



Sense and Sensibility: A Research Study on Jane Austen's Representation of Love, Marriage, and Women in Society

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Abstract: This paper examines how Jane Austen absorbed and interacted with the revolutionary concepts of her era and entered the ideological, transplanted empowerment of women through themes that prompted English society to reevaluate the role and position of women in society in her *Sense and Sensibility*. This novel examines the status of women in nineteenth-century England, their significance in society, and their participation in it. Everything that is shown in the novel, including family life and the social structure, is representative of modern-day England. In the work, Austen depicts women's interactions through the metaphor of sensibility. Her primary goal is to portray the difficulties faced by women as well as the issues of love, marriage, and money. Sensitivity is a contemporary idea that is common in nature, and the feminine body is at the core of the story. Sensibility implies all female movements, including sighs and worries, and is defined as reasonable thought. Sensitivity frequently causes characters to suffer, and it causes the heroine to become ill. Fanny and Anne are extremely sensitive characters in the novel. Marianne becomes a strong female character because of her eventual learning to see, accept, and prosper in the flawed world. Elinor, on the other hand, values honour above all else and establishes herself as logical and in control throughout the novel by consistently supporting and directing her family despite her emotional condition.

Keywords: Woman, Love, Marriage, Society, Relationship, Family

Introduction

Jane Austen is an English novelist who became one of the most read authors in English literature because of her romantic novels. Scholars and critics have always valued her for her realism, scathing irony, and social commentary. Her most notable literary works, which are few yet are akin to "so much meet in so small a dish," are what brought her renown and popularity rather than her personal details or the favourable reviews she received from critics and educationists. Even after her passing and two centuries have gone by, readers and writers of today still revere and read Jane because she is such a well-known author. Her story finds its home in the harsh realities of life and middle-class society; she is a writer of everyday people and common issues. The development of a completely happy partnership is the fundamental issue in Austen's feminine world. Despite its seeming preoccupation for the trivialities of feminine life, this universe is far from shallow. Nevertheless, Austen's heroines are rarely seen in a poor man's hut, and aside from their interactions with domestic help, they are unfamiliar with the working classes.

Mr. Dashwood, a wealthy man with two wives, appears in *Sense and Sensibility*. Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret are the three daughters of John's first and second wives. As he lies dying, Mr. Dashwood is aware that John will inherit all his

belongings. He so made a commitment to John to look after his sisters and half-mother. John vowed to look after them despite his kind nature. Mr. Dashwood passed away shortly after, leaving his second wife and three daughters without a stable income. Following Mr. Dashwood's passing, John wished to assist his three sisters and half-mother, but his mother and wife persuaded him against it out of avarice, and soon after, they took ownership of their home and treated Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters as outsiders. Additionally, they force them to immediately depart from Norland Park.

Due to her lack of a home and little money, Mrs. Dashwood is currently in great pain. Elinor wisely persuades them to remain there till they find a place to call home. The self-centred and snobby brother of Fanny Dashwood, Edward Ferrar, stays there and becomes drawn to Elinor. Elinor was also attracted to him, but she refrained from publicly expressing her sentiments since she was aware that Mrs. Ferrar and Fanny Dashwood would not approve of or tolerate their relationship. Fanny became so impolite and insensitive to Mrs. Dashwood after realising their infatuation that she immediately left Norland Park and went to Barton Park, where his cousin Mr. John Middleton lived. He repeatedly encouraged her to move in and live in one of his cottages. Since she did not want to part with Edward Ferrar, Elinor was unhappy to leave Norland

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Park. The family now departs for the cottage of Mrs. Dashwood's cousin brother in Devonshire.

Three other people live in that house: Mr. Middleton's wife, his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings, and his close friend Colonel Brandon, a 35-year-old bachelor who became enamoured with Marianne's charms and is very helpful and mature. Marianne meets Mr. John Willoughby there, whom she adored and believed to be the man she had been waiting for, without Colonel Brandon realising it. The Dashwood family found refuge and shade in Mr. Middleton's company here in Devonshire, but they still missed their boyhood home. Everyone was sure that they may announce their marriage at any time after witnessing Marianne's feelings for Mr. Willoughby. However, fate has another secret. Willoughby quickly departs for London without providing any explanation and makes no mention of his return. Edward Ferrar soon gets there and spends a week at his friend's place. Now Marianne was completely shattered.

Edward left Willoughby's country home, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Middleton's hyperactive sister. Marianne is let down as she expects them to have some news regarding Mr. John Willoughby. Miss Steel and her younger sister Lucy, who are acquainted with Mrs. Jennings, followed Palmer's departure and were invited to remain with her for a while. Elinor now learns about Lucy and Mr. Edward's covert engagement, which greatly disappoints her. Both sisters were now distraught and devastated. Elinor and Marianne were summoned by Mrs. Jennings to travel with her to London. They initially refused to accompany her since they were both uncomfortable, but they eventually agreed to travel with Mrs. Jennings as Marianne anticipated seeing Mr. Willoughby in London.

Marianne made numerous attempts to meet Mr. Willoughby there, but he never showed up. She wrote multiple times without receiving a response. One day, Elinor and Marianne see him dancing with the heiress Miss Grey, who is well-off and stylish, at a ball. When Marianne tried to explain, he responded to her in a chilly and uninformed manner. She writes him again to enquire why, but he brutally returns her letter with a message saying that he has no interest in her and will now approach Miss Grey. When Colonel Brandon learnt of John Willoughby's behaviour towards Marianne while he was in London, he was devastated. At this point, Colonel Brandon told Elinor his own story about how he loved his cousin Eliza. However, Eliza left his father for another man after a few years since his father had married her to his older brother, who mistreated her. She is now on her deathbed as her illness worsens.

Colonel Brandon pledged to raise her daughter, Eliza, who had been wooed by Willoughby, and he did everything in his power when he first met her. John Dashwood and his wife, Fanny, arrived in London at the same time. After John meets his sisters, Anne and Lucy are eventually asked to remain with the

Middletons as well. The secret that Lucy is engaged to Edward was revealed by Anne. Knowing that Edward would not betray his promise to Lucy, Fanny becomes enraged and her mother denies him her inheritance. However, Lucy learnt that Edward is no longer Ferrar's heir and is no longer a wealthy and well-established man. She abandoned her engagement to Edward and eloped with Robert Ferrar, the younger brother of Edward Ferrar, who was the new heir apparent. To assist Edward Ferrar, Mr. Brandon offers him the position of curate at his estate. On their son's birth in Cleveland, the Dashwood sisters and their mother are invited to a party at Palmers.

Marianne becomes gravely ill and appears to be dying. To take care of her, Mr. Brandon was also present. John Willoughby visited Marianne at her home after learning of her illness, found Elinor there, and expressed regret to her for what he had done to the defenceless Marianne. His wife had ruined his life, he informed her. When he repented, Elinor felt terrible for him. After Marianne gets better, everyone goes back to Barton Park. Elinor described Willoughby's visit to Marianne and his subsequent confession. Marianne was upset that her illness had forced her friends and family to endure hardship. One day, a servant informs Elinor that Lucy and Ferrar are now married. She realised it was Edward and became very agitated. When Edward finally gets there, he discovers that Lucy, who is money-minded, is married to his younger brother Robert, Ferrar's heir. Now that everything was in order, Edward proposed to Elinor, who accepted, and Marianne consented to wed Mr. Brandon, who would become her lifelong partner. After that, the two couples led contented lives.

The structure of the novel is that its main characters have manifested more incarnate traits than qualified incarnations. Elinor Dashwood's negative attributes have ranged from being pleasant and decent but only occasionally intriguing in their combination, to not being a real person or, on the less pleasant side, having a dull, acerbic personality. In contrast, her sister Marianne, who is not regarded as flawless, appears to have a depth of emotion that Elmor is unaware of. Although they frequently attend the same events, Marianne has minimal interaction with Colonel Brandon, the man she later marries, and none of Elinor Dashwood's few meaningful interactions with her future husband Edward Ferrars occur in the formal setting of the novel.

The main characters are not much involved in courtships with anyone save their final partners. We witness Edward Ferrar's friendship with his secret fiancée, while Marianne Dashwood briefly interacts with Willoughby. Lucy Steele solely through a backwards look. This does not imply that the novel is flawed in any way. The relationship between sense and sensibility - or, as we might say, between mind and heart - is the main theme of the novel. Sensibility and sensitivity, judgement, and emotion, or thought and feeling. The tale begins with a widow and her



daughters being evicted after Mr. Dashwood's death, indicating that it is about the necessity for women to have both strong heads and kind hearts. The title page suggests that the author is particularly interested in the Head/Heart conundrum, which is related to the now-unfolded stones of Elinor and Marianne.

Elinor and Marianne are contrasted in the novel; one symbolises the excellent reason and caution of women, while the other is driven into trouble and wrong by impatience and an excess of emotion and behaviour. A thorough depiction of Elinor's inner life and her private chats with Marianne replaces the courting plot. A partial dramatization of Marianne, details on the sisters' temperamental and philosophical differences, and a sense of how Elinor should react to Marianne, Edward Ferrars, and Colonel Brandon - all of whom are under her scrutiny - are thus provided to the reader. Investigating Elinor's character presentation is also necessary, and it may reveal that she is more fascinating than is widely believed. In contrast to the typical perception of her rigidity or her brief appearance in the novel, she is not only adaptable in reacting to far more than just traditional forms, but she also serves as a moral hub of emotion and behaviour that continuously centres the events around her.

Elinor's receptiveness allows her to discriminate against others and, in turn, to understand the emotions of people other than herself. She genuinely feels sorry for Marianne. However, she thinks her sister is acting foolishly towards Edwards Ferrars, who she finds out is secretly engaged to Lucy Steele, and towards the handsome but fake Willoughby. She can react without sacrificing herself or him. Even though she is upset by this circumstance, she does not let it scare her because friendship is the only thing that can exist between two people until an unforeseen circumstance enables them to experience the intimacy that lovers have long coveted.

The most revealing aspect of Elinor is her relationship with Edward. While he was away from Barton Cottage, Marianne laments that when her sister is sad or depressed, her self-control is always the same. Elinor appears determined to carry on with her business without displaying much emotion when Edward subsequently departs from Mrs. Dashwood in a dejected mood without providing an explanation or an apology. Elinor demonstrates her ability to exert herself here, as she frequently does, but Marianne, who constantly gives in to her emotions, finds Elinor's behaviour difficult to tolerate.

Marianne, whose loyalty to Willoughby is so great that she puts herself in danger, has no reason to brag about the contrast with herself, whereas Elinor has restrained her emotions to save her mother and sisters a great deal of solicitude on her behalf. When someone with lukewarm feelings practices self-command, she sees it as a wholly negative dichotomy with no value, while for someone with great attachments like herself, it is completely irrelevant. The happiness claimed for their marriages and Elinor's final success in persuading

Marianne of the need to act in accordance with the moral integrity of the four main characters both support this view. However, since there are so few instances in which courteous behaviour actively encourages good morals and because the two romantic relationships are so poorly defined, the male characters are presented in such a bad manner. Instead of continuing to expose themselves to a corrupt society, a tiny group of good out-of-power individuals choose to withdraw to Barton Delaford, which is reminiscent of Bleak House.

Austen portrayed Marianne in this novel as a suffering woman who experiences passion but does not lose her sensibility; this is not a single incident, but rather a well-planned climax. She had been learning her lessons too severely for teasing for the novel's thirty-nine main chapters. To avoid leading us to the expected conclusion, she set herself the mission of ridiculing Marianne more than Elinor appears to exemplify the novel's merits. And this is what takes place. The way she is portrayed captivates our empathy to the point where we want to find the good in her. Elinor and Marianne, two women who uplift the spirits of many decent men who lack certain virtues. The one spiritual endeavour of marriage unites the competing tendencies. Marianne has discovered that the ego is not free and that it flows into the world, much like so many of Austen's heroines. Despite the sad nature of her enlightenment, she manages to survive.

Traditionally, women were supposed to stay at home, get married, and be polite to everyone. She is not entitled to her father's land. Man will be the one to determine whether she will go out for a job. She does not have enough room to live alone. Austen disagreed with the social role that women play in society. As a result, she used her unique sense and sensibility to portray women in a distinct way. She conveys the joys and challenges that women face throughout their lives. Austen depicts the various facets of women's personalities through the characters of Elinor and Marianne, Lucy Steel, Fanny Dashwood, and Mrs. Dashwood. Elinor is a responsible, mature, and sensible girl who manages her emotions for the benefit of her family. Marianne, on the other hand, is a very sensitive and emotional girl who, after being abandoned by John Willoughby, accepts the challenges and shame of life to face society. From there, she gradually matures and becomes independent to all odds of life, becoming a decision-maker who chooses to marry Colonel Brandon. Despite his advanced age, she thinks he would make a good partner.

Fanny d, the avaricious, crafty, cruel, and opportunistic woman who has a strong passion for money and property and believes she is better than others, offers another perspective on women with malicious natures. Following Mr. Dashwood's death, Mrs. Dashwood, a widow, is left without a living or money, along with her three daughters. She also found it difficult to have a decent life with her girls. Austen thus questioned the conventionally expected role of women in society in this novel, transforming them into



self-sufficient, independent, ambitious, and self-sufficient individuals.

In Austen's works, if the heroine meets the right man, she experiences rage and misunderstandings that eventually resolve and lead to a marriage; conversely, if she meets the wrong man, she suffers socially, psychologically, and physically. After the novel's protagonist enters her life, things gradually calm down and lead to a happy conclusion. Elinor falls in love with Edward Ferrar, a good man by nature, in *Sense and Sensibility*. She knows that this relationship is difficult to even consider because no one will accept it, so she keeps her love a secret from everyone.

After many misunderstandings and ups and downs, Lucy, who was initially engaged to Edward, marries Robert, Edward's younger brother. The story concludes peacefully with Elinor and Edward getting married after Edward makes a proposal to her, which she accepts voluntarily and amicably. When John Willoughby left her and moved to London, Marianne, who had fallen in love with him, quickly fled him. In this relationship, Marianne's love for John was pure and innocent, but John's love is opportunistic. She made multiple attempts to contact and talk to John after he abandoned her, distraught and alone. However, he always attempted to get away from her. She was able to control her emotions and face the world with courage after realising that he had betrayed her. She chooses to marry Colonel Brandon after experiencing his companionship and kind care during this time. As a result, her life likewise came to an end.

After learning that Ferrar had been disinheriting the land and that Robert was now Ferrar's new heir, Lucy Steel, a very egotistical and money-minded girl, abandoned her engagement and marriage to Edward Ferrar and married Robert instead. This kind of love also fluctuates according to the spouses' financial status. In the end, everyone's desire to marry is satisfied, and the novel concludes happily with Elinor marrying Edward, Marianne marrying Colonel Brandon, Lucy marrying Robert Ferrar, and John Willoughby marrying Miss Grey, a wealthy and attractive heiress.

Sense and Sensibility is an assault on violent impulses, unbridled emotions, and shallow senses, as the novel's title makes clear. Since Elinor and Marianne are two significant unmarried women who control the plot, marriage and love are the primary topics covered in the novel. The issue of marriage is raised at the start of the novel as Marianne and Elinor, the two main female characters, start looking for suitable partners. Scenes of engagements and women's concerns about resolving the marriage issue are fascinating and thrilling. The themes of love, marriage, and money take up the majority of the novel's plot. Because they want to wed the men they love, Elinor and Marianne control the plot.

The issue of love is significant for people other than women, according to *Sense and Sensibility*. They worry about money and property because they

believe that money is the only way to truly be happy. Given that social position is determined solely by financial means, riches and money are a powerful force that unites distant families. Parents also encourage a partnership that benefits the spouses' financial well-being. Because parents had to decide for the dowry to find their daughters a wealthy boy to be their life partner, dowries were a significant factor in the 19th century. Girls are aware that since marriage is a business between the two families, money ultimately determines the decision to get married.

Since Austen's protagonists live in a society where wealth and property are highly valued, love, loyalty, and sincerity are all flimsy concepts. All her works revolve around marriage since it determines women's rights, including the ability to inherit and the freedom to pick their spouses. Women's futures are determined by their financial situation and their marriages. A woman can live in peace and security if her husband is supportive, but she will have trouble inheriting family wealth and assets if he is not. In addition to being the primary factor in marriage, money is a strong influence that controls women's lives. After realising the difficulties of marriage, Elinor and Marianne tie the knot at the novel's end. Although the tale emphasises the value of love and Colonel Brandon's fall in love, the main contributing elements are money and family consideration. Although Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret endure a great deal of hardship during their romance, love ultimately triumphs, and money is a key factor in determining and finalising the marriage. Austen protests against romantic illusions in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Key Themes

Marriage and Money

In Austen's world, marriage is the primary vehicle for women's social and economic security. *Sense and Sensibility* dramatizes this reality through contrasting unions: mercenary matches (Willoughby's heiress, Lucy and Robert) expose the cold calculations behind many marriages, while Elinor and Edward's relationship idealizes unions where affection coincides with integrity, even at financial cost. The Dashwood sisters' precarious position, caused by inheritance laws favoring male heirs, underscores the extent to which wealth shapes women's fates.

Sense vs. Sensibility

The novel's title encapsulates its central moral inquiry. "Sense" represents prudence, rationality, and ethical self-restraint, while "sensibility" signifies emotional expressiveness and authenticity. Austen does not wholly endorse one over the other; instead, she critiques extremes. Elinor demonstrates the dangers of excessive repression, while Marianne reveals the risks of unchecked passion. The novel resolves in synthesis: true happiness emerges when reason tempers emotion, and feeling informs judgment.



Women's Roles

Austen exposes structural inequities limiting women's autonomy. The Dashwood sisters' displacement illustrates how inheritance laws deprive daughters of property, leaving them dependent on male relatives or marriage. Through Elinor and Marianne, Austen portrays the resilience required of women navigating these constraints, while Lucy Steele demonstrates how women could manipulate the same system for self-advancement. Ultimately, the novel critiques a society that forces women to stake their futures on marital fortune.

Love and Betrayal

Romantic constancy is tested against opportunism throughout the novel. Elinor's patient endurance contrasts with Willoughby's betrayal of Marianne for money, while Edward's loyalty to his youthful promise contrasts with Lucy's abandonment of him once wealthier prospects arise. These betrayals highlight the vulnerability of women to male choices and the corrupting influence of materialism. Austen suggests that true love must endure trials of secrecy, poverty, and temptation in order to be genuine.

Austen's dialectic of sense and sensibility dramatizes the psychological and social challenges facing women. Elinor's endurance under secrecy and Marianne's near-fatal illness both expose the vulnerabilities of women constrained by law and reputation. Secondary characters (Lucy Steele, Fanny Dashwood) broaden Austen's critique, illustrating how ambition and greed operate within gendered limitations.

Comparatively, *Sense and Sensibility* anticipates later Austen heroines: Elizabeth Bennet balances wit and judgment, Emma Woodhouse learns humility, Anne Elliot demonstrates patience under societal constraint. Yet the Dashwood sisters remain unique in embodying abstract principles—reason and feeling—as lived experience.

Conclusion

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* remains a vital literary work that critiques the intertwining forces of money, marriage, and gender roles in nineteenth-century England. By contrasting sense (Elinor) and sensibility (Marianne), Austen underscores the need for balance between rational judgment and emotional depth in navigating life's challenges. Ultimately, the novel advocates for women's resilience, integrity, and independence, even within the constraints of patriarchal society. Austen's insights resonate with contemporary feminist discourse, making *Sense and Sensibility* not only a romantic narrative but also a profound social critique.

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TABLE 1. Character

Character	Social Position	Role in Marriage-Money Plot	Thematic Function
Elinor Dashwood	Gentleman's daughter	Marries Edward after Lucy jilts him	Sense, rationality, endurance
Marianne Dashwood	Gentleman's daughter	Marries Colonel Brandon	Sensibility → maturity
Edward Ferrars	Gentleman's son, disinherited	Marries Elinor	Constancy, integrity
Colonel Brandon	Wealthy bachelor	Marries Marianne	Stoic love, duty
John Willoughby	Dependent, debt-ridden	Marries wealthy heiress	Mercenary calculation
Lucy Steele	Lower gentry	Marries Robert Ferrars	Ambition, manipulation
Fanny Dashwood	Wealthy	Blocks Dashwood inheritance	Greed, materialism

Discussion