Stereotypes of men and women, and inequality between the sexes in
Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*
-A didactic essay attempting to show that a gender focused reading of *Pride and Prejudice*
has much to offer both male and female students

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Abstract
This essay will discuss why one would use a literary text such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice (1813)* in a classroom. There is a certain focus on what *Pride and Prejudice* might have to offer both male and female students, since research has shown that boys tend to resist reading romantic novels and stories about girls. This essay attempts to show that a gender focused reading of *Pride and Prejudice* might make it interesting to male students as well, since the way that the unequal relationship between men and women is portrayed concerns them as well as the female students.

Regarding the reasons for using literature in the classroom, I will investigate what it is that literary texts can offer to its readers. This essay will argue that reading literature is an aesthetic experience, which is what separates literary texts from other non-literary texts. Aesthetic experiences have to do with the way student’s feel about and experience certain texts, and also with the artistic values of a text. To have an aesthetic experience is very important since the English classroom is a place where the students’ feelings and experiences normally are not given enough neither time nor space.

This essay attempts to show that by looking at stereotypical characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as looking at what qualities in men and women were considered desirable, a very interesting discussion might arise in the classroom, concerning gender roles, and inequality between men and women. A discussion of this sort gives the students an opportunity to question the gender roles we have in today’s society, as well as the relationship between men and women.

Keywords: Literature, reading, aesthetic experience, gender, stereotypes.
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................1
   1.1 Theoretical background ..........................................................................................................2
       1.1.1 Feminist theory .............................................................................................................2
       1.1.2 Pedagogical framework ...............................................................................................4
   1.2 Aim and scope .........................................................................................................................7
       1.2.1 Research questions .......................................................................................................7
2. Material ........................................................................................................................................8
3. Approach ......................................................................................................................................8
4. Analysis ......................................................................................................................................10
5. Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................24
Works cited ......................................................................................................................................26
1. Introduction
Many people might claim Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (first published in 1813) to be a novel written to entertain and interest women in particular, considering that the focus is on female characters, and the novel’s main theme is marriage. If a teacher wishes to use *Pride and Prejudice* in a classroom, it is very likely that at least one male student will object to this novel. He might object to it since he normally does not read romantic novels: “Boys tend to enjoy escapism and humor, and some boys are passionate about science fiction or fantasy” (McFann 2). Jane McFann also states that “Boys tend to resist reading stories about girls, whereas girls do not tend to resist reading stories about boys” (2). Since *Pride and Prejudice* is a romantic novel with many female characters it would probably not be a male student’s first choice.

In order to use a novel in class the teacher must be prepared to justify why that particular novel could be interesting to all the students, the example above is just one of many objections the students might have. They may also question why they should read novels at all. Both these issues are of interest since there are other books for English teachers to use. Textbooks, for instance, are designed with the purpose to teach language, which a novel is not. As these books exist and are used in English classes all over Sweden, why should one use a literary text in a foreign language class? The syllabus for the B-course in English at upper-secondary school states that some of the goals a student should have reached after the course are: “Pupils should be able to read, summarise and comment on the contents of longer literary texts”, and “Pupils should have a basic orientation to English literature from different periods” (National Agency for Education B-course syllabus). One of the goals for the C-course in English is: “Pupils should be able to read literature from different periods and different genres, as well as be able in their reading to reflect on textual contents and form from different perspectives” (National Agency for Education C-course syllabus). *Pride and Prejudice* can easily be applied in this case since it fits the description of longer literary texts and since it can be seen as an example of a 19th century novel, it can be considered English literature from different time periods and different genres. Since the National Curriculum in Sweden is goal-oriented it gives teachers more freedom when it comes to the course’s contents, and my conclusion is therefore, considering the quotations above, that *Pride and Prejudice* could be used in both the B- and the C-course.

This essay will discuss why one would use *Pride and Prejudice* in a B- or C-course of English at an upper-secondary school in Sweden. I will try to find if there is something in particular that
literary texts can offer the students. This essay will attempt to show that a gender focused reading of *Pride and Prejudice* can make it interesting to all the students, since it deals with issues that concern both men and women. Some of these subjects might be gender roles, stereotypes of men and women, and inequality between the sexes. These issues are still of much interest in today’s society, and of special interest to young adults, who are in the process of forming their personality and gender identity. The analysis concerning gender in *Pride and Prejudice* will focus on how men and women are portrayed, what is considered desirable in men and women, and whether these images of men and women are stereotypical. All these matters concern both male and female students, since gender is constructed by society and it is important to show the students that the views on gender and the importance of gender are constantly changing along with society.

1.1 Theoretical background

This section will develop some of the main ideas used in this essay. In section 1.1.1 feminist criticism and what some feminist critics have written on the subject of gender in *Pride and Prejudice* will be brought up. Section 1.1.2 will deal with the pedagogical framework in which the novel will be set, discussing the pedagogical questions of *What* and *How* but mainly *Why*, concerning the use of literature in the classroom.

1.1.1 Feminist theory

The feminist literary criticism of today is a product of the 1960s “women’s movement”, yet this women’s movement was not the start of feminism (Barry 121). Feminism can be said to have started much earlier. These authors and their works, which can be considered to have laid the foundation of the 1960’s women’s movement, are: Mary Wollstonecraft with *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Olive Schreiner’s *Women and Labour* (1911) and Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of Ones Own* from 1929 (Barry 121).

In the beginning of the feminist movement, one of the main concerns was to “expose what might be called the mechanism of patriarchy, that is the cultural ‘mind set’ in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality” (Barry 122). Feminist critics have made a special point of the way women in 19th century fiction are portrayed; women do not work for a living, “instead the focus is on the heroine’s choice of marriage partner, which will decide her social position, happiness and fulfilment in life” (Barry 112). Much attention was given to the way male authors described women, and these representations were considered to be stereotypical, the female characters were
not given an alternative role but were always depicted as dependent on men. Quite a few critics, such as Missy Dehn Kubitschek, Susan Fraiman and Johanna M. Smith, have had a feminist approach when reading *Pride and Prejudice*. There is much written about the female characters of the novel, and on the theme of marriage. Kubitschek claims that some of the female characters, such as Mrs. Lucas and Mrs. Bennet, are stereotypes of women, and she also notes that there are stereotypes of men in *Pride and Prejudice* as well: “Both sexes and every social class has faulty representatives” (1).

Jane Austen herself lived in a patriarchal society, where men were the norm and women considered weak, inferior and depending on men. Therefore, in *Pride and Prejudice*, we have the same focus “on the heroine’s choice of marriage partner”; in fact all the female characters in the novel seem to focus extremely on marriage (Barry 112). This shows that Jane Austen has chosen to keep the division of power between the sexes as it stands in reality, in order to show the inequality between them, since “Historically, middle-class British women had little choice” (Kubitschek 1). Austen chose to exaggerate the ‘wish to marry well’ in some characters, in order to show how the female characters suffer under the patriarchal values of her society. Since Kubitschek states that: “Middle-class women were socially destined to be dependent on men for financial support”, this supports the idea of *Pride and Prejudice* as novel that shows a realistic image of the relationship between men and women in 19th century England (1).

Jane Austen gives her readers stereotypical images of both men and women in order to make us think both sexes, and the power struggle between them, as rather silly. At the same time as Jane Austen condemns the stereotypical female characters in the novel, she also shows us how little choice these women have in changing their situation. The words of Joanna M. Smith might be used to illustrate my point: “As Pride and Prejudice condemns Lydia’s man hunt, it hints that her behaviour, like Charlotte’s, is a logical extension of her culture’s insistence that marriage is middle-class women’s only option” (5). In order to oppose the patriarchal values of her society, Jane Austen’s criticism was neatly snuck into the novel by the use of irony. One of her ways of doing this can be seen in the way she depicts some of her characters. In *Pride and Prejudice* the character of Mr. Collins might be seen as a good example; instead of criticizing him she uses humour in her descriptions of him in order to make him appear a silly and shallow man. It is important to search for stereotypical images of both men and women, not only in *Pride and Prejudice*, but also in other literary texts. Because discussing these stereotypical images can give
the students an opportunity to face, and become aware of, whatever prejudice they might have against the opposite sex. By bringing up a discussion of inequality between the sexes the students can come to a better understanding of why it is this way, and they could discuss what we can do to make men and women more equal. It is also important to make the students aware of the dominating values of our society and give them an opportunity to question things they might have taken for granted.

This essay will discuss the way men and women are portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice*, and what is considered desirable in men and women, in order to show that both men and women suffer from the unequal relationship between the sexes. It will be shown that *Pride and Prejudice* could be considered interesting to both male and female readers.

1.1.2 Pedagogical framework

If one wishes to use literary texts in a foreign language classroom, one faces not only the question of, which this essay aims to answer; *Why* to use literary texts, but also the questions of *How* to use literature and *What* kind of texts one should use. Louise Rosenblatt claims that in order to really enjoy and learn from reading, every reader needs to feel that a particular text has something to offer them. Her view is that reading novels or other literary texts allows the reader/student to “live through the text”, and experience things that they normally could not (38). In literary texts, readers might find answers to questions they have about themselves and people in general: “The reader seeks to participate in another’s vision- to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible” (Rosenblatt 7). Since *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that focuses on human relationships, surely it will have much to offer the students when it comes to this aspect.

In order to choose a text for the whole class to read, the teacher should, besides trying to follow the aims and goals of the National Curriculum, have in mind that the text should deal with issues that are of interest to all the students. As I have already shown that according to the syllabus *Pride and Prejudice* might be used in both the B-and B-course, I will only briefly mention it once more. *Pride and Prejudice* would probably be used in a B- or C- course where the students are at the ages of 17-18. As students at this age are in the process of creating their personality and gender identity, surely a novel that focuses on marriage, gender roles and love, could be considered to contain much of value to them.

Rosenblatt’s view is that the teacher should let the students decide for themselves which book
they want to read, however, in order to have a discussion about a particular work (as she suggests one should have) with the whole class, we need to limit these options, so that all the students will have read the same work. It is when the students come in contact with the views of other students they truly learn from and understand one another. This is just one way of reading literary texts in class and should be varied with other ways of reading texts, the next time the class reads literature, the students might chose which ever novel they like and after having read it, they could write something about it. However, instead of focusing on the questions of what the students should read or how to use literature, I choose to focus on why they should read literary texts. Regarding this question, Rosenblatt argues that both writing and reading literature has to do with personal experiences; the writers’ own experiences are brought into a work as they write, and readers seek the experiences of others in order to increase their knowledge. She claims that literary texts are based on the personal experiences of the author, in her own words: ”Is not the substance of literature everything that human beings have thought or felt or created?” (5). Rosenblatt also claims that readers of literature seek to find knowledge about certain issues in life that they are faced with; that they seek the knowledge of others (7).

Likewise, Ibsen and Wiland argue that reading literature is an aesthetic experience, but what does the term stand for?

The word aesthetics comes from the Greek aisthētikos, meaning being capable of perception; or more directly I feel, I perceive. To feel, to sense, and to perceive are all verbs related to an aesthetic way of understanding, and it is a combination of physical and affective faculties that brings out this special insight. A sensual and sensitive perception of the world is emotionally and mentally worked on to bring about a new kind of understanding; an aesthetic form of cognition. Aesthetics is also concerned with the beauty and value of art and the way art impresses us and give a sense of insight. Aesthetics implies both knowledge and knowing. Aesthetics also covers both productive and receptive processes (137).

Thus, aesthetic experiences are concerned with the way we experience a work, and with the way we feel about the different issues in that particular work, it is also concerned with the artistic values of a work. All these aspects are of much importance since it is the feeling we have after reading a work that determines if we liked it or not. Even if a particular work is not considered to be the kind of literature a student would normally read, it can still be considered a great work of art if the students take into consideration the aesthetic aspects of it, the way it made them feel. By reading
literature we may face issues that are not very familiar to us and the way we live this literature can
give us an opportunity to learn about different cultures. In both *Literature as Exploration* and
*Encounters with Literature*, the authors stress the importance of the interaction between the reader
and the text. In the words of Ibsen and Wiland:

> The interaction between reader and text is what matters, and reading is a two-way process, a kind of dialogue
> between the text and the reader. When you read a text, your own experiences and expectations will determine
> what you look for and find important. (…) The meaning of a text, then, will be determined by the personality
> of the reader. (…) Each student will meet the texts in his or her own way; the student’s understanding of a text
> is based on past experiences and knowledge about literature and life. (145-146)

Since we cannot know the exact experience of all our students we will have to make some
assumptions, we will have to assume that at the ages of 17-18 the students already have a fairly
good historical knowledge and have most likely been in contact with literary texts before, we might
also assume that they all are able to read the novel since they have reached the B or C level.
However, we cannot make any assumptions concerning what meaning the students will give a text,
or what they will look for in a text, and find important. Since all the students have different
experiences, they will give different meanings and interpretations of the same text.

The ideas of reading as an aesthetic experience, and reading as interaction, are concerned with
the past experiences of the readers and with the way readers experience a work, and it is these
aspects that make both theories similar to each other. Since understanding and interpreting a text is
something very subjective and differs depending on who is reading the text, there will be many
different responses to the same text. The different reactions a literary work might cause in a class
can be a good starting point in order to introduce a discussion about different themes or issues, such
as gender, in a literary work. This discussion would lead to that the students learn from each other;
by sharing their experiences with others they are able to see things from different perspectives.
These types of discussions are normally not given enough time or space in the foreign language
classroom, yet they are very valuable since these discussions concern the students’ feelings and
experiences, and that would mean that there are no rights and wrongs. All students are given an
opportunity to state their opinions, and argue for what they believe, having these types of
discussions not only gives the students an opportunity to practice speaking English but can also
help creating an atmosphere where all students feel accepted and where all opinions are valuable.
A literary work might be particularly good to use in a language classroom since the students would read it in the original language, that way they can get a better feeling for the language since the kind of English Jane Austen uses in *Pride and Prejudice* is quite different from the English spoken in the world of today. Some students might have trouble with that kind of English when it comes to understanding some of the words, however, the biggest differences seem to be related to spelling, and the differences are not too big, so the students might very likely be able to figure out the meaning of those words.

1.2 **Aim and scope**

Since *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel about marriage and the main characters are female, and considering the fact that most male students may like to read other types of books, one aim of this essay is to examine if *Pride and Prejudice* can be considered to have something to offer to both male and female students.

This essay aims to examine if the reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, with the focus on gender, can give both the male and female students an opportunity to discuss the way gender roles are portrayed, whether or not they seem realistic, if they are stereotypical, and if they are still valid in today’s society.

Another aim of this essay is to show that there is something in particular that literary texts can offer the students, and all of its readers. I have also tried to find what other scholars have written on the subject of gender when it comes to *Pride and Prejudice* since I wanted to find what male students/readers have thought of it, and also to see what issues connected to gender other scholars have brought up or found interesting. Most scholars have written on the subject of marriage and stereotypes of women, therefore this essay will focus on those things as well, however I will also see if there are stereotypes of men, since that could make it interesting to male students. Unfortunately there has been nothing written of what male students/readers might think of a novel like *Pride and Prejudice*.

1.2.1 **Research questions**

The three main questions used in order to reach the aim in this essay are:

- Why use fictional texts in a foreign language class?
- How can *Pride and Prejudice* be used as grounds for discussions of gender issues?
- What is desirable in men/women in *Pride and Prejudice*? What are the characteristics of
stereotypical male and female characters?

2. Material
Material used in this essay has been Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, and also articles by other critics who have written about it concerning the subject of gender, stereotypes and gender roles. One article that I found very interesting that brings up the issues of stereotypes is Missy Dehn Kubitschek’s *Truths universally acknowledged: Stereotypes of women in Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice* (2003) where she claims to have found stereotypical images of women and men in the novel. This article has been very useful since it gives examples of both characters and characteristics that might be considered stereotypical. Another article that is of interest is Susan Fraiman’s *Peevish Accents in the Juvenilia: A Feminist Key to Pride and Prejudice* (1993), this article deals with the issues of marriage and the relationships between the characters. Joanna, M. Smith’s “I am a Gentleman’s Daughter”: A Marxist-Feminist Reading of Pride and Prejudice (1993) is an article that deals with both the class and gender issues of *Pride and Prejudice*. Another article that is very useful when it comes to reading habits is *Boys and Books* (2004) by Jane McFann, in this article she discusses what boys tend to read and how much, compared to girls’ reading habits. This article shows that *Pride and Prejudice* is not the type of book boys would normally choose to read. As for facts about feminist criticism Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (2002) has been very helpful, it is a book that deals with different types of literary criticism, some facts about what they specialize in and some examples of how to do those types of readings.

When it comes to the pedagogical issues concerning why to use literature in the classroom several literary theorists and their works have been consulted. Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* (1995) as well as Ibsen and Wiland’s *Encounters with literature* (2000), are the books that I have found most useful, since both works consider literature reading to be an aesthetic experience, and both have a strong focus on the relationship between the text and the reader.

3. Approach
In order to answer the question of why to use literature in a foreign language classroom, the focus is mainly on the reader response theories of Rosenblatt and Ibsen and Wiland, concerning the reading of literature as an aesthetic experience. These ideas of using literature in order to find answers to questions about oneself, human nature and life in general are very interesting and useful in a
classroom if a teacher wishes to have a discussion concerning certain issues in a literary work. Since reading and interpreting a text can be seen as something very subjective and considering that the focus is on the relationship between reader and text, reader response theories are very valuable when it comes to answering the question of why to use literature in the classroom.

When it comes to the questions of how to use literature in the classroom, and what sort of literature to use, it is may be better to try different strategies and texts, in order to find out what works in a particular class, since all classes and students are different, there cannot be such things as universal methods or universal texts that will fit in all situations. Since this essay aims to answer the Why question, there will be no mention of all the diverse methods of how to use literature, maybe it is best for each teacher to find their own way. Consequently, the analysis will have a particular focus on the Why question. It can be argued that the Why question is the most fundamental one, since if there is no good answer for that one, the questions of How and of What might seem to hold less importance.

As it comes to analysing Pride and Prejudice in terms of gender in order to see what it has to offer both male and female students, feminist criticism is the chosen approach. Since there are many feminist critics who have written quite a lot on the subject of gender, and on the subject of the stereotypical images of men and women, and much is also written concerning the unequal relationship between the sexes in Pride and Prejudice, this seemed the most logical approach.

To perform my analysis I have gathered information about different theories concerning the reading of literature, and those theories that are concerned with reader response are the ones that are best suited in this case, since it is the students’ responses to the text that will lay the foundation for the class discussion which will hopefully follow after having read a text like Pride and Prejudice. Another reason why these theories are in focus is the fact that Pride and Prejudice is a fictional text, and reading and interpreting that sort of a text is something that subjective and there are no right or wrong when it comes to how the students might interpret it. To be noted is that empirical research concerning how the students would feel about, and experience, reading a novel like Pride and Prejudice, has not been included in this essay. Simply because I felt that it would be too much to ask from the students; it would mean that they would have to read it on their spare time, since their teacher has probably already decided the course content for this term.

Problems that I have encountered during the writing of this essay for instance concern; the fact that there is nothing written about what male students/readers think of Pride and Prejudice, when
ever I have searched for readers’ opinions of this particular work, there have only been women’s opinions available. Another problem that I faced when performing the analysis was the fact that there is not very much written on the subject of male stereotypes, nor of what the characteristics of a stereotypical male might be, all the best examples concerning stereotypical behaviour have focused on the female sex.

4. Analysis

There are many good reasons and arguments for why one should use literature in foreign language teaching. Here I will merely discuss a few of the most frequently mentioned in my sources. Some of these arguments are; Reading literature is a social and aesthetic experience (Rosenblatt 22-23), reading literature will lead to cultural enrichment, and literary texts are authentic (Parkinson 9-10). In a school context all these aspects are of importance, since one of the aims of upper secondary school is: to make the students “realize the values of cultural diversity” (National Agency for Education Lpf 94 1, my translation). Another reason why these theories are in focus is the fact that *Pride and Prejudice* is a fictional text, and reading and interpreting that sort of a text is something very subjective and there is no right or wrong when it comes to how the students might interpret it. By using an authentic English novel in the foreign language classroom, students will be able to have an aesthetic experience. By reading and learning what is considered to be a great work of art and is part of the canon of English literature they will gain cultural enrichment. Rosenblatt argues that an aesthetic experience is something very valuable and that it is this experience which makes literary texts so different from other texts (32). Both Rosenblatt and Ibsen and Wiland have a strong focus on the relationship between the reader and text, and both share the idea that understanding a text is something very subjective, and the way readers react to texts is depending on who they are. That is why literature reading in a foreign language classroom might be so valuable, since the different reactions the students will have will open up for a discussion, a discussion in which there are no rights or wrongs, and where all students’ opinions are important and valuable.

In order to search for stereotypical images of men and women in *Pride and Prejudice* there needs to be a definition of the term stereotype. These are the definitions of stereotypes found in the Longman dictionary of contemporary English: ”a belief or idea of what a particular type of person or thing is like. Stereotypes are often unfair or untrue” and the second definition is: “to decide unfairly that a type of person has particular qualities or abilities because they belong to a particular race, sex or social-class” (1627). When I in this essay claim a character to be a stereotype, I am
referring to certain characteristics that can be considered as typical male or female. Some stereotypical female characteristics, that Kubitschek mentions as well, might be: Gossiping, flirting with men, to be concerned with public appearances, being the caretaker of the family, and to be very concerned with marriage (2-3). It is the exaggeration of these characteristics that makes the characters stereotypical.

In the case of *Pride and Prejudice* the best example of a stereotypical female character is one whose greatest concern is to marry and to marry rich, since, as Kubitschek states ”the family’s class is determined by the status of its men” (1). Therefore I will just as Kubitschek, focus on those female characters that are “stereotypes of women obsessed with marriage”, and on those characters who are obsessed with money (1). One of the reasons why I want to include the issue of money when I search for stereotypical women is the fact that women did not work and earn their own money, and as Kubitschek states:”women were socially destined to be dependent on men for financial support”, this shows that money was a very important aspect in a marriage (2). Therefore my definition of a stereotypical female character is one who is obsessed with both marriage and money.

Two of the characters that Kubitschek considers to be obsessed with marriage are Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Lucas since they are trying to “secure ´good´ husbands (wealthy and respectable) for their daughters” (1). This can be considered true when it comes to the character of Mrs. Bennet since she speaks of her wish to marry off one of her daughters on the very first page of the novel, and considering the fact that she might be seen to represent “the silly, unreasonable female chatterbox” (Kubitschek 2). As Mrs. Bennet lets her husband know that a young man is to move into the neighbourhood, she also tells him that this man is “single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year” and she also thinks it:”a fine thing for our girls!” (Austen 1). It is quite clear that Mrs. Bennet is, in fact, obsessed with the idea of marrying off her daughters, since a single man cannot move into the neighbourhood without having her eyes on him and with this intention in mind. What makes Mrs. Bennet fit the description of a stereotypical character even more so is the fact that she, as most women that are considered to be stereotypical, is obsessed with money as well, and especially when it comes to having one of her daughters marry someone wealthy. One good example to show Mrs. Bennet’s exaggerated obsession with both marriage and with money is when she finds out that Mr. Darcy wants to marry her daughter Elizabeth. Despite all earlier resentment and hatred she felt towards Mr. Darcy, she immediately
changes her mind when she finds that he wishes to marry Elizabeth. This is just one of many things
she has said of Mr. Darcy, before she knew he was interested in Elizabeth: “he is a most
disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no
enduring him!” (Austen 9).

Yet as she finds that the rich Mr. Darcy fancies her daughter and they are now engaged she says
“Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! dear me! Mr. Darcy!” and as she goes on praising him,
it becomes quite apparent why she is so happy all of the sudden: “I can think of nothing else! Ten
thousand a year, and very likely more! ’Tis as good as a Lord!” (Austen 290). This I believe shows
that Mr. Darcy’s money is more important to Mrs. Bennet than his character, Mrs. Bennet’s
primary concern is not Elizabeth’s happiness, but to secure her financial support. Mrs. Bennet is a
character in whom one senses that the importance of money, and the obsession with it, is
exaggerated in order to make the reader react and question it. Another good point that Joanna Smith
brings up, that also might show Mrs. Bennet’s concern for money, is that Mrs. Bennet, herself
married up: “as the daughter of an attorney Mrs. Bennet married up when she captivated the landed
Mr. Bennet” (3). That might explain why she has this particular interest in finding rich husbands
for her daughters, since she might be afraid of having to support them herself.

Since reading and interpreting literary texts is something subjective it is very likely that the
students will have different opinions concerning certain characters, some might sympathize with
them and some might condemn them. As literature is based on personal emotions and experiences,
the readers can see different aspects of a certain issue by “entering” the minds of others and seeing
things from their perspective. Doing so allows us to see ourselves and our way of life from an
outside perspective; that might make us question the things we have taken for granted. The words
of Ibsen & Wiland will illustrate my point: “How a text interprets reality may challenge our own
prejudices and fixed opinions about other societies. In the effort to perceive a situation from
another point of view, learners will have to detach themselves, at least temporarily, from their own
values, beliefs and expectations” (144). One example of this might be to compare the way people
lived in Jane Austen’s time with the society of today. The character of Mrs. Bennet can be very
interesting in a class discussion; one interesting aspect might be Mrs. Bennet’s concern for her
daughters, the students might consider her a women who is desperate to have her daughters married
to rich men just so that she might gain from it herself, or they might consider her a good mother
who is concerned for her daughters welfare and happiness. It would be interesting to hear if the
students think that mothers of today still have this concern, or how they would have reacted if their mother behaved like Mrs. Bennet. It could also be interesting to hear whether the students consider her a good or bad mother and why they think so.

Since I have now shown that Mrs. Bennet can be considered a stereotype, I will move on to the other female characters in which I have detected this exaggerated desire for rich men. Another female character that can be consider as a stereotypical female on the basis of wanting rich men or marrying for financial support is Miss Charlotte Lucas. Charlotte Lucas is the kind of woman who is convinced that “happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance” or depends on how successful a woman is in “fixing” herself the man she desires (Austen 15). Charlotte has the idea that women have to encourage men to make them fall in love; this is what she tells Elizabeth Bennet:

If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all begin freely- a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten a woman better shew more affection than she feels (Austen 15).

She believes that after having secured a man a woman has “the leisure of falling in love as much as she chuses” (Austen 15). Although Charlotte does not say so herself, Elizabeth immediately and ironically recognizes that Charlotte’s “plan is a good one […] where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married” (Austen 15). Charlotte is the kind of woman who would do just about anything to be married. Kubitschek argues that Charlotte Lucas’s greatest fear is to remain unmarried: “Charlotte Lucas correctly says that marrying nearly any husband is more pleasant that remaining single and poor” because to be a maid would mean that she would be forced to take care of herself financially and that would mean a lot of hard work which does not pay very well at all, these kind of jobs would be: ”servants, seamstresses, factory workers, or governesses” (1).

As Charlotte Lucas does not believe very much in love or thinks very highly of men, it might seem as if marriage would equal income to her. This is what she says about her feelings concerning her engagement with Mr. Collins: “I am not a romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins’s character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast about entering
the marriage state” (Austen 96). And as we are told that: “Without thinking highly of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want”, it is clear that Charlotte’s only intention for marrying is financial security (Austen 94). Although she does not like her future husband all that much we find that she is quite pleased with the way things have turned out for her: “This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it” (Austen 94). Smith states that; Charlotte’s “reasons for accepting Mr. Collins are entirely logical in a culture that provides middle-class women almost no ‘preservative from want’ except marriage” (4-5).

Thus, the character of Charlotte Lucas can be considered very interesting to the students when it comes to the unequal relationship between the sexes. A very interesting discussion might arise in the classroom, concerning whether or not Charlotte should be considered a stereotype of a woman or if she is doing the only logical thing. If the students considered her actions to be logical, it might be interesting to discuss to what extent she can be considered as a stereotype. This might lead to a discussion in which the logic of a woman being practically forced to marry in order to support herself, must be questioned. Perhaps the marriage between Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins is the best example of how unequal the relationship between men and women in *Pride and Prejudice* is. Mr. Collins’s main concern was to marry- for his own sake, because he felt it was “a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances […] to set the example of matrimony in his parish” (Austen 81), yet Charlotte Lucas “accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment” (Austen 93). This shows that women were more or less forced to marry, while men had more choice. Since literature is “imitation of life or representation of reality”, literature allows the students to move to different times and places, it also allows them into the hearts and minds of its characters, and that way the students are given an opportunity to feel or experience what life might have been like in the 19th century (Ibsen & Wiland 144). However, we must remind our students that literature is merely an imitation or a representation of reality and can not be seen as the absolute truth, but just one way of representing it. One might easily consider Charlotte to be a stereotype of a woman who is only concerned with money, yet one might just as easily consider her a woman who had no choice but to marry. Charlotte Lucas’s choices and behaviour might be seen as a good example of one of the consequences of a patriarchal society. The discussion concerning
her character might make the students think of what today’s society is like, if we still have this division of power, and if we do, why is it so.

However, Mrs. Bennet and Miss Lucas are not the only female characters that might be considered stereotypical. Miss Caroline Bingley is another one of the female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* that might be considered just as stereotypical as the ones already mentioned above. She has the same strong, or perhaps an even stronger desire to marry as Charlotte Lucas has. What makes Caroline even more of a stereotype than Charlotte is that she is not only set on fixing the richest character in the novel; Mr. Darcy, but she also lies and makes plans of how to fix him, and she does all this in order to secure financial support for herself. Kubitschek states that some of the female characters, Caroline included, in *Pride and Prejudice*; “pretend to stereotypical feminine traits because they lack the power to act directly” (Kubitschek 3). One way of making people act for you is to influence them to make decisions from which one will benefit, and this is exactly what Caroline Bingley is doing. Caroline is jealous of Elizabeth and does everything she can in order to sabotage Elizabeth’s chances with Mr. Darcy, by making herself appear to be a better choice. As soon as she finds that Mr. Darcy thinks Elizabeth’s eyes are beautiful, she does all she can to make Elizabeth look like a less desirable object by bringing up Elizabeth’s family as an example. These are Caroline’s own words: “Miss Elizabeth Bennet!” “I am all astonishment. How long has she been such a favourite?—and pray when am I to wish you joy?” “You will have a charming mother-in-law, indeed, and of course she will be always at Pemberley with you” (Austen 19).

Caroline Bingley seems to be the kind of woman, who makes herself appear better than she is, and elevates herself on the expense of others. We find that Caroline “often tried to provoke Darcy into disliking [Elizabeth Bennet] by talking of their supposed marriage, and planning his happiness in such an alliance” (Austen 39). Another example of how she tries to make herself look better is when Elizabeth is at Netherfield, and we find that Caroline “began abusing her as soon as she left the room [and that Elizabeth’s] manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and impertinence; she had no conversation, no stile, no taste, no beauty” (Austen 25). As she goes on, throughout the novel, to mock both Elizabeth and even Jane, who is supposed to be her friend, because of their inferior connections it is quite apparent that she seems to think that her money and social status immediately would make her, not only a better person, but also a better choice of marriage partner for Mr. Darcy.

Moreover, Miss Caroline Bingley seems to share Charlotte Lucas’s ideas that women should
show more affection than they feel, and that a woman must take her opportunity to make the most out of the time in the company of the man she desires. Here again, we have something that might be considered a ‘stereotypical feminine trait’ that Caroline adopts in order to try to influence Mr. Darcy, in one way or another. As soon as Caroline Bingley and Mr. Darcy are in the same room, she always tries to get his attention, either by saying something degrading about someone else or by commenting on the things he does. One example is when Mr. Darcy is writing a letter to his sister: “Mr. Darcy was writing, and Miss Bingley, seated near him, was watching the progress of his letter, and repeatedly calling off his attention by messages to his sister” (Austen 34). Examples of the things she says by doing so are: “You write uncommonly fast” and “How can you contrive to write so even?” this shows that she really is not searching for a serious conversation, but only to make him aware of her presence (Austen 35). She keeps complimenting him on everything he does, no matter how small or big a thing, in order to show her interest, and to capture his attention. Caroline seems to think that she will have success with Mr. Darcy, by flattering him and boosting his ego. Caroline does as much as she can to make sure that she will have as much of Mr. Darcy’s time and attention as possible by trying to find out his plans or by making it into a coincidence that what they are to do happen to be the same thing. These lines will exemplify my point: “When tea was over, Mr Hurst reminded his sister-in-law of the card-table—but in vain. She had obtained private intelligence that Mr. Darcy did not wish for cards” (Austen 41). And as one finds that when “Mr. Darcy took up a book; Miss Bingley did the same”, it shows that she was not at all interested in reading, but in trying to get Darcy’s attention, since the only reason she chose that particular book was because it was the second volume of the one Mr. Darcy was reading (Austen 41). All these examples show how desperately Caroline seeks Mr. Darcy’s time and attention and how much she would like him to give it to her, although he does not.

However, Caroline Bingley is also the type of woman who is very persistent and does not give up on her plan of capturing Mr. Darcy that easily, and this quote might be used to support my idea:

Miss Bingley’s attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy’s progress through his book, as in reading her own; and she was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at his page. She could not win him, however, to any conversation; he merely answered her questions, and read on (Austen 41).

Yet Caroline does not let Mr. Darcy’s silence bring down her mood or lessen her attempts, instead she goes on alluding to Mr. Darcy as she exclaims: “How pleasant it is to spend an evening this way!
I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! ”When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library” (Austen 41). This shows that Caroline Bingley has no scruples when it comes to getting what she wants, she is determined to get Mr. Darcy not matter what is takes. I have shown that she is willing to do just about anything, in order to get Mr. Darcy; she has said many negative things about Elizabeth, she has tried many different methods of getting Darcy’s attention, and she has even in his presence alluded to him as her future husband.

Therefore the character of Miss Caroline Bingley can be considered very interesting in a gender discussion, since she might be seen as the stereotypical, jealous, and greedy female rival of the heroine. Since betrayal unfortunately seems to be a rather timeless issue, it is very likely that some of the students have had similar experiences as Elizabeth and Jane, or might have had other experiences of being betrayed, which might lead to a very interesting discussion of why people act in certain ways and what consequences these actions might have. Fraiman states that: “rivalry among women in Austen is one visible and logical result of their absolute need to marry at a time when men […] were scarce” (6). As this rivalry is best shown in the character of Caroline Bingley, surely she appears to be a very interesting character. One aspect of this rivalry that might be interesting to the students is the fact, that even though our society has changed, and women no longer are as obsessed with getting married as before, women still have this rivalry between them, and still consider other women as the enemy. Hearing the student’s opinions of why they think this rivalry still exists would be very interesting, and I believe that there might be many quite different opinions about this issue. As literary texts often are elaborate descriptions of human experiences, the students can relate to these texts, since they probably have had similar experiences, and by seeing another side of an issue, they can get a better understanding of human behaviour.

The final stereotypical female character that I will discuss is the young Miss Lydia Bennet, who is obsessed with men and flirting, and she is equally as obsessed with money and marriage as her mother is. One might even claim her to be an exact copy of her mother, since they both indulge in gossip, and none of them seem to have the ability of keeping to themselves, what ever foolish opinion they might have, and both of them seem to be equally obsessed with social appearances. Mr. Bennet seems to be of the opinion that Lydia is the most foolish of all his daughters, as he says that he considers her “uncommonly foolish” and “silly” (Austen 21), and he also considers his wife to be one of the most foolish women he ever met, as we find that he thinks that she has a “weak understanding” and “illiberal mind”, and that “her ignorance and folly had contributed to his
amusement” (Austen 180). This, I believe, supports my idea of Lydia to be very much like her mother. Kubitschek also notices this similarity when she states: ”Mrs. Bennet represents the silly, unreasonable female chatterbox; her daughter Lydia presents a younger manifestation of the same problem, the boy-crazy adolescence” (2).

When Elizabeth gives her opinion of Lydia, and of the way she behaves, we find that Lydia is endangering the happiness of all her sisters, by her “imprudent manner” (Austen 176). This is what Elizabeth is telling her father on the subject of Lydia and her trip to Brighton: “Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia’s character” (Austen 176). Elizabeth also tells her father that if he does not do anything about Lydia’s behaviour, she will be “beyond the reach of amendment” and that her character then would be fixed (Austen 176). That would mean that Lydia, at the age of sixteen, would be:

the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous. A flirt too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person, and from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite (Austen 176-177).

We also find that Elizabeth considers Lydia “Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrouled!” (Austen 177). This shows why Lydia Bennet might be considered, as Kubitschek states: “the most rebellious female character [since she] violates the critical taboo for an unmarried woman when she runs away with Wickham” (2). Lydia’s elopement with Wickham, as well as the characteristics of her personality, make Lydia into the “most selfish and immoral” female character in the novel (Kubitschek 2). The character of Lydia Bennet might be considered as a perfect example of a young woman whose only care in life is to live for the moment and enjoy herself, however she also seems very concerned with securing a suitable marriage partner, yet it is her thoughtlessness and her inconsequent behaviour that disables her from making rational choices.

Moreover, as Lydia boasts of her marriage to Mr. Wickham, she takes her mothers´ side and says: “Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman”, and as we learn that she “longed to see their other neighbours, and to hear herself called Mrs. Wickham, by each of them”, this again shows that she is very pleased with the idea of being married maybe even more than she is pleased with what it actually means to be married (Austen
240-241). Since one finds that marriage has not changed Lydia at all and that: “Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless”, it shows that she does not take her role as a wife seriously, and that she only sees her marriage as yet another subject to boast about (Austen 239). Lydia Bennet is one of many stereotypical female characters who, as Kubitschek puts it; ”will enjoy neither her husband nor their financial situation” (2).

The characters of Lydia Bennet and Charlotte Lucas, are good examples of women who are so obsessed with the thought of being married that they have married the first persons who gave them an offer. Since neither Charlotte nor Lydia are considered to have great chances of happiness with the choices they have made, surely these characters will open up a discussion of the rather desperate circumstances under which women had to make decisions concerning their future. This discussion could be about the students’ opinion of both Charlotte’s and Lydia’s chances of finding happiness, and their abilities to support themselves, if they had not married. It would be interesting to hear what the students think these women’s lives would have been like if they had remained single or if they had married a man who they were in love with. Another issue that might be of interest when it comes to Lydia is the fact that she might be considered as a child still, since she is only sixteen, this might be interesting to the students if they consider themselves, or the sixteen year olds of today, and compare Lydia’s behaviour to a typical sixteen year old girl of today. The students could discuss differences and similarities between being sixteen in the 19th century and being sixteen in the year of 2006, and they might also consider what the characteristics of the typical “Lydia of 2006”, might be.

The qualities that men find desirable in the female characters of *Pride and Prejudice* are of course not those qualities that belong to the stereotypical female characters, instead it is those qualities that the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet and her sister Jane, possess. To use Kubitchek’s words: Of the five Bennet daughters, Jane and Elizabeth best exemplify the novel’s conservative values: female chastity, emotional sincerity, rationality, and loyalty to tradition” (2). The character that best exemplifies how a female character should be in the eyes of men, is the character of Jane Bennet, since as Kubitschek states: “Jane exemplifies the ideal, the virtuous woman always considerate of others, always reserved in expressing her feelings” (2). Another example of how important female virtue and chastity is to the male characters is when Mary says: “that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable- that one false step involves her in endless ruin- that her reputation no less brittle that it is beautiful” (Austen 219).
As I have given examples of some of the characteristics of stereotypical female characters, and shown why some of the female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* could be considered as stereotypes, I will now move on to see if there are male characters that could be considered as stereotypes as well. Since it has already been mentioned that women were depicted as dependent on men, this means that men are depicted as the providers and protectors of the women and the family. As the female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are very concerned with money and social status, this shows that these qualities are the ones they consider most important in a man. One good example of the importance of money is that the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* states: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a large fortune must be in want of a wife.” Although this sentence is meant to be ironic it still says a lot about what is considered desirable in men. And as one finds that even if marriage is not the single man’s own design, “this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters” (Austen 1). As Kubitschek states that those who can be considered “good husbands” are “those with good moral character, wealth, and compatible personalities”, I believe that it supports the idea of money being important to men, and that money is what attracts women (2).

The male characters that I will refer to as stereotypical are the characters who give an appearance of possessing one or all of the above mentioned qualities, who want to appear to be good husbands by pretending to be someone that they, in fact, are not. Many of the stereotypical male characters are the ones who boast a lot of their money or social connections, men who like to appear as great men with good morals; men of importance. It is this pretending to be someone else that makes these male characters stereotypical. They pretend in order to hide the fact that they are rather shallow men with flat characters, and that they hold no great importance or have any morals what so ever. I would even claim that some of the male characters pretend, and try to fool people around them, for the same reasons that the female characters might lie and scheme; they are all hoping to marry someone rich. Money is a very important issue when it comes to the male characters since money is what women want, and the more money men have the more desirable they become in the eyes of women, and also the more respectable in the eyes of other men, to be noted however is that it had to be inherited money. The stereotypical male characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are those who try to convince the society that they are richer, more gentlemanlike, and more respectable, than they in fact are. These are the characters who give the appearance of being
the perfect men, just so that they might find a woman who is more respectable and richer than they are, and for this woman to empower them as men, since money equals power and influence.

Mr. Collins is a character that is easily recognized as a stereotypical male character, one immediately senses his need to show that he is a true gentleman with important connections. His continuous boasting about his connections with Lady Catherine de Bourgh might be a good example. He has made sure to mention Lady Catherine’s name in the letter he sends to Mr. Bennet, before ever having met with him:

I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of this parish, where it shall be my earnest endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards her Ladyship, and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England. (Austen 47)

The way Mr. Collins speaks of Lady Catherine and of himself in this letter is seen throughout the novel, he can hardly have a conversation with anyone without mentioning Lady Catherine or without saying something that would make him look like a amiable young man. To Mr. Collins it seems to be enough to drop Lady Catherine’s name in order for him to get the attention and estimation he desires, he seems to believe that if Lady Catherine likes him, then surely everyone else must do so as well. Instead, we find that “Mr. Collins was not a sensible man” and that:

A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living at Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he felt for her rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility (Austen 53).

We also find that some of the other characters consider him “an oddity” and that “there is something very pompous in his stile” and that “there is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter” (Austen 48).

As Mr. Collins, during his first dinner at Longbourn, could hardly speak of anything else besides Lady Catherine and her family, Mr. Bennet observes that; “it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy” (Austen 51). And flatter he does, in fact he is so keen on pleasing and flattering, that he appears as a very silly man whose only talent seems to be obsequiousness.
After his first dinner at the Bennet’s we find that: “Mr. Bennet’s expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped” (Austen 51). Kubitschek refers to the character of Mr. Collins as “foolish”, “weak” and “irresponsible”, and this description fits well with the view I hold of him, and also with the way other characters in *Pride and Prejudice* view him(2).

Mr. Collins might then be seen as the one of the stereotypical male characters who wish to make themselves appear to be of greater importance in the world than they actually are, he wants to make himself look good by boasting of the rich and important people he knows, and to recommend himself by pointing out what high connections he has. The character of Mr. Collins might be very interesting in a class discussion; it would be interesting to hear what the male students’ views are of him, if they consider him a stereotype, or a silly and shallow man? It would be interesting to compare Mr. Collin’s behaviour to that of modern men, does the modern man still boast about his connections and try to impress people by mentioning how much somebody in a high position likes him. It would be interesting to hear if the students think that reputation and connections are still as important today as it was in the 19th century.

However, there are other aspects of a character that would make him fit in the stereotypical category as well; one of these is the want of money, or to give the appearance of having money. The only male character in the novel, who seems equally obsessed with money as many of the female characters, is the character of Mr. Wickham. As one finds that the reasons for Mr. Wickham to dislike Mr. Darcy is because of money, one can also see how extremely important the issue of money is to Mr. Wickham. As he says of Mr. Darcy that “The world is blinded by his fortune and consequence, or frightened by his high and imposing manners, and sees him only as he chuses to be seen”, one can not help but wonder if Mr. Wickham only wishes for money to have this power, and also wishes that money would do the same thing in his case (Austen 59). Mr. Wickham is also one of the characters who are very concerned with appearances and wants people to see him only as he chooses since he is making up lies about Mr. Darcy, and lies about the true reasons to why they are not on friendly terms. Mr. Wickham lies about Mr. Darcy not granting his father’s dying wish; that Mr. Wickham should be ordained, and for him to be supported financially until he is. Wickham claims he has not received any money from Mr. Darcy and was therefore forced to join the army:

> A military life is not what I was intended for, but circumstances have now made it eligible. The church ought to have been my profession —I was brought up for the church, and I should at this time have been in possession of a most valuable living, had it pleased the gentleman we are speaking of just now (Austen 60).
The great importance money seems to have in Mr. Wickham’s life can not only be seen in his dislike for Mr. Darcy, but also in his way with women. Mr. Wickham is the only male character in *Pride and Prejudice* who seems to have adopted the women’s plans of capturing rich partners, it is very clear that Mr. Wickham is a man who is in search of a rich wife.

As we find that Wickham’s “apparent partiality [for Elizabeth] had subsided [because of] The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds [that were] the most remarkable charm of the young lady; to whom he was rendering himself agreeable” (Austen 115-116). Elizabeth’s answer to this is that she has come to a “mortifying conviction that handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as the plain” (Austen 116). This shows that Mr. Wickham’s greatest concern when it comes to choosing a wife is money. As we find that Mr. Wickham has tried to seduce young rich girls before, for example the rich Miss Darcy, we also find that “Mr. Wickham’s chief object was unquestionably” Miss Georgiana’s fortune, “which is thirty thousand pounds” (Austen 155). After receiving this information, Mr Wickham’s intentions should become quite unquestionable to the students as well as to any other reader.

Considering the fact that Mr. Wickham was, as Elizabeth puts it “bribed” into marrying Lydia, there is absolutely no question about the importance of money when it comes to the character of Mr. Wickham. This particular character is very important in a class discussion about gender, since this character has the same obsession with money as the female characters do, although he might have different reasons for this obsession. A very interesting discussion might arise in class concerning this want of money. One might question if money is still as important to men today? Another question might be if money is somehow connected to masculinity; if money makes men feel more masculine. It would be interesting to hear the male students’ opinions concerning money and marriage, if they think that money is just as important to women in today’s society. Another very interesting thing would be to hear if the male students consider the images of male characters in *Pride and Prejudice* to be fair and realistic, and if they consider the male characters as the ones with the power. Maybe they think that the male characters actually suffer from the way women view them? Mr. Wickham might be considered a character who feels that he needs all this money in order to feel like a good husband, or to be able to support his rather extravagant life style, and one might question if, this keeping up of appearance, and the constant chase of money is not very tiresome. Discussing Mr. Wickham’s character might lead to a very interesting question of the
various ways in which men could be exploited. Could it be so that a patriarchal society is not entirely beneficial to men, and that this exploitation is one of the side-effects of such a society? In a society where the differences between men and women are so great, and where the man’s role is the one of a provider, men might easily fall victim to women whose only concern is to be supported by them. In such a society a man’s worth and his masculinity could be measured in money. It would be very interesting to hear the male students’ opinions concerning the importance of money in a man’s life and also how the image of masculinity is depicted in the novel and what the image of masculinity looks like in today’s society, if there are differences or similarities.

5. Conclusion
This essay has tried to show that *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that a teacher could use in a class with both male and female students, since it deals with issues that are important to both genders. The analysis has shown that there are stereotypical images of both men and women in *Pride and Prejudice*, some of the female characters that might be considered as stereotypes are for instance Mrs. Bennet, Caroline Bingley, Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet. The characters of Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham can be seen as stereotypes of men. What makes these characters stereotypical is for instance their obsession with marriage, money and social status, it might also be their way of pretending to possess the qualities others desire. The analysis has also shown what men and women find desirable in the opposite sex. The qualities that women find most desirable in men are; money, a good reputation and good moral character. The qualities that men find desirable in women are; chastity, purity, they should be caring, and reserved.

My conclusion is that since it is a fact that there are stereotypical images of men and women that show inequality between the sexes in *Pride and Prejudice*, it can be interesting to both male and female students. This essay has also tried to show that there is something in particular that a literary text can offer the students and that is an aesthetic experience. Through literature the students are given an ability to move back in time and experience the 19th century, and get an idea of how men and women might have lived, and what was considered desirable in men and women, and how the power was divided between the sexes. They are given a chance to question the gender roles of the people of the 19th century, and compare them with the way men and women behave in the society of today. The students might question if female virtue is still as desirable in women today as it was in 19th century, or if wealth, titles and good morals are as desirable in men, as it was in Jane Austen’s time. The students might see what has changed since then, and what still needs to be done.
Students will be given an opportunity to view themselves from an outside perspective for a while and question if we, in today’s society, are as equal as we might imagine.

Considering the fact that the way we experience a text, and the way we interpret it, is something very subjective and is based on our own personal experiences, a novel like *Pride and Prejudice* might be very good to use in a class with both male and female students. Since these students all have had different experiences, surely they will have different views of the texts. It is important to have a discussion about all the different ways a text might be interpreted, since it gives the students an opportunity to learn from each other, and also gives them a chance to face their own prejudices and fixed opinions concerning certain issues. The students need to discuss these questions, which are still of much interest in today’s society, in an environment that does not judge them for their opinions. As teachers we need to make sure that the classroom is an environment like this, a place where no opinion is considered wrong or right, an environment that is safe, a place where the students are not afraid to ask questions. Since there are no rights or wrongs when it comes to how we understand and interpret a literary work, reading and speaking of literature can be a good way to create this kind of safe atmosphere.

*Pride and Prejudice* is just one of many literary texts a teacher might introduce to a class with the intention of discussing certain issues that are dealt with in that particular work. My belief was that *Pride and Prejudice* could be used in a classroom with both male and female students, and by reading it with a focus on gender and on stereotypical images of men and women, I believe that I have shown that *Pride and Prejudice* has a lot to offer both male and female students.

As for further research, it would be very interesting to hear the reactions and opinions of male readers and critics, since the critics mentioned in this essay have all been female. It would also be very interesting to use *Pride and Prejudice* in a real class to see what aspects and issues the students consider important, their views might be very different from the teacher’s. It would also be interesting to look deeper into what a stereotypical image of a man looks like, since the description of stereotypes when it comes to men is somewhat vague. It would be interesting to see if men consider the images of male characters in *Pride and Prejudice* as stereotypes at all, or if this depiction of men is realistic.
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