

# She's a Legend, She's an Icon: Fordyce, Austen, and *Fire Island* (2022)

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## Abstract

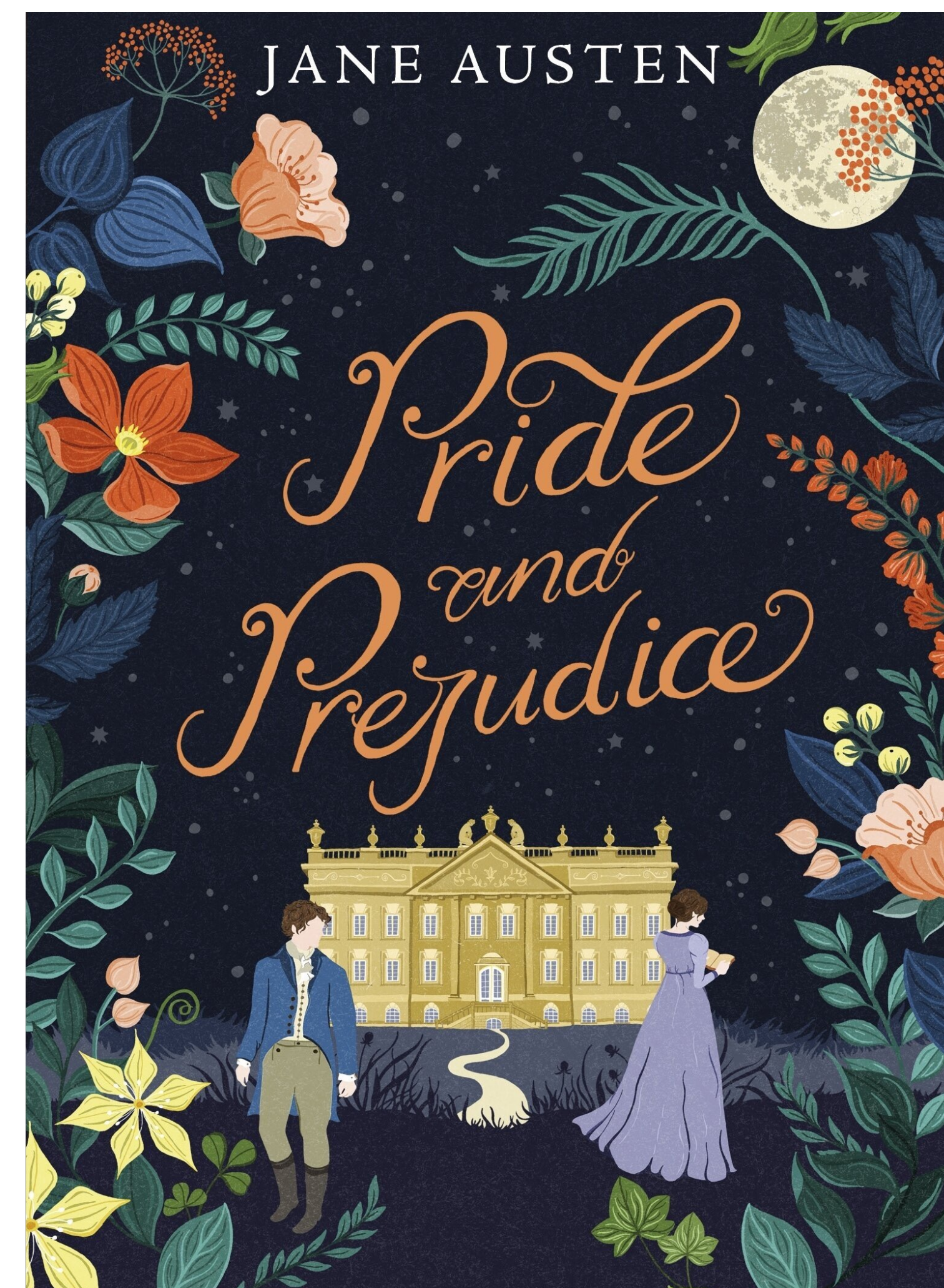
Andrew Ahn's *Fire Island* (2022) is a contemporary adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* featuring a found-family dynamic of five gay men coming together for a vacation week in Fire Island, NY. The film, taken with Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and Fordyce's conduct books—widely circulated preceding and during Austen's life and writing career—reveals both emancipatory and insidious dynamics present in the gay community today. This article aims to parse these dynamics, trace the treatment of courtship roles and dynamics from Fordyce, through Austen, to Ahn, and track the presence of what Fordyce terms to be “gendered-virtues” as imperative qualities in courtship dynamics. Further, this paper will, with Ahn's *Fire Island* (2022) as a case study, illustrate how such “gendered-virtues,” while clearly a dated and amply incorrect term in today's world, still have echoes even within the gay community itself.

## Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766)

*And Addresses to Young Men* (1777)

|           | Positive   | Negative  |
|-----------|--|---|
| Fashion   |  | -Female uniformity<br>-Fashion as female-exclusive  |
| Behavior  |  | -Women cannot be witty + attractive<br>-Women must create marital ease and cater to husbands                      |
| Nostalgia | -Using nostalgia in the form of literature as a didactic technique | -Emulate heroes and heroines of Old Romances<br>-Avoid novels<br>-Women = chaste + humble, Men = loyal + dominant |

## Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)



|           | Positive  | Negative  |
|-----------|---|---|
| Fashion   | -Not the most important aspect of attraction<br>-Not limited to women                                     | -Not much variety in fashion-based gender expression or boundary crossing |
| Behavior  | -Women can be witty, men can be more reserved or timid and still attractive                               | -Chastity is still of high importance                                     |
| Nostalgia | -Brings question that nostalgia in terms of Old Romances or even more clearly poetry not wholly effective | -Dancing and Conversation to woo still very strongly adhered to           |

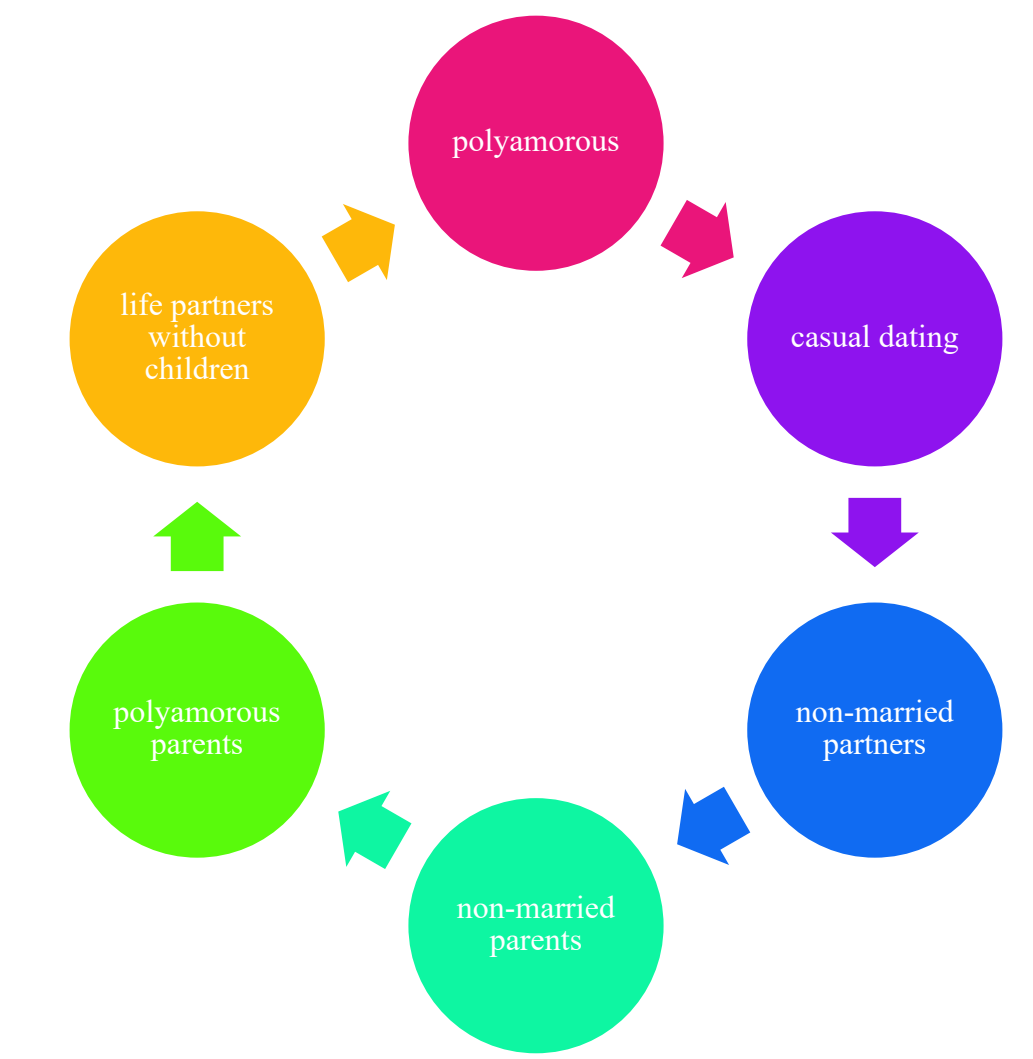
## *Fire Island* (2022) dir. Andrew Ahn



|           | Positive   | Negative   |
|-----------|--|--|
| Fashion   | -exhibits and interrogates gay community fashion polarization (masc and femme)                             | -arguably unbalanced representation of gay men   |
| Behavior  | -extends Austen characterizations with timid masc and dominant femme presenting characters                 | -superficial wit clashing at times between Will and Noah (recycling & water a stretch)         |
| Nostalgia | -rejects the heteronormative aspects of classic novels like <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> that it is based on | -does not provide alternatives (or perhaps, there aren't any yet that have stood test of time) |

## Conclusions

Ahn's *Fire Island* (2022), through the polychromatic depiction of gay men and the happiness they find in monogamous, polygamous, and even platonic dynamics, removes the necessity of marriage or even that illusive concept of “ease”. Or, perhaps more saliently, they attach “ease” to a more flexible, fluid, and empowering happily-ever-after than gaining the view, marriage, and consequence afforded by Austen's Pemberley.



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