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2008

"What men ought to be": masculinities in Jane Austen's novels

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**“WHAT MEN OUGHT TO BE”:
MASCULINITIES IN JANE AUSTEN’S NOVELS**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

SARAH LOUISE AILWOOD BA (Hons) LLB (Hons)

SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LITERATURES, LANGUAGES AND PHILOSOPHY

2008

CERTIFICATION

I, Sarah Louise Ailwood, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of English Literatures, Languages and Philosophy, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Sarah Ailwood

19 November 2007

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TEXTUAL REFERENCES

References to Jane Austen's writings are to the following editions:

Northanger Abbey. Ed. Marilyn Butler and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

Sense and Sensibility. Ed. Ros Ballaster and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

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Emma. Ed. Fiona Stafford and Claire Lamont. London: Penguin, 2003.

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"Jack and Alice". *Catharine and Other Writings*. Ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Douglas Murray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Letters from Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra Austen, her nieces Anna Austen and Fanny Knight and to James Stanier Clarke are quoted from *Jane Austen's Letters*. Ed. Deirdre Le Faye. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

To Tim
what a man ought to be

ABSTRACT

“ ‘What men ought to be’: Masculinities in Jane Austen’s Novels” examines Jane Austen’s literary constructions of men and masculinity as feminine and feminist contributions to the public debate on ideal English masculinity throughout the Romantic period. It explores the problematic position of women writers in critiquing masculinity in the highly politicised context of the Romantic period and develops a theoretical approach to interpreting their constructions of desirable and undesirable masculinities as being representative of their social, cultural and feminist concerns. Throughout her novels, Jane Austen’s representations of the desirable male – of ‘what men ought to be’ – are informed by her fundamental concerns regarding the realisation of female selfhood and the fulfilment of women’s desires, and the political survival and moral wellbeing of the English nation. This thesis argues that Austen’s novels seek to reform socially-approved codes of gentry masculinity by endorsing a model of male identity that is not dependent on the submission or passivity of women in courtship or domestic relationships, promoted by conventional patriarchal ideologies. Austen’s novel’s dramatise the process by which men can choose to forge a masculine identity that allows women a greater socially and publicly participatory role, both enabling the fulfilment of female desire and ensuring the security and wellbeing of the English nation.

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