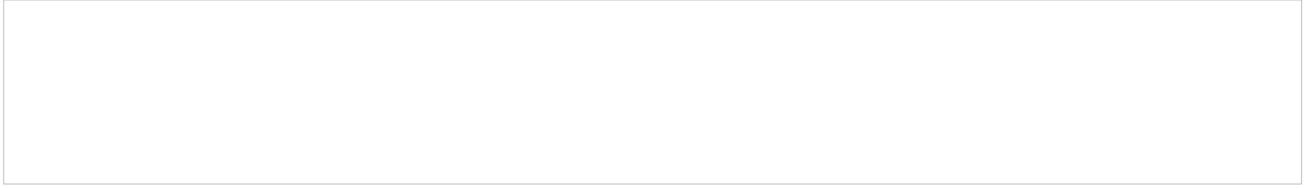


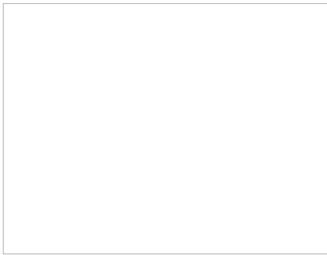
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Darcy's Vampiric Descendants: Austen's Perfect Romance Hero and J. R. Ward's Black Dagger Brotherhood

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READERS AND AUTHORS OF POPULAR ROMANCE FICTION claim Jane Austen as the fountainhead of all romance novels. No matter how apparently removed from Austen's "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village"¹ the modern novels might seem, Austen's novels epitomize the structure

and conventions of the romance genre and Austen's characters are the ideal heroes and heroines of popular romance fiction. E. J. Clery identifies one reason for two hundred years of Austen's influence over the most popular genre of fiction: "Austen is the founder of the modern romance narrative, as the first to recognize the extraordinary narrative power of keeping the hero's point of view in reserve. The suspense surrounding the hero's feelings and intentions drives the story forward in a way unequalled by shipwrecks, bandits, abductions, or eerie sounds" (339). The necessary corollary to Clery's claim is that the power of this narrative suspense lies in the promise that the hero will resolve all mystery by overcoming his very nature to confess his feelings to his heroine, as Darcy does in *Pride and Prejudice*. "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (189). The popularity of hero-centric romance series—J. R. Ward's paranormal Black Dagger Brotherhood series, Suzanne Brockmann's military Troubleshooter series, Susan Elizabeth Phillips's Chicago Stars football series, and Stephanie Laurens's historical Cynster series, for example—testifies to the appeal of the romance hero. But as modern romance fiction expands its use of the hero's point of view, it must preserve the suspense of his feelings and intentions in other ways, resulting in exaggerated representations of both the hero's masculinity—which itself symbolizes the barrier he must overcome to express his emotions—and his ultimate emotional debasement. The modern version of Darcy's moderate expression of his love for Elizabeth and his appreciation of her influence over him, then, is the extreme of a superhuman vampire weeping for the love of his heroine.

According to the Romance Writers of America, a story requires just two components to be considered a romance: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending ("About"). Using this deceptively simple definition, the romance genre constitutes "the largest share of the consumer [book] market in 2008" ("2008 ROMStat" 14), including not only the monthly category romances printed by Harlequin in North America and Mills and Boon in the United Kingdom, but also mainstream historical, contemporary, and paranormal single-title romances. The definition for popular romance fiction also embraces Jane Austen's novels.² As Pamela Regis claims, "Austen was a genius. Her chosen form was the romance novel, and she never deviated from it" (76). *Pride and Prejudice* is, in Regis's estimation, the perfect romance, an academic evaluation supported by poll after poll of modern readers who consistently rank *Pride and Prejudice* as the most romantic novel of all time.³ One of the reasons it is considered so perfect and so romantic, of course, is its hero, Darcy, who consistently ranks in reader polls as the most romantic hero in all literature.⁴

“Such a man as Darcy”: Darcy-mania and the appeal of masculine confession

Our generation is by no means the first to be smitten with Darcy-mania, however. While Laurence Olivier, who played Darcy in the 1940 film, caused his own wave of Darcy-mania, the phenomenon began with the initial publication of *Pride and Prejudice*. In May 1813, Annabella Milbanke, the future Lady Byron, wrote to her mother:

I have finished the novel called *Pride & Prejudice*, which I think a very superior work. It depends not on any of the common resources of Novel writers, no drownings, nor conflagrations, nor runaway horses, nor lap-dogs & parrots, nor chambermaids & milliners, nor rencontres and disguises. I really think it is the *most probable* fiction I have ever read. It is not a crying book, but the interest is very strong, especially for Mr. Darcy. (Elwin 159)

In distinguishing Austen’s “superior” style and probable fictional world from the devices of sentimental and gothic fiction, Milbanke’s appreciation focuses, surprisingly, not on the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, whose point of view predominates in the text, but on the emotionally distant hero, Darcy.

Romantic-era author Mary Russell Mitford proclaims a more specific interest in Darcy’s welfare in her letter to Sir William Elford in December 1814:

The want of elegance is almost the only want in Miss Austen. I have not read her *Mansfield Park*, but it is impossible not to feel in every line of *Pride and Prejudice*, in every word of “Elizabeth,” the entire want of taste which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine as the beloved of such a man as Darcy. Wickham is equally bad. Oh! They were just fit for each other, and I cannot forgive that delightful Darcy for parting them. Darcy should have married Jane. He is of all the admirable characters the best designed and the best sustained. (Southam 54)

Mitford wishes Darcy to marry Jane because she is concerned for the future happiness of the most “delightful” character in *Pride and Prejudice*. By putting Elizabeth’s name in quotation marks, and by claiming that questionable aesthetic choices in Austen’s narrative style produce Elizabeth’s pertness and her worldliness, Mitford emphasizes

Elizabeth's fictional nature. Yet, although Mitford appreciates the skill of Austen's construction of Darcy—he is well designed and well sustained, after all—when she writes of “such a man as Darcy” and talks of being unable to forgive him, she seems to lose her perspective on Darcy's fictionality and treats him as a real person.

In 1813, one of the very first reviewers of *Pride and Prejudice* (presumably male) contended, “On the character of Elizabeth, the main interest of the novel depends” (Southam 46). However, rather than concentrating on Elizabeth's character or the lessons she learns, the reviewer commends Austen for using Elizabeth to create a realistic method for effecting self-awareness in Darcy:

[T]he fair author has shewn considerable ingenuity in the mode of bringing about the final *eclaircissement* between her and Darcy. Elizabeth's sense and conduct are of a superior order to those of the common heroines of novels. From her independence of character, which is kept within the proper line of decorum, and her well-timed sprightliness, she teaches the man of Family-Pride to know himself. (Southam 46)

The reviewer seems to be claiming that Austen's skill lies in making Elizabeth's character not an end in itself but the means to the end of Darcy's self-understanding. The reviewer then quotes Darcy's fervent post-proposal *mea culpa*, in which he explains the shortcomings of his upbringing and expresses his appreciation of the changes wrought by Elizabeth's reproofs. The substantial amount of space the reviewer devoted to the passage demonstrates that at least one contemporary reader's interest in the emotional pinnacle of *Pride and Prejudice* lies not in Elizabeth's private realization of her blindness, nor in the successful proposal, but rather in Darcy's ardent confession of his sins and his appreciation of the education and the reformation he experienced during the course of the narrative. Darcy reveals his understanding that the mantle of masculine authority bequeathed to him by his father needed correction. He confesses not only that Elizabeth's intervention set him straight, but also that this correction was sorely needed and fully appreciated. In “hearing” Darcy's confession from his own mouth, so to speak, rather than indirectly from the narrator, his words have an immediacy, a legitimacy, and the emotional ring of truth, demonstrating his commitment to his continued emotional growth, especially in comparison to the remote indirect dialogue of Darcy's actual proposal.⁵ In quoting this speech so extensively, this anonymous reviewer predicts the appeal of modern popular romance for female readers: confession by the hero of the necessity of his love for the heroine to complete his

integration into moral society.

“In want of a wife”: the hero and the marriage plot

Pride and Prejudice, of course, begins, “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (3). This famous beginning is not merely ironic; it also summarizes Austen’s construction of masculinity in which marriage is as necessary an institution for the male characters as it is for the female—that is, a man absolutely *is* in want, in need, of a wife, in order to be completed by her. Feminist criticism has long argued that the marriage plot, in which the heroine’s story necessarily ends with marriage, is inherently conservative. Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains that the marriage plot “muffles the main female character, represses quest,” and “is based on extremes of sexual difference,” finally arguing that the marriage plot “is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole” (5). The marriage plot, then, replicates for female readers the repression of the patriarchal system to which they are subject. While admitting the validity of DuPlessis’s critique, Laura Mooneyham White attempts “a partial defense of the marriage plot” (72) by maintaining that it “persists in the fictive imagination for some compelling reasons, and while the attack on the marriage plot as indicative of repressive social conditions and ideologies is well justified, feminist critics might benefit from seeing beyond the historical and cultural dimension of marriage” to examine its narrative purpose (76). White eventually comes to the conclusion that Austen’s completed novels “emphasize that through marriage one becomes part of a social and economic entity. Marriage allows the *heroine* to join the wholeness of society even as she joins the unity of male and female” (83, emphasis added). Critical focus on the heroine, however, ignores the fact that she is only one half of the romantic relationship Austen constructs in each book.

By examining Austen’s marriage plots from the perspective of her construction of the subjectivity of her heroes, then, it is possible to expand understanding of the marriage plot beyond its efficacy for the heroine. While White demonstrates convincingly that there is more to the appeal of the marriage plot for female readers than brainwashing about the benefits of subjugation to the whims of a husband, Austen fundamentally refocuses the marriage plot to establish the benefits, indeed the equal necessity, for the *hero* to conclude his narrative with marriage. Austen’s novels argue that civilized and civilizing associations with women in a permanent, romantic, companionate relationship are necessary for *men* to achieve their full potential. Indeed, Austen takes that argument one step further and insists that her heroes confess their recognition and appreciation of the fact that love for a woman is the

essential component in the construction of satisfactory, complete masculine subjectivity. The marriage plot, as Austen develops it, is as indispensable to the hero's narrative as it is to the heroine's. For the Romantic-era female reader, this narrative strategy was more empowering and practical than questioning the marriage plot in a world where marriage was, for all practical purposes, an economic imperative for women.

“The savage beast is tamed by love”: masculine confessions and tears

Critics—myself included, of course—can make all sorts of claims about the political ramifications for the marriage plot of the romance hero's confession and acceptance of his moral development through love. Nevertheless, the proof of the power and appeal of the hero's confession, and of Austen's genius in creating it in the first place, can be found in the modern romance reader's continued desire for similar masculine confession and emotion in modern romance heroes. Indeed, the most significant change in popular romance over the last thirty years is the increase in the reader's access to the thoughts and emotions of the romance hero. No longer do we have to read the story solely from the heroine's perspective and guess the hero's emotional state along with her, as so many non-romance readers assume is still the case. In fact, many modern romances are narrated from the point of view of the hero at least as much as from the point of view of the heroine. Bestselling historical romance author Laura Kinsale goes so far as to claim that “*the man carries the book*” (44) because “readers are actually asking for emotional identification with the hero, not simply his viewpoint,” signaling, in her opinion, “a plain rejection of heroine-identification in favor of hero-identification” (41). From the perspective of popular romance narratives, then, Austen's achievement was to locate the emotional climax of the novel in Darcy's narration of his maturing emotional state, even though it was constructed primarily from the exterior through dialogue. Modern popular romances expand and exploit the power and appeal of Darcy's confession by providing continuous access to the interior perspective of the romance hero as he realizes and admits that his heroine has become indispensable to his happiness.

Increased narrative access to the hero, however, requires increased proof of both his emotional inaccessibility at the beginning of the novel, and his reformation into love at the end. The modern romance hero is no longer, as in Austen's novels, emotionally distant simply because his point of view is hidden from the reader. Darcy's relatively mild words to Elizabeth in both the first and second proposal scenes are meaningful because the lack of narrative access to his internal

perspective makes the directly expressed words a powerful representation of the barriers he has overcome in order to be able to express them at all. But when access to the hero's thoughts is granted by the narrative, the emotional power of the hero's confession of his feelings for and his education by the heroine must be attained through other the narrative strategies, resulting not only in supernatural heroes whose inhuman abilities redefine the limits of the merely human hero, but also in a narrative insistence on locating the emotional climax of the novel in the hero's tears. Stereotypically in modern popular romance, the more masculine the hero, the more emotionless he is, and the larger the barrier that must be overcome to achieve access to his emotions. The greater the barrier, the further the hero must fall to prove his love.

The domineering, emotionally remote alpha-male hero of modern hero-centric romances embodies patriarchal power in all its glory. Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan argue that romance heroes' "hypertrophied masculinity" is what proves that they "have the Biggest and Best Schlong of All in both figurative and literal terms" (74). These heroes, according to Wendell and Tan are "strong, dominating, confident," but they are "often isolated" and have "a tortured, tender element within themselves that they rarely let anyone see" (77). With delightful circularity, casting director Janey Fothergill describes what she and Sue Birtwistle were looking for when casting Colin Firth as Darcy in the 1995 BBC miniseries of *Pride and Prejudice*: "Now Darcy, I feel, is such a specific type—in a sense he really is what Mills and Boon heroes are, the naughty, arrogant, difficult man who underneath has great charm and sensitivity" (Birtwistle 15). One feature of the supermasculinity of these heroes is a determination not to be touched or changed by love. In truth, readers of popular romance love to read about how the man whose heart has never been touched—or, even better, the man who claims not to have a heart at all—is, in author Penelope Williamson's words, "for all his fierceness . . . quite literally brought to his knees to propose marriage and declare his undying love. The savage beast is tamed by love: such is the allure of the fantasy" (156). Paranormal romances, with heroes who are variously vampires and werewolves, angels and demons, allow both the masculinity and the emotionlessness of their heroes to be literally superhuman.

In order for these superhuman men to prove that they have broken through the barrier of their masculine emotionlessness enough to fall in love with and appreciate the changes wrought by the heroine, the narratives invariably depict them crying. Masculine tears are something modern women are taught to long for as demonstrating the depths of a man's emotions, precisely because our culture paradoxically teaches boys and men that, in order to be "real" men, they should never

cry. In romance novels, the hero is the fantasy representation of the most masculine, most manly, most alpha man of all, enforcing the cultural imperative against masculine tears. The current trend in the hero-focused popular romance means that the more alpha the hero, the more likely he is to cry to prove his love for the heroine, because the more barriers he must break through to express his love for the heroine, the more that expression of love can be trusted by the heroine and the reader.

“This one sublime moment”: the hero made whole

Each one of the vampire heroes of J.R. Ward’s ongoing Black Dagger Brotherhood series, for example, demonstrates superhuman strength and hypermasculine lack of emotion and, by the end of his story, each one demonstrates through his tears his acceptance of the necessity of unconditional love to complete him. Each of the seven novels in Ward’s bestselling, ongoing series follows a member of a group of “[h]ighly trained vampire warriors,” who, although not actual brothers, fight together for the protection and survival of their species (*Dark* ix). Their hypermasculinity, “a result of selective breeding within the race”—a race distinct from humans—gives the members of the Brotherhood “immense physical and mental strength as well as rapid healing capabilities” (*Dark* ix). They are “[a]ggressive, self-reliant, and secretive by nature” and “are the subjects of legend and the objects of reverence within the vampire world” (*Dark* ix). Anything human heroes can do, these vampire heroes do better: they are all at least three hundred years old; they out-fight, out-survive, and out-macho anything around them; and their defining characteristic is their emotional inaccessibility, which is itself compounded by the fact that they’re each cursed in some way, sometimes emotionally, sometimes psychologically, sometimes literally. The conventions Ward uses to construct each of her heroes and the emotional journey each of them undergoes to achieve the tears required for his happy ending are so appealing to and were so well-received by readers that the novels quickly became word-of-mouth bestsellers, with the third and each subsequent installment reaching *The New York Times* bestseller list and the seventh installment, *Lover Avenged*, debuting in hardcover at number two (8 May 2009).

Wrath, the hero of Ward’s first novel, *Dark Lover*, is the king of his species:

Wrath was six feet, six inches of pure terror dressed in leather. His hair was long and black, falling straight from a widow’s peak. Wraparound sunglasses hid eyes that no one had ever seen revealed. Shoulders were twice the size of

most males'. With a face that was both aristocratic and brutal, he looked like the king he was by birthright and the soldier he'd become by destiny.

And that wave of menace rolling ahead of him was one hell of a calling card. (3)

Wrath's sole motivating force is revenge, finding and killing *lessers*, the creatures who massacred his family in front of him when he was a boy: "Wrath was off the chain when it came to the business of vengeance, and he hunted their enemies with a single-minded purpose that bordered on the insane" (3). After Wrath meets, falls in love with, and mates with his heroine, Beth, she is kidnapped by the *lessers*. In the process of helping her rescue herself, Wrath is shot. When he wakes up in the hospital, he finds Beth asleep beside him and realizes that, unlike the time his family was slaughtered, "He was alive, and so was she. Wrath started to cry" (372). Beth wakes up:

"Oh, Wrath . . . You have me. We're together, love."

Tears poured out of him in a mad rush, his chest quaking from the sobs, his breathing jagged and raw.

She took his face in [her] hands, trying to soothe him. "It's all right. I'm not going anywhere. I'm not going to leave you. I promise you. Oh, love . . ."

Eventually he relaxed a little. The tears slowed.

A croak came out of his mouth.

"What?" She leaned down.

"Wanted to . . . save you."

"You did, Wrath, you did save me."

His lips trembled. "Love. You." (373, ellipses in original)

While Wrath has already readily admitted his love for Beth, he wasn't ready to trust that she wouldn't be killed as his family was. He wasn't willing to believe in the permanency of their bond, or in their happy ending. When they both survive Beth's kidnapping, when he saves her the way he could not save his family, Wrath must accept his destiny and his happiness, must change his pessimistic worldview to accept being happy, and must acknowledge his emotions by crying, thereby overcoming the great masculine taboo against tears and proving that he deserves his happy ending.

In the second book of the series, *Lover Eternal*, the hero's curse is literal: when angry or frustrated, Rhage turns into a dragon that destroys everything in its path and is unable to tell friend from foe. After the heroine, Mary, meets Rhage's curse, the dragon he despises and fears,

she tells him, “I’m grateful for it. I feel safe. Between you and the dragon, I don’t have to worry.’ When she looked up at him with a smile, Rhage was blinking rapidly” (414). He admits between his tears, “I thought if you knew what it looked like . . . you wouldn’t be able to see me anymore. All you’d remember is some horrible monster” (414). Mary explains: “It’s a part of you, not all of you or all of what you are. And I love you. With it or without it” (415). Rhage cries when the unthinkable happens: when he is accepted for all of who he is, when he can trust that his heroine’s love is truly unconditional, changing his worldview and his perception of his future, just as those of Wrath are changed.

Wrath and Rhage cry when they accept the necessity of companionate love to make them whole, when they can believe in an optimistic vision of their future. In *Lover Awakened*, Zsadist, the most emotionally inaccessible of the Brotherhood, cries when he receives broader community acceptance as a result of the heroine’s unconditional love for him. Enslaved and both physically and sexually abused for a century, Zsadist has felt no emotion except anger for two hundred years and denies all ties of community, even his twin brother’s love. He refuses to be touched, to trust anyone, or to act in a socially acceptable manner. All this changes when he falls in love, of course, and he realizes, just as Darcy does, that he needs to take care of himself in order to deserve his heroine, Bella. He tells her, “I figured, maybe if I could read, and if I took better care of myself, and if I tried to stop being such a mean-ass motherfucker . . .” (422, ellipses in original). After they declare their love for each other, Bella tells Zsadist she is pregnant, the ultimate optimistic ending to a romance, and Zsadist faints. When he comes to, he is surrounded by the Brothers and their mates, as well as Bella:

His voice cut out. And then, yeah, like a complete flipping nancy, he broke down totally and wept like an idiot. In front of all the Brothers. And Butch. And Beth. And Mary. He was no doubt horrifying Bella with his weakness, but he couldn’t help himself. This was the first time in his whole life that he had ever felt . . . blessed. Fortunate. Lucky. This moment, this perfect, shimmering moment in time, this one, sublime moment where he was flat on his back in the foyer, with his beloved Bella, and the young inside her, and the Brotherhood around him. . . . this was his very luckiest day. (426, ellipses in original)

Zsadist’s tears do more than merely signal his appreciation of his heroine’s love and his changed worldview. Zsadist’s tears create

community when everyone gathers to witness them, and they demonstrate his acceptance of the community of Brothers he has rejected for two hundred years. After three hundred years of being carelessly, randomly cursed by fate, he begins to believe in good fortune, in good luck, in perfection and sublimity, and his tears embody the barriers he has had to overcome to achieve his companionate and communal happy ending.

“He wept at the hollowness he felt”: the hero in despair

While Wrath, Rhage, and Zsadist cry in appreciation for their heroines' love and in acceptance of a changed worldview, Butch in *Lover Revealed* and Vishous in *Lover Unbound* both cry in despair because they believe that they've lost their heroines' love. While Zsadist refuses community his whole life, only to cry when he finds it, Butch craves belonging to a community more than anything else:

“I’ve had a piece missing all my life. I’ve always been different from other people, not just in my family but when I was working here on the CPD force, too. I never fit in . . . until I met the Brotherhood. I met your kind . . . and, shit, now I know why. I was a stranger among humans.” He cursed softly. “I wanted to go through the change not just for you, but for me. Because I felt like then . . . I could be who I’m supposed to be. I mean, hell, I’ve been living on the fringes all my life. I kind of wanted to know what being in the thick was like.” (*Revealed* 325-26, ellipses in original)

But when he is inducted into the Brotherhood before he and his heroine reconcile, he cries because he discovers that the community for which he has yearned for so long is not enough:

Butch let his head fall loose on his shoulders and he wept openly . . . though not out of happiness, as they must have assumed.

He wept at the hollowness he felt.

Because however wonderful this all was, it seemed empty to him.

Without his mate to share his life with, he was but a screen for events and circumstances to pass through. He was not even empty, for he was no vessel to hold even the thinnest air.

He lived, though was not truly alive. (446, ellipses in original)

The direct comparison between Zsadist and Butch, with Butch's book coming immediately after Zsadist's, enforces the lesson that only romantic love is truly fulfilling for the hero. Bella's love for Zsadist helps him to accept and even welcome the community he rejected. In contrast, Butch gains the community he has always yearned for, but because it does not come with the love of his heroine, he is hopeless and despairing. Only love can make him whole, as it does in the scene immediately following his induction, when his heroine, Marissa, comes back to him.

In *Lover Unbound*, Vishous's character reiterates Butch's situation, but adds an overlay of Zsadist's lack of emotion. Ward makes the extraordinary choice in *Lover Unbound* to kill Vishous's heroine. Jane and Vishous achieve their happy ending when she comes back as a ghost, but her death emphasizes Vishous's emotionlessness and the importance of his tears. An entire chapter is taken up with Vishous's tears, beginning with an indication of how antithetical they are to his nature:

Vishous had never cried before. Throughout his life he had never, ever cried. After all the shit he'd been through, it had gotten to the point that he'd decided he'd been born without tear ducts.

The events leading up to now hadn't changed that. When Jane had lain dead in his arms he hadn't wept. When he'd attempted to cut off his hand in the Tomb as a sacrifice and the pain had been astonishing, there had been no tears. When his hated mother had cast him back from the deed he'd been about to do, his cheeks had been dry.

Even when the Scribe Virgin had put her hand upon Jane's body and he'd watched in a daze as his beloved had been reduced to ash, he had not wept.

He did now.

For the first time since his birth, tears rolled down his face and soaked his pillow. (482)

Vishous is crying because he believes that, with Jane dead, his existence will be forever barren: "he was to be nothing but an empty shell that lay next to the ashes of his beloved" (483). Without Jane, Vishous loses all hope of happiness, and even though he would have denied he ever had that hope, to have it irrevocably taken away is to reduce to tears the man who never cried. Such, indeed, is the power of a heroine's love. When Jane's ghost and Vishous are reunited, Jane thinks that "love in its many forms always endured. It was the infinite. The eternal. That which

sustained” (486), a moral and theme that Ward makes explicit through her deployment of her heroes’ tears in each of their narratives.

The Black Dagger Brotherhood: Darcy’s ultimate heirs

As campy as they are, Ward’s hypermasculine vampires are Darcy’s ultimate heirs. Darcy not only must mature because of his love for Elizabeth, but he must also recognize and welcome the change his heroine has wrought in him. Superhuman, nearly immortal, cursed, and emotionless, Wrath, Rhage, Zsadist, Butch, Vishous, and later Phury and Rhevenge, represent the hyperbolic extreme of Darcy’s attractiveness, power, and pride. Their tears of love, acceptance, and despair break through strong taboos of masculinity and represent the inevitable physical embodiment of Darcy’s verbal expression of his emotional maturation. The stunning popularity of the Black Dagger Brotherhood series indicates that modern romance readers—just like Darcy’s first fans—appreciate the opportunity to plumb the true emotional depths of the romance hero. The more masculine the man and the more devastating to his own emotional control is his admission of the importance of love to his very existence, the more powerful and precious that admission is to the reader. Pamela Regis, after claiming *Pride and Prejudice* as the Ur-text of popular romance fiction, argues that “Ordering society is now an issue of taming or healing the hero. . . . Untamed or unhealed, the hero will not truly appreciate the role of the heroine in his life; he will not engage with her emotionally” (114). The spectacle of masculine tears in the popular romance both tames and heals the hero and allows him to accept, appreciate, and verbalize the necessity of his love for his heroine. But Darcy led the way two hundred years ago.

NOTES

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1. Jane Austen to Anna Austen, 9-18 September 1814, in *Jane Austen’s Letters*

2. By labeling Austen’s novels “popular romance fiction,” I am by no means denying or devaluing the aesthetic or literary value of her work. I would argue, in fact, that the aesthetic and literary value of the best of

modern popular romance fiction is severely underestimated and deserves reconsideration.

3. For example, in 2005, the members of the Romantic Novelists Association in the United Kingdom voted *Pride and Prejudice* as the most romantic novel of all time (“Austen”). *Pride and Prejudice* is “our runaway favourite of a perfect ending” for World Book Day in the United Kingdom in 2006 (Ezard).
4. For example, Darcy is the only historically-authored hero in a poll of the top ten heroes of modern romance readers (“Top Ten”).
5. For a much more detailed discussion of the relative narrative importance of direct and indirect dialogue in the proposal scenes in Austen’s novels, see my article, “‘If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more’: Direct Dialogue and Education in the Proposal Scenes,” in *The Talk in Jane Austen*.

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