined in] *Pride and Prejudice* ... [and analysed] ... by exploring the means through which masculine genders are socially and culturally constructed, scrutinizing the desirability or undesirability of such masculine ideals (particularly in relation to women's needs and desires) and exposing the implications for individual men as well as for women, of socially imposed male gender identities. Armstrong notes Rowton's opposing view: '... women write "not as the rivals" but as the "partners" of men, it simply follows that feminine discourse will be personal and subjective rather than political or philosophical in character.' (1982: 131). The women writers that this statement refers to write as all of these, and further analysis will prove this to be true. Sexual conflict was the crucial factor for shaping the form and content of the novel. Women authors had to manage 'the difficult task of simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards'.

British society at the same time in making the shift to a growth economy, wanted to confine women to the home, devalue their labour and their political rights, which they were perpetually denied. A redefinition of gender as well as the 'powers' considered appropriate for each of the sexes was necessary in order for female literary authority to come into being (Gilber and Grubar in Armstrong 1982: 128). Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë both achieve this. 'Scholars recognise that the formation of modern ideologies of masculinity occurred precisely at the time of Austen's formation as a novelist' (Kestner in Ailwood 2008: 12). Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, two of Watt's 'fathers of the novel', constructed images of ideal masculinity in direct response to 'problems raised in women's texts about definitions of ideal men'. Defoe and Richardson successfully reflect and manipulate women writers' and readers' 'longing' for an ideal male in order to redirect discussion towards topics that were less revolutionary and threatening to the patriarchy. Bacscheider claims that the subjects of courtship and the ideal male were made troubling by women's texts, so Defoe and Richardson moved the spotlight to marriage and diverted attention away from men and onto women. Bacscheider argues that Richardson's novels 'spawned as many revisionary texts as imitative ones by women' (Frantz and Rennhak 2011: chapter 1). This demonstrates how the novel developed and female authors used the marriage plot in the domestic setting to manipulate men in the same way that men had tried to manipulate them. It was the instability of the former ideal male model at this time that allowed Austen to be so successful in questioning ideologies on masculinity. It is argued that: '... by "domesticating" the novel female

novelists used the moral authority which ideologies of feminine gender accorded them over the domestic space to create a new political power for themselves. ... She suggests that the female novelists were able to launch a highly effective critique of the state from within the home because the political nature of the critique was concealed.' (Armstrong in Ailwood 2008: 29). The class divide that was present in England in the nineteenth century is represented in both novels; it is a barrier that hinders both of the protagonists'. Both Elizabeth and Jane are treated as lowly by those who have higher social status than them. Moler points out that in *Pride and Prejudice* a variant of the eighteenth century 'art-nature' contrast is encountered when Elizabeth's forceful and engaging individualism clashes with Darcy's by no means indefensible respect for the social order of his class and pride (1968: 75). Darcy expresses his attraction to Elizabeth: 'Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger.' (Austen 1998: chapter 10). Austen satirizes Darcy's flaws of judging a person on their social status, using irony to do this. Darcy believes he is not in danger, because he assumes his prejudiced judgements will protect him. The implied reader is led to be biased in this conflict, and because the narrative is mainly focalized through Elizabeth, sees that Darcy is in great danger because he is making prejudiced judgements that may lead to his own unhappiness. Ideal masculinity is explored through class and vice versa. This behaviour had to be expressed through a male character; a female protagonist alone could not have carried these opinions effectively in a patriarchal society. The male character was

used as a vehicle to convey the authors' political, social and cultural opinions and they had to appear to be of benefit to him for the author to be able to infer that a change amongst society was needed. This is demonstrated by the authors', through Darcy and Rochester, and in how these characters act towards the protagonists' to emphasise the ideal behaviour surrounding class. In *Pride and Prejudice* it is Darcy who inadvertently conveys his own failings and the repercussions of this negative behaviour. In contrast, Brontë expresses this point in a very different way. As Ailwood states: '... the reader's access to the heroine's consciousness provided female novelists with the tools for a direct critique of men through the lens of masculine appeal to women' (2008: 35). Rochester does not show any prejudice towards Jane's social status. He addresses her as though she is inferior, as a consequence of the patriarchal values he embodies. Instead he admires her greatly for the qualities that define her, which ironically have been shaped by her background. She is a positive contrast to the aristocratic company he is used to keeping, and Brontë uses the character of Blanche Ingram and her family to emphasise this: "... I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class. " (Brontë 2010: chapter 17). Lady Ingram states this in Jane's company. This comment contributes to a conversation that scrutinizes Governesses. Blanche Ingram believes them all to be a "Tribe" that are a "nuisance". The choice of word "physiognomy" emphasises just how strong prejudice based around class was at this time. Lady Ingram is able to make a strong judgement of character that is centred only on Jane's facial features. The novel is focalised through Jane, who is also the overt narrator, and so the implied reader reads subjectively, and a tone of great

injustice is created whilst this conversation unfolds. Therefore, when Rochester admits his true feelings to Jane; it reveals Miss Ingram to have been a mere pawn to incite jealousy in Jane and of no romantic interest. When Rochester asks Jane to be his wife, the ideal reader is placed in a position where Rochester's rejection of the class system seems to be a very admirable and desirable trait. Both authors', although using very different literary techniques, question the ethics of the class system and create exactly the same effect. A desirable man must not pass judgements based on social status. A patriarchal society was a further obstruction for both protagonists' and many women of this era. Franz and Rennhak argue that when women construct and write about men in fictional worlds, not only do they analyse the causes and effects of patriarchy, but they also construct their own realities, imagining alternative masculinities that are desirable from a woman's perspective (2011: chapter 1). This is shown when Elizabeth witnesses Darcy's character's behaviour change after reprimanding his offensive opinion on her in his first proposal. She tells him that her feelings have changed. Darcy's reaction is described as, 'The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do.' (Austen 1988: chapter 58). The use of the word 'violently' emphasises the strength and uncontrollable nature of Darcy's emotions. He is now also expressive instead of repressive in terms of his emotions. He has matured emotionally through submitting to the needs of Elizabeth and can be consequently happy. His emotional transformation is effectively emphasised through the use of an omniscient third person

narrator that rarely focalises through Darcy. When the implied reader does obtain information about Darcy's insights through the use of free indirect discourse, they are extremely powerful due to the author rarely using this technique. Darcy's compliance with patriarchal behaviour is what stood in the way of him achieving emotional happiness. Rochester differs from Darcy in that he does not try to suppress his romantic feelings for Jane, however he does attempt to dominate her through manipulation and lies. As Kendrick points out, Rochester's behaviour, although he loves Jane, is still unethical because his efforts are those of mastery rather than negotiation (1994: 250). Although he is in touch with his desires he needs to be taught by Jane's moral guidance that love cannot be gained through domination. " " Never, " said he, as he ground his teeth, " never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable. A mere reed she feels in my hand! " (And he shook me with the force of his hold.) (Brontë: chapter 27). The way in which the author chooses to represent Rochester's emotions through dialogue makes Jane appear to be an object of desire. He addresses her in the third person, which dehumanises and infers she is his inferior. As King points out, the quality of courage that won Rochester's love and respect when she saved him from the fire are rejected as soon as they become inconvenient (1986: 45). The reader is led to admire Jane's strength as they are aware of how desperately Jane wants to feel a sense of belonging and value as a result of the harshness of her earlier life, "... if others don't love me I would rather die than live-I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, " Jane confided in her closest friend Helen who died whilst they were at Lowood together. Rochester, like Darcy, does embody traits that were typically patriarchal. He

is more in touch with his desires in the beginning of the plot than Darcy, but he does not respect the emotional needs of Jane. His selfishness and objectifying behaviour offended Jane, and due to how the narrative is being focalised, the implied reader interprets this as a negative model of masculine behaviour. The concept of men seeking the desire of a woman to fulfil emotional needs is one that is in direct conflict with patriarchal power. As Glover and Kaplan point out, at this time in history the differences between men and women had to be sharply emphasised and feminine traits kept firmly in their place; in men these were a sign of weakness (2000: 61). If the male characters need women to complete them, they must submit and embrace the protagonist's values, meaning that they will no longer be dominant. From the evidence it is clear to see that these women authors' were able to voice opinions through their writing about political, social and cultural issues. A patriarchal society meant they had to use male characters as a device to transmit their opinions. They used male desirability as a mechanism within the plot to explain why the model of ideal masculinity that they were portraying, was both necessary and beneficial for men and women. Mark Kinkead-Weekes sums up the place of love in the novel: '... the self can only be fulfilled through love, but that love must be between two individuals, sure of their own identity and content to let the integrity of the other remain intact.' (King 1986: 46). This approach was subtle, logical and revolutionary; it was developed at a time, as Ailwood argues, when women were advised to adopt a certain model of femininity to be considered more attractive to men. Men however, adopted a role of masculinity that was based on factors such as their public and professional reputation, their status



among their peers and community, and national interest (2008: 143). It is possible to see how presenting a new model of ideal masculinity that is dependent on desirability within the marriage plot is an ingenious way of introducing new ideologies of gender roles that empower women, and how it could effectively challenge current ideology through the instability of male identity at the same time as the novel rose to be a hugely popular and accessible genre of literature. References Ailwood, S, L. (2008) "What men ought to be": masculinities in Jane Austen's novels. Ph. D. thesis: University of Wollongong. [online] Available from: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=0&article=1124&context=theses&type=additional&sei-redir=1&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.uk%2Furl%3Fsa%3Dt%26rct%3Dj%26q%3Dsarah%2520ailwood%2520what%2520men%2520ought%2520to%2520be%26source%3Dweb%26cd%3D2%26ved%3D0CCUQFjAB%26url%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fro.uow.edu.au%252Fcgi%252Fviewcontent.cgi%253Ffilename%253D0%2526article%253D1124%2526context%253Dtheses%2526type%253Dadditional%26ei%3DY0KrTuffLceh8QOkmeiyCw%26usg%3DAFQjCNHMT05H28SdgWjdNSRw7WrJg3gehW#search=%22sarah%20ailwood%20what%20men%20ought%22> [Accessed 5th November 2011]. Armstrong, N. (1982) The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. [online] 15 (2) 127-145 Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1345220> [Accessed 23rd October 2011]. Austen, J. (1998) *Pride and Prejudice*. [Kindle version] Available from: <http://www.amazon.co.uk> [Accessed 3rd October 2011]. Brontë, C. (2010) *Jane Eyre*. [Kindle version] Available from: <http://www.amazon.co.uk> [Accessed 9th