



Jane Austen's *Sense and
Sensibility*

The Original Mean Girls

Jane Austen, 1775-1817



Hampshire to Bath





The Role of Women in Regency England

- Women of good breeding are expected to marry early and generally with the aim of increasing or maintaining their financial situation
- Most women possess a dowry of some sort, but this money is made over to her husband at marriage, as is any property she acquires during the marriage
- Married women were not legally protected (with regards to money) until 1882
- Divorce is almost impossible, and generally resulted in penury for the woman

Commentary on a Woman's "Sell-By" Date

"A woman of seven and twenty," said Marianne, after pausing a moment, "can never hope to feel or inspire affection again, and if her home be uncomfortable, or her fortune small, I can suppose that she might bring herself to submit to the offices of a nurse, for the sake of the provision and security of a wife. In his marrying such a woman therefore there would be nothing unsuitable. It would be a compact of convenience, and the world would be satisfied. In my eyes it would be no marriage at all, but that would be nothing. To me it would seem only a commercial exchange, in which each wished to be benefited at the expense of the other."

Publication History of *Sense and Sensibility*

- First written in epistolary form and read aloud to the Austen family (1796)
- Substantially revised and the first full-length novel completed (1798)
- Second novel sold, first actually published (1811)
- Published under the pseudonym, “A Lady”

What is Sensibility?

- The ability to feel or to employ emotion in perceiving the world; aligned with sympathy, subjectivity, and wider human experience (as opposed to experience based solely on rationality)
- In the 18th century, it is perceived as feminine, although late 18th-century novels rebrand masculinity to incorporate sensibility
- Considered a bourgeois novelistic form (as opposed to one associated with landed economic forms, which focus on objectivity and rationality)

Sense vs. Sensibility

- Someone with “good sense” acts soundly (with good judgment)
- Someone with “good sensibility” has sound impulses with regards to self and others
- While sensibility might assist a person to *understand* other people and respond to the manifold emotions any situation might raise, it does not necessarily lead to good decision-making
- Sense is required to make good decisions, and a balance of sense and sensibility enable a person to negotiate a complex world, assess the character of others, and avoid the mistakes of either over-rationality or over-emotionalism

Overview of *Sense and Sensibility*

- Elinor Dashwood (Pretty and prudent heroine)
- Mariann Dashwood (Even prettier and quite romantic)
- Edward Ferrars (Elinor's irritatingly passive love interest)
- Colonel Brandon (Kind-hearted admirer of Mariann)
- John Willoughby (Charming, selfish blackguard and Mariann's favorite)
- Lucy Steele (Edward's secret fiance, scheming, petty, ill-bred and undereducated)

Geography of S&S



Sense and Sensibility in the Novel

- Elinor: The perfect mixture of sense and sensibility
- Mariann, Mrs. Dashwood, Margaret, Edward: Misled by an overdose of sensibility
- Colonel Brandon: The masculine counterpart of Elinor, he is the male combination of sense and sensibility
- Willoughby: Dangerous lack of sense
- John Dashwood, Fanny Dashwood, Mrs. Ferrars, Lucy: Insensible to a comic point, lack of sensibility leads to a lack of sense