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# Portraying Masculinity in Different Adaptations of *Sense and Sensibility*

Made to Fit the Mould of Modern Masculinity

Bachelor's project in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Eli Løfaldli

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## Abstract

This thesis analyses and discusses how the male characters from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* are made to fit the contemporary ideals of masculinity on screen. The films *Sense and Sensibility* and *From Prada to Nada* are adaptations of Austen's book, but have, in their own way, been updated to fit the contemporary audience. Building a good public image, solid work ethic, and stable domesticity are three of the main factors that play into an ideal masculinity. Looking at how the three leading men, Edward Ferrars, Colonel Brandon and John Willoughby, represent these standards in the book and the two films shows that while Austen focused on creating well-rounded and realistic portraits, romantic comedy films assume a female audience. Because of this the way in which masculinity is portrayed on screen is seen to reflect an ideal masculinity, which prioritises pleasing the audience above creating realistic portrayals.

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## Introduction

### Thesis Statement

Ambition, passion, wealth and family were important factors in the makeup of a 19<sup>th</sup> century man. Meeting these requirements is no easy feat and as Marianne Dashwood exclaims, ‘I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much!’ (Austen, 2002, p. 16). Through an analysis of *Sense and Sensibility* written by Jane Austen in 1811, along with the 1995 film adaptation by the same name, and the 2011 film adaptation, *From Prada to Nada*, this thesis will focus on how the male characters are made to appeal to a contemporary audience, by fitting the contemporary ideals of modern masculinity. I will first define the term ‘masculinity’, both in a historical and contemporary context, before I analyse the chief differences and similarities in the three male leads and how masculinity is portrayed differently in the two adaptations, while comparing these to the original text. Thereafter, I will compare the two films, before discussing how the portrayals of masculinity are affected by the romantic comedy genre.

The first adaptation, which was directed by Ang Lee in 1995, is classified as ‘a fusion production’ (Troost, 2007, p. 82) that ‘remains true to the tradition of heritage drama’ (Troost, 2007, p. 83). While set in the early 1800s, as the original text, the film has been changed in several ways, both through characters and certain plot points (Troost, 2007, pp. 82-83). The other adaptation, *From Prada to Nada*, was directed by Angel Gracia in 2011. This version is a modernised re-telling of Austen’s story, set in the 2010s, and can be classified as an imitation adaptation (Troost, 2007, p. 76). It is important to note that the two films are set in different cultures and countries, and do not reflect how masculinity is portrayed as a whole; Lee’s film is British, and Gracia’s film is set in a Mexican-American setting. In this thesis, however, I will be focusing on the portrayal of masculinity in romantic comedies in more general terms.

### Masculinity

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines masculinity as ‘the quality, state, or degree of being masculine or manly’ (‘Masculinity’, n.d.). Being masculine involves ‘having qualities appropriate to or usually associated with a man’ (‘Masculine’, n.d.). It is not so much the biological state of being a man as it is a set of qualities derived from ‘socio-cultural ideologies regarding gender’ (Levant, 2020).

Historically, the term ‘masculinity’ has encapsulated men’s public and private conduct. In the 1800s, masculinity was a concept consistent of several factors, including, but not limited to, class difference, domestic authority and a solid work ethic (Tosh, 2016, pp. 61-62). As John Tosh (2016) points out, the ‘man of substance and repute came to be someone who had a steady occupation in business or the professions’, which in turn required stable domesticity (p. 63). The evolution of masculinity that happened during the 1800s was reflected in Austen’s writing, where she challenged the debate on what constituted the desirable masculine persona (Ailwood, 2008, p. 42). Austen focused not on what a woman should do to be attractive to a man, but on how men should act to be desirable to the female sex (Ailwood, 2008, p. 45), much like contemporary romantic comedy films do. Sarah Ailwood (2008) focuses on tendencies such as the masculinity approved by the public, work ethic, and home life in Austen’s writing, which critique ‘the public constructions of masculinity throughout the Romantic period’ (p. 45).

Finding a concrete definition of what the masculine identity constitutes in contemporary times is not easy, but a survey from 2017 showed that British men saw contentment in work, stable relationships, and a good self-image, among other things, as important contributors to their welfare (Barry, 2018). Amanda Roskelley (2016) comments that conventional ‘masculinity include[s] heterosexual, physically strong, in-control men who value their careers and can provide for a wife and children’ (p. 50). But at the same time, the older sense of masculinity is being replaced with a newer, more fluid identity, as men no longer necessarily are the head of the household (Barry, 2018). In this thesis I will therefore specifically focus on how the male characters have been made to fit the modern mould of ‘what a young man ought to be’ (Austen, 2002, p. 35), through their public image, meaning behaviour and wealth; work ethic and ambition; and domesticity, also including romantic actions and passion.

## Analysis

### *Sense & Sensibility* by Jane Austen

When Edward is first introduced, the narrator calls him ‘gentlemanlike’ (Austen, 2002, p. 13), a description which at the time meant to be from a ‘good family’ (‘Gentleman’, 2018). The narrator then immediately comments on his economic situation, in line with the period’s belief that wealth and public image were important factors (Ailwood, 2008, p. 45). He is an unlikely love interest, as he contradicts the ‘established ideas of what a young man’s address ought to be’ (Austen, 2002, p. 15), and is described as neither attractive nor graceful (Austen, 2002, p.



15). Edward's brother, Robert, attributes these qualities to his lack of a proper education in the public-school system, and labels him a 'gaucherie' (Austen, 2002, p. 177) because he displays 'no wish to be distinguished' (Austen, 2002, p. 67). From this, one could question why Edward was worth having at all. It is said that 'idleness was pronounced on the whole to be the most advantageous and honourable' (Austen, 2002, p. 75) option for him, but also that his proposal to Lucy was brought forth by his lack of occupation (Austen, 2002, p. 255).

However, the main argument raised against him is not about his public image or work ethic, but about his 'deficiency of all that a lover ought to look and say' (Austen, 2002, p. 64). He is the opposite of Marianne's ideal man (Ailwood, 2008, p. 131). Elinor, however, still found that 'His abilities in every respect improve as much upon acquaintance as his manners and person' (Austen, 2002, p. 17). Edward was not the stereotypical hero of the time, but is made worthy of Elinor through 'his integration of "sense" and "sensibility"' (Watson, 2011), and is redeemed through his unwavering loyalty. He would rather stay true to his word than be happy, and is willing to give up his wealth and family in order to keep his promise to Lucy (Austen, 2002, p. 188). Furthermore, he does not propose to Elinor before he is 'honourably released from his former engagement' (Austen, 2002, p. 256). As Elaine Bander (2011) points out; while his initial impression is disappointing, he is considered to be good, and it is this that makes Elinor 'think him really attractive' (Austen, 2002, p. 17).

When Colonel Brandon is first introduced, he is, similar to Edward, described to be a gentleman, but is not considered attractive (Austen, 2002, p. 28), as he is 'neither lively nor young' (Austen, 2002, p. 39). However, he is considered 'a very respectable man, who has every body's good word' (Austen, 2002, p. 40), and, as Sarah Wakefield argues, he 'embodies a model of masculinity' through his profession (2007). He is said to be rich (Austen, 2002, p. 139), but also shows great generosity, e.g. by giving Edward a parish (Austen, 2002, pp. 199-200). Brandon does not know Edward, personally, and so, as Ailwood (2008) says, 'his generosity [arises] from his desire to perform a social good, rather than from motives of familial or nepotistic patronage' (p. 128). Marianne and Willoughby's criticism of Brandon has to do with 'aesthetics', not 'ethics' (Bander, 2011). Marianne highly doubts him having any passion at all, considering his advanced age (Austen, 2002, p. 29), and accuses him of having no taste or spirit (Austen, 2002, p. 40). Beyond Marianne's surface-level analysis, however, we see that Brandon is everything that Willoughby is not (Bander, 2011). While 'He certainly is not so

handsome as Willoughby', Brandon's age is eventually seen as an advantage (Austen, 2002, p. 240), and he turns 'his strong feelings to a practical social good' (Ailwood, 2008, p. 129).

In contrast to Brandon and Edward, Willoughby encapsulates and fulfils all of Marianne's desires in a man (Ailwood, 2008, p. 113). When he first appears, he is, similar to the two other men, described as a 'gentleman' (Austen, 2002, p. 33), but also as 'uncommonly handsome' (Austen, 2002, p. 33). His public image is in tune with that of an 1800s gentleman (Ailwood, 2008, p. 114), and he is 'what a young man ought to be' (Austen, 2002, p. 35); he is chivalric, owns an estate, is a good rider and hunter (Austen, 2002, p. 34), who participates in the public society, in addition to being a 'respectable young man' (Austen, 2002, p. 35). On the other hand, Willoughby 'sacrifice[s] better feelings for financial gain' (Bander, 2011). While owning a small estate, he 'often complained of his poverty' (Austen, 2002, p. 54), and he only marries Miss Grey for her £50,000 (Austen, 2002, p. 141), which he needs in order to finance his expensive habits and pay off his debts (Austen, 2002, p. 227).

What initially draws Marianne to Willoughby, however, is his appearance and poise (Austen, 2002, p. 33), and is thus linked 'with literary models of masculine perfection idolised by Marianne' (Ailwood, 2008, p. 114). Their tastes are 'strikingly alike' (Austen, 2002, p. 36), and in this way, Willoughby is perfect for Marianne. However, Willoughby's moral qualities are never commented on (Bander, 2011), and we later learn that, though he did feel for Marianne, it was 'insufficient to outweigh that dread of poverty' (Austen, 2002, p. 229). From his passionate behaviour, Marianne believes Willoughby to be morally sound (Ailwood, 2008, p. 114), and while he initially 'is the incarnation of the generic romantic hero' (Ailwood, 2008, p. 113), he valued estate and income over domestic happiness (Austen, 2002, p. 249). Even though Willoughby's reckless and zealous personality is what first draws Marianne to him, his 'libertine practices' (Austen, 2002, p. 248) means that Marianne 'never could have been happy with him' (Austen, 2002, p. 247).

### *Sense & Sensibility* (1995) by Ang Lee

Similar to the book, it can be difficult to understand why the 1995 version of Edward is considered attractive at all, as he still lacks passion and ambition (Lee, 1995). Roskelley (2016), however, argues that this is what 'win[s] the girl in the end (p. 51). He still shows compassion and humour, and is publicly known to be 'incapable of being selfish' (Lee, 1995, 01:30:00-

01:34:20). His work ethic is quite similar to the original, but here, he conveys a wish to take orders in the church right away (Lee, 1995), while he in the book claims to ‘have no wish to be distinguished’ (Austen, 2002, p. 67) at all; but prefers the church (Austen, 2002, p. 75) if he has to choose. This endorses a more ambitious masculinity than what characterises him in Austen’s novel. Furthermore, Edward’s relationship to Margaret is accentuated (Looser, 1996), and he shows compassion for all three sisters, which resembles ‘the more domesticated man’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 21) of modern society; a desirable trait in the contemporary man of many Western societies (Barry, 2018).

The 1995 adaptation of Colonel Brandon is considered rich and an attractive bachelor, yet ‘infirm’ (Lee, 1995, 00:37:35-00:37:50). Here, however, Brandon is shown to not think very highly of himself; something which creates sympathy for him. He still expresses compassion for Marianne through acts of service, and he displays ‘an earnest desire of being useful’ (Lee, 1995, 01:25:10-01:29:35). Being physically strong is an attractive trait (Roskelley, 2016, p. 50), which might be why the scene where Brandon carries Marianne inside, sheltering her from the rain, was added (Lee, 1995). This also reminds us of Willoughby’s first appearance, and allows us to think that Brandon is equally as passionate about Marianne as Willoughby was. Furthermore, giving Brandon a musical talent, while emasculating and feminine in the 1800s, makes him appealing (Wakefield, 2007), both to Marianne and the audience, probably because showing a passion for something is viewed as attractive in the contemporary sense of masculinity. Similar to Edward, Brandon’s work ethic has not been updated in the 1995 film. However, his passion to help Eliza and Beth, in addition to Edward (Lee, 1995), shows the same compassionate work ethic Brandon displays in the book. The at first fragmented story about Eliza and Beth not only gives him a mysterious quality, but also contributes to that same sense of a father-like masculinity present in Edward.

When John Willoughby is first introduced in the 1995 film, he is seen riding in on a white horse to save the damsel in distress (Lee, 1995). This immediately makes us think of him as a hero, establishing a stereotypical romantic and conventional masculinity through his physical strength and chivalry (Roskelley, 2016, p. 50). Willoughby displays a passion for poetry, which immediately attracts Marianne (Lee, 1995), again emphasising the importance and attractiveness of being passionate about something. Similar to the book, Sir John explains him to be a hunter and entitled to an estate, and therefore ‘well worth catching’ (Lee, 1995, 00:43:10-00:43:45). A solid work ethic is important in the make-up of modern masculinity

(Barry, 2018); however, Willoughby shows no work ethic beyond the pursuit of a marriage of convenience, and it is his lack of fortune instigated by this absent work ethic that causes him to treat Marianne so badly. Even before the reveal of his true character, Willoughby is shown to be rude and inconsiderate, e.g. in the way he leaves Barton and treats Marianne at the ball (Lee, 1995). This illustrates that attractive portrayals usually include ‘softer, caring, and more nurturing beings who desire a relationship with their partner’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 29). However, compared to the original book, Marianne and Willoughby’s relationship in the film is eroticised (Stovel, 2011), which might be because sex-appeal sells to the contemporary audience, and ‘moviegoers desire more romance than do readers of books’ (Stovel, 2011).

*From Prada to Nada* (2011) by Angel Gracia

*From Prada to Nada* has been classified as a ‘makeover’ and ‘Latina version’ of Austen’s novel, as the story and setting is updated to suit a modern audience (Gevirtz, 2010). Edward Ferris is made very confident compared to his nineteenth-century counterpart, which might be because confidence is an important factor in attractive masculinity today (Roskelley, 2016, p. 24). His first appearance establishes that he is smart and has a sense of humour, and that he works as a ‘ruthless attorney’ (Gracia, 2011, 00:09:50-00:10:52). While giving Edward a job, which could cause ‘conflicting duality in [his] characterization’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 50), he shows compassion for Nora (Elinor) and Mary (Marianne) through his actions (Gracia, 2011). When Nora and Edward win the janitors’ case, Nora later pronounces Edward ‘fantastic’ (Gracia, 2011, 01:02:40), showing that his sense of ambition and achievements are attractive to Nora. In this version, Edward does not pursue a relationship with Lucy until after Nora rejects him (Gracia, 2011), justifying his actions in a different way than the original, which focuses more on a redemption arc. Edward confidently pursuing Nora exemplifies what Roskelley (2016) explains as a ‘shift to men who are surer of what they want which includes a committed, emotional relationship with a woman’ (p. 23).

Gracia’s version of Colonel Brandon, Bruno, is a younger man. In the same way that Marianne is prejudiced against Brandon on the grounds of his age, Mary judges Bruno for his lack of ambition; he works on junk, and belongs to the lower class, without any money or prospects. This allows the audience to dismiss him as an unlikely hero. However, similar to Brandon, Bruno shows his true character through his actions; e.g. helping Mary with her car (Gracia, 2011). In contrast to Brandon, however, he puts on a façade in this version. While Brandon is

said to be troubled from a complicated past, Bruno is sarcastic (Gracia, 2011), maybe because he feels the need to guard himself. However, he is also shown to have a compassionate heart, for example when he unhappily watches Mary dancing with Rodrigo (Willoughby) at the party (Gracia, 2011), which makes him seem more ‘nurturing and caring’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 50). Mary eventually realises the importance of an emotionally mature man (Roskelley, 2016, p. 50), and that he is just as passionate as Rodrigo seemed to be, just about other things (e.g. painting, helping the less fortunate, children).

Upon first meeting Rodrigo Fuentes, Gracia’s Willoughby, he displays the same, fiery passion as the original Willoughby. Furthermore, he is identified as an ambassador’s son, and Mary therefore immediately recognises that he is worth having. He works as a teacher’s assistant, owns a convertible and talks of his love for telling ‘each other details until they make a full story’ (Gracia, 2011, 00:40:50-00:42:20), suggesting that public image, solid work, and passion are important to Mary’s established idea of what a man ought to be. In the original, Marianne being interested in Brandon or Willoughby for financial reasons is never even suggested, but here Mary says she finds Rodrigo attractive because she would be able to move back to Beverley Hills if she married him (Gracia, 2011), showing that the notion from 1990s-films is still somewhat present; ‘financially successful and self-assured men are still the romantic leads’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 21). In contrast to Willoughby, who knows of Marianne’s financial situation the entire time, Rodrigo only learns about Mary’s situation when they arrive at the party. Initially, he seems to accept her for who she is, but almost immediately after the party-scene, he supposedly needs to go to Mexico (Gracia, 2011). One could argue that this makes him even more shallow than the original Willoughby, especially seeing as how Rodrigo was married the entire time, making him a cheater (Gracia, 2011).

## Discussion

### Comparing Portrayals of Masculinity

#### *Public Image and Behaviour*

Emma Thompson’s major concern when adapting the book into the 1995 screenplay was staying true to the book while simultaneously appealing to the contemporary viewers (Stovel, 2011). Edward Ferrars has been described to be one of Austen’s dullest heroes (Troost, 2007, p. 83), which is why the creators decided to give him qualities such as wit and shyness, while

retaining his ‘dull, wimpy character’ (Sufina, 2020, 2:45-3:05, 37:37-37:55). Edward Ferris in *From Prada to Nada*, however, receives a complete transformation. As previously mentioned, he conveys a lot of confidence in the way he pursues Nora, retaining very little of the shy and awkward persona in Austen’s book. While many deem the original Edward unworthy of Elinor (Watson, 2011), one can argue that both adaptations revise Edward in a way that makes him worthy of her, in keeping with the tendency of portraying men who are ‘much more willing to actively pursue love’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 24). The creators of the 1995 adaptation departed from the book in casting Hugh Grant, as he was considered too handsome to play the role of Edward (Looser, 1996). Films are able to benefit off the success of previous films by casting similar leads that make the viewer associate to the other characters (Gevirtz, 2010), which might be why the creators of the 2011 adaptation also chose to depart from the book’s description of Edward by casting Nicholas D’Agosto. Seeing as both adaptations chose to adapt Edward into a more physically attractive man, this plays on the suggestion that physical appearance is important in modern masculinity. Laura White states that readers ‘wish Brandon and Edward were more handsome and interesting’ (Ailwood, 2008, p. 108), which might explain both the casting and the reforming of Edward and Brandon’s personalities. On the other hand, it might simply be because Lee and Gracia wanted to attract larger audiences, and, as previously mentioned, because the films are made to attract women (Troost, 2007, p. 75), among both the female characters and the audience.

While some readers are disappointed with Marianne’s decision to marry Brandon in the original book, the revisions made to Brandon in the 1995 film were welcomed by those who ‘preferred a more emotive masculinity’ (Wakefield, 2007). Casting Alan Rickman in the role allowed Brandon to convey a mysterious, dangerous and passionate personality (Wakefield, 2007), and Thompson admired him for it (Stovel, 2011). Bruno is also shown to be a mysterious character who compassionately cares for Mary through his actions, which Roskelley (2016) argues women find appealing (p. 29). He is therefore also what Thompson explains as ‘the man of all our dreams’ and ‘a river of compassion, and love, and strength, and honour, and decency, who is also flawed, and knows it’ (Sufina, 2020, 5:26-5:41). The 1995 film includes an emphasis on Brandon’s emotional backstory, which makes the audience and the female characters sympathise with him (Roskelley, 2016, p. 50). This backstory is most likely what causes Brandon’s sudden compassion for Marianne, as she reminds him of Eliza (Lee, 1995, 00:52:00-00:52:45). While the 2011 film does not emphasise an emotional backstory in the same way, Bruno prompts sympathy through his mysterious and “dangerous” character which intrigues

the audience. Thompson assigns some of Willoughby's qualities to both Edward and Brandon, which makes Brandon more attractive to Marianne (Stovel, 2011), and one can argue that Gracia did the same with Bruno. Having Brandon emotionally react to Marianne's piano playing 'sets him apart from his novelistic counterpart' (Wakefield, 2007), which one can argue is applicable to Bruno as well, who is given an aesthetic sense. Both these adaptations differ from Austen's "'strong and silent'" Brandon, who 'is insufficient to charm a modern movie audience' (Wakefield, 2007).

Mary is made to be materialistic in the 2011 film, in contrast to the original and 1995 version of Marianne. She prefers Rodrigo over Bruno for his status and wealth. However, because Bruno is made poor in *From Prada to Nada*, in contrast to both the original and 1995 Brandon, and even though Mary explicitly states that Rodrigo's wealth is one of the reasons why she is attracted to him, Mary ends up with Bruno. This suggests that wealth is an ideal that is considered attractive, but also superficial, in the context of the film. However, Mary is not just interested in Rodrigo for the money; 'he's so hot, and he's cultured' (Gracia, 2011, 00:42:30-00:42:50), and similarly Willoughby is considered attractive because he expresses himself with 'great decorum and honour', 'and spirit and wit and feeling' (Lee, 1995, 00:41:30-00:43:08). While using multi-faceted characters like Rodrigo and Willoughby could 'create moral confusion' (Bander, 2011), one could also argue that this makes the characters more realistic, and therefore a truer representation of what constitutes modern masculinity.

#### *Work Ethic and Ambition*

While the original Edward Ferrars' hero status is largely dependent on him marrying the heroine, Elinor (Ailwood, 2008, p. 108), the 2011 adaptation makes Edward Ferris masculine on his own, seen through his characterisation as a 'ruthless attorney' (Gracia, 2011, 00:10:46). Yet, Nora is not interested in Edward until after they win the janitors' case, suggesting that achievement, to Nora, is the most attractive trait of all. In the 1995 adaptation, however, they retain Edward's sense of ambition in work, and through his conversation with Elinor, we see that he feels he is unable to choose an occupation (Lee, 1995, 00:16:05-00:16:40). While the decision to give Edward a high-end job in *From Prada to Nada* might be counterproductive in creating a desirable character (Roskelley, 2016, p. 29), his pro bono work and his help in providing Nora with a job redeem him. Moreover, this change might please readers who did not believe Edward worthy of Elinor in the original (Watson, 2011).

Personal ambition and passion in work is important in desirable masculinity today, and being content in that work is important for the masculine identity (Barry, 2018). It is mentioned in the 1995 film that Brandon served in the East Indies and thus ‘fulfills the requirement of a profession’, which means he ‘embodies a model masculinity’ (Wakefield, 2007). Bruno, on the other hand, works as an artist, which suggests that he values love more than wealth (Roskelley, 2016, p. 29). Bruno’s occupation emanates compassion and tenderness, because it is primarily through handiwork that we understand his love for Mary, and what eventually allows Mary to realise she feels the same. Willoughby’s work ethic in the 1995 film, however, is rather similar to Austen’s Willoughby; he hunts and rides, and relies on inheritance and marriage to finance his way of living, while Rodrigo, on the other hand, is a teacher’s assistant in Mary’s class. His fiery passion for poetry attracts Mary, again in line with the notion that a more artistic career carries positive connotations with it (Roskelley, 2016, p. 29).

### *Domesticity and Passion*

In the 1995 film, Grant is still able to convey Edward’s awkward personality through different techniques (Stovel, 2011), and explains that to him, Edward is ‘nice, shy, but dry’ (Sufina, 2020, 2:40). However, D’Agosto himself explains Edward to be ‘confident in [his] charm and effect on women’ (MovieWeb, 2011, 01:45), which does not coincide with the 1995 adaptation of him. This change in personality is probably caused by the fact that men in films from the 90s were depicted as ‘just as much in need of emotional connection and romance as a woman’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 20), while newer films portray men who are surer of what they want in a relationship (Roskelley, 2016, p. 23), justifying Edward’s new-found confidence. In the 2011 version, Edward only pursues Lucy because Nora rejected him, which might make the audience more sympathetic towards him than his 1995 counterpart, who, similar to Austen’s Edward, was engaged to Lucy all along. One could, however, argue that the loyalty Edward shows by staying with Lucy in the 1995 film displays desirable traits such as reliability and faithfulness, qualities the 2011 version of Edward does not convey.

Some critics claim that clichés like riding in on a horse, which all three leading men in the 1995 version do, along with romanticising the story, ‘contradicts Thompson’s feminist emphasis’, while Thompson felt it exuded ‘male strength’ and made them ‘all swoon’ (Stovel, 2011). Kuno Becker, who was cast as Rodrigo, explains that Rodrigo ‘uses what he knows, and books and poetry to get access to a lot of girls’ (FromPradaToNada, 2011, 0:14-0:23), and in that way he becomes what Greg Wise, cast as Willoughby, says; the ‘epitome of masculine sensibility’



(Sufina, 2020, 4:37-4:46). However, Willoughby's interest in music, and through that, some notions of his sensibility, is founded in his interest in Marianne, which Wakefield suggests reveals a weakness in his masculinity (2007), and one can argue that Rodrigo's interest in poetry, though possibly caused by a genuine interest at first, is further accelerated by the knowledge of how it attracts women. Both Rodrigo and Willoughby are libertines in different ways, which initially attracts Mary and Marianne, respectively. Yet, as previously mentioned, it is this quality that ruins the men for both the female characters, and the audience, who prefers committed male characters (Roskelley, 2016, p. 30).

While an emotional backstory gave the viewers a reason to sympathise with Brandon, both films omit the part of the book where Willoughby defends himself (Austen, 2002, pp. 224-236). One could argue that the 1995 film ending is more satisfying to viewers, as Willoughby in a sense 'gets what he deserves' while gloomily watching the woman he loves marry someone else. In the second film, Rodrigo does not show any remorse at all, accusing Mary of being drunk when she finds him out. Seeing as he already was married, in contrast to the 1995 version of Willoughby, he is made even more despicable to the audience for being a cheater. Neither film gives him the opportunity to redeem himself, which might be because the creators wanted to justify Marianne's choice to marry Brandon. By making Brandon more interesting, and simultaneously taking away some of Willoughby's charm, Marianne's choice to marry Brandon is more reasonable, which might satisfy those who pronounced him "attractive only to the most generous observer" (Ailwood, 2008, p. 108). Furthermore, this allows us to question whether the modern audience would be unable to sympathise with Willoughby in the same way Elinor feels sympathy for Willoughby in the book (Austen, 2002, p. 247).

Roskelley emphasises the need for a grand gesture at the end of a film, and Edward's proposal to Elinor and Edward's proposal to Nora establishes 'that his feelings aren't temporary' (Roskelley, 2016, p. 30). This grand gesture combined with vulnerability is what wins the love interest over in the end (Roskelley, 2016, p. 30). This suggests that professions of love and knowing what you want are important factors in desirable masculinity as portrayed on screen. The 1995 film ends with Marianne and Brandon's wedding. The book does not include any details about the wedding, maybe because Austen herself never married, or because she did not regard it as important compared to the rest of the story. One can assume the scene was added to the film because it shows the main characters in stable relationships, which satisfies the audience (Roskelley, 2016, p. 30), or simply because it adds a romantic element. In the same

way, *From Prada to Nada* ends with Edward and Nora's wedding, with Mary and Bruno attending as a couple. This gives the audience a definite happy ending, opposed to Austen's more realistic conclusion; 'let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, [...] they could live without disagreement' (Austen, 2002, p. 269).

### Representing Masculinity in Romantic Comedies

In this part of the thesis I want to establish in what ways the portrayal of masculinity is affected by the romantic comedy film genre, and compare this to how Austen chose to represent masculinity ideals. Authors of the Romantic period were accused of writing "transcendently perfect" (Ailwood, 2008, p. 20) portraits of men, pleasing the audience rather than reflecting reality, and, as mentioned in the introduction, Austen 'presents female desire – what women want in men' (Ailwood, 2008, p. 45), much like the contemporary romantic comedy. However, Ailwood (2008) claims Austen wrote 'realistic portraits of men through her characterisation of John Willoughby, Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars' (p. 17). They are seen as inaccurate representations of male characters usually present in courtship novels (Ailwood, 2008, p. 107); maybe because they are flawed and do not necessarily fit the bill of desirable masculinity. Because of this, one can argue that the way in which the film creators have updated the three leads in both films steals away from Austen's original intent. Contemporary romantic comedies very rarely feature an unconventional male lead winning the girl in the end, maybe because the creators '[distrust] audiences ever to accept an unheroic hero' (Auerbach, 2004, p. 112). As mentioned previously, this might be why Willoughby's redeeming speech was cut from both films, and why both Edward and Brandon/Bruno are given chances to prove themselves worthy. However, doing this also poses a problem, as the idea of masculinity conveyed in romantic comedies 'may create an impossible standard for actual men' (Roskelley, 2016, p. 3).

One could argue that all three of the leading men in both films are unrealistic characters, seeing as women are the target audience (Whelehan, 2007, p. 138). Austen's intent was to create diverse, rounded characters that would display 'the complexity of masculinity in "real Life"' (Ailwood, 2008, p. 109), but cinematic representations tend to focus on a more desirable masculinity, seen from a woman's point of view. Vulnerability, for example, became a very attractive trait among the male leads in 1990s films (Wakefield, 2007), and giving male characters 'a significant emotional range [...] invites the idea that he has been hurt' (Roskelley, 2016, p. 73). Edward Ferris's reaction to Nora's rejection, and Colonel Brandon's countenance

are examples of this. Moments like these provoke sympathy in the viewer and the leading lady, which ‘deem[s] him pitiful and deserving of some form of affection’ (Roskelley, 2016, p. 73). From this, one could argue that a softer, more romantic version of masculinity, also seen through the presence of music and poetry in *Sense and Sensibility* from 1995, has become an integral part of what women are expected to desire in men, and thus what is presented on screen. This feminization makes the male characters more familiar and relatable to women (Ailwood, 2008, p. 34). Consequently, the films focus on enhancing that which appeals to women; not on realistic representations of contemporary men.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed the portrayal of masculinity in *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen and compared this to how the male characters were made to fit the mould of modern masculinity in two different cinematic adaptations. I compared and discussed the chief similarities and differences concerning the portrayal of masculinity in the two adaptations, before finally discussing how the portrayal of masculinity is affected by the romantic comedy genre. I have focused specifically on three areas that contribute to the notion of masculinity, namely public image, work ethic and domesticity. While one can argue that the adaptations discussed here portray masculinity in a way that alters Austen’s original intent of writing about well-rounded and unlikely heroes, they do appeal to the target audience (Wakefield, 2007), which is arguably the purpose of most contemporary romantic comedy films. Furthermore, ‘masculinity cannot be reduced to particular labels or “types” in the social world, and should not be in literature either’ (Ailwood, 2008, pp. 109-110), and one can therefore conclude that no representation of men in either film or book will adequately satisfy all that constitutes the masculine identity.

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