

Michael Kramp, ed., *Jane Austen and Masculinity: Transits, Literature, Thought and Culture, 1650-1850* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2024). Pp. 301. \$39.95. ISBN 9781611488661.

This impressive and timely collection of essays explores the diverse masculine identities across Austen's works. Michael Kramp's useful and clearly argued introduction rehearses the case for problematising the masculine gender and for seeing its representations as accurately and as critically as feminist theorists have seen representations of women (3). Kramp agrees with other theorists that masculinity is continually seen as in crisis. He cites Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett, in their *The Masculinities Reader* (2001), to point out that this perception of crisis tends to produce a moral panic around men and masculinity, which can quickly turn into a backlash against women and feminism, and, as we all know all too well, into open hostility to or even oppression of the LGBTQ+ community.

The essays cover an impressively diverse range of topics. In 'Men, Domesticity and the Family', Jan Fergus offers a detailed study of the gender politics of domestic space. Fergus incisively explores the different models of masculinity in *Emma*, focusing on John Knightley, as an embodiment of 'whining masculinity', and comparing his attitude to domestic ties to that of Mr Weston, in light of his decision to have the Churchills adopt his son, Frank. Perhaps most illuminating is the consideration of the implications of Austen's praise for the style of Charles William [Pasley]'s *Essay on the Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire* (1811). Next, Kit Kincade ably examines 'Failures of the Patriarchy: Fathers as Role models in Jane Austen', exploring the roles or shortcomings of fathers, the roles of the three dead fathers in *Sense and Sensibility*, and the inadequate parenting of the Crawfords in *Mansfield Park*, concluding that 'Austen seems almost biblical in asserting that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children' (58). Natasha Duquette offers a thoughtful and perceptive analysis of 'The Sensibility of Captain Benwick', concluding that he represents 'a model of masculinity as much needed in our own time, as in [Austen's]' (109). I certainly agree that Benwick's mild and melancholy thoughtfulness might be a welcome corrective to the forms of hyper or toxic masculinity currently so much in the ascendant, and might have seemed welcome to Austen's first readers—at least in contrast to the models of louche military masculinity, or entitled and self-destructive carelessness which seem to mark Austen's more obviously disagreeable male characters. Nevertheless, I do not find the claim for Benwick's exemplary status in Austen's time entirely persuasive, not only because Admiral Croft finds Benwick too soft and too *piano* for his approval, but also because his bereaved melancholy is persistently represented as a form of illness or at least debility. Duquette's essay is immediately followed by Enit K. Steiner's firmly argued discussion of 'Literary Men and Melancholia', which follows the critique repeatedly given of Men of Feeling in the eighteenth century, in dismissing Benwick's 'narcissistic enjoyment of suffering' (120).

The final section focuses on Austen on YouTube and in television and cinema adaptations, discussing the military dandies who so frequently shape the plots of the novels, as well as the cross-dressing frivolity of Mr Denny in *Pride and Prejudice*. Megan A. Woodworth, in 'I could meet him in no other way: Duelling, the Culture of Honor, and Modern Masculinity in *Sense and Sensibility*', offers an acute analysis of the contrasting models of masculinity in relation to attitudes to birth or hereditary property as important determinants of masculine character and behaviour, showing the 'pitfalls of hereditary patriarchal power, not only for female agency but for the men themselves' (91), read against Richardson's *Clarissa*. Finally, Gayle Magee's chapter 'Performing to Strangers: Masculinity, Adaptation and Music in *Pride and Prejudice* (1995)' reads the familiar BBC adaptation afresh by viewing it perceptively through the lens of Carl Davis's musical score.

Overall, this is a thoroughly thought-provoking and worthwhile collection of essays, which I recommend to any student seeking to refresh their reading of these familiar texts. In recent decades, the BBC has made the most of its extensive wardrobe of vaguely Austen-style frocks and tight breeches—the traditional garb of Austen adaptations—in order to show us versions of Austen which comfort in the most unchallenging ways, presenting versions of a British past populated almost exclusively by the clean, tidy, white and polite middle classes, untroubled by industrialisation or, indeed, much sign of labour of any kind. Perhaps these critics could next consider the satirical shows bringing Austen to a wider audience or readership with little time for what is clean, tidy, or genteel, such as *Plied and Prejudice* (The Vaults, London) or the improv show *Austentatious* (currently on tour).

Harriet Guest
University of York