"A MODEL OF EXCELLENCE":

THE EVOLUTION OF SENSIBILITY IN THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

by

Nicholas J. Griekspoor

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Approved by:

William D. Brewer, Thesis Director

David L. Orvis, Reader

Alex Pitofsky, Reader

Kristina Groover, English Department Honors Director

ABSTRACT

This project concerns the development of Jane Austen's criticism of the quality of sensibility, with a focus on her implied stance pertaining to its place and validity within social and personal behavior. By investigating and comparing *Lady Susan*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Persuasion*, it seeks to identify the nature and manner of this change in authorial judgment from a wide variety of points in her literary career. Much attention is given to each novel's implied moral standard, which this paper terms "models of excellence." The ever changing, "ideal" balance of such distinct qualities as sense, sentiment, and sensibility – all of which are discussed here at length – lead to a mature, socially valid reconfiguration of the heroine of sensibility. Main research questions include:

- What is "sensibility," and how is it distinct from "sense" and "sentiment?"
- What are the historical and social contexts of such qualities?
- How does Austen's early fiction convey her judgment of sensibility? How do later novels alter this judgment?
- What constitutes an ideal character in Austen's fiction?
- How are sensibility and the ideal character reconfigured in Austen's *Persuasion*?

The qualities and expression of "sense" and "sensibility", so central to Jane Austen's social vision that they are incorporated into the title of her first published novel, nevertheless present a curious task for the would-be interpreter. Their supposed opposition implies a false dichotomy; indeed, multiple meanings and connotations exist even within the individual terms, and the two have more in common than one might initially suppose. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language,* first published in 1755, defines sensibility as "quickness of sensation or perception." Sense, on the other hand, is the "faculty or power by which external objects are perceived." Ros Ballaster's observation of the relationship between the two is therefore rational: sensibility is "best understood less as an antonym of sense than as a variant upon it."[1] This hint of sensibility's complexity is by no means a modern interpretation; even in 1755, the word was loaded in a way belied by Johnson's scant definition. Any investigation of sensibility naturally entails one of "sentiment," a term that Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction* identifies as related to, and sometimes synonymous with, sensibility. Nevertheless, a clear difference exists between them. A sentiment, she holds,

> is a moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct; the early eighteenth-century novel of sentiment is characterized by such generalized reflections. But a 'sentiment' is also a thought, often an elevated one, influenced by emotion, a combining of heart with head or an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or a principle…'sentiment' comes close to 'sensibility', which also presupposes an emotional susceptibility. After Sterne's

[1] Ros Ballaster, introduction to *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Penguin, 2008), xviii.

> novels, it frequently takes the meaning of refined and tender emotion, although the denotation of moral reflection also continues.[2]

Sentiment, therefore, is not egregious. Rather, it implies the marriage of a tender capacity for feeling with sense, which is understood to stand for reasonable behavior (usually within the bounds of propriety). In other words, sentiment unites "heart with head." Its relation to moral judgment implies that the feeling it inspires has definite, rational causation, as opposed to existing for its own sake. Sensibility, on the other hand, emphasizes *above all else* the capacity for powerful emotion. "Little used before the middle of the eighteenth century," Todd continues, "[sensibility] came to denote…the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering…[that revealed] itself through a variety of spontaneous activities such as crying, swooning and kneeling." The ensuing "novels of sensibility," epitomized by such works as Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771), catered to the public's demands for endless and extreme affectivity. The confusion of sentiment with sensibility comes from the pejorative "sentimental," introduced in the 1770s to ridicule the "debased…affected feeling" and "indulgence in and display of emotion beyond the stimulus and beyond propriety" celebrated in the novels of sensibility (7).

Such derision became increasingly common as the last quarter of the eighteenth century progressed. Indeed, the "conventional, repetitive, mannered, and overcharged" vocabulary of these novels – in conjunction with their continued use of clichéd character archetypes like the chaste and victimized virgin – soon exhausted literary critics (5). Gothicism and Romanticism, both of which enjoyed rising popularity in the latter years of the eighteenth century, largely

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[2] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 7.

continued this trend of excessive affectivity. In *Equivocal Beings*, Claudia Johnson remarks, "during the 1790s in particular, sentimentalism and Gothicism converged to produce a body of novels distinctive first and foremost for their egregious affectivity…emotions are saturated in turbulent and disfiguring excess." Critics like Ian Watt, she continues, considered such works "lamentable" and "failures of aesthetic judgment."[3]

Thus, sensibility and sentimentality were already considered embarrassments by Austen's young adulthood. Literary taste became polarized as the classically educated elite revolted against the popular appetite, a phenomenon that served to irrevocably link sensibility to commonness and vulgarity. The taste issue is gendered, as well; such fiction came to be thought of as emasculating to men and granting women (who, as Todd mentions, were reading and writing such novels in increasing numbers) undue prominence. In 1785, this reversal of acclaim was apparent enough to lead Henry Mackenzie, the author of *Man of Feeling,* to harshly criticize the very same sentimentality pervading his own prior work: "This separation of conscience from feeling is a depravity of the most pernicious sort" (Todd, 133-134). He can hardly be blamed for the change of heart; in just a few decades, sensibility had nearly become its own opposite. Continuing from her discussion of the relationship between sense and sensibility, Ballaster draws attention to the way in which the latter became linked to self-centeredness: sensibility, she contends, "inverts to become an individualistic and self-gratifying corruption of the valued social response and collective responsibility that sentiment engenders" (xix). This, however, is itself a corruption; at its core, sensibility entails empathy, benevolence, and innocence.

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[3] Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1-2.

The critical popularity of such notions served to firmly ensconce the young Jane Austen in a literary culture disgusted with sensibility and sentimentality. With her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen seemed to enter the field with a clean, crisp, and witty rejection of sentimental values, replacing them instead with rational and *sensible* alternatives for behavior. Indeed, Todd herself deems Austen one of sensibility's finest detractors, and her reputation as such follows her more than two centuries after her death (144-145). While this picture of Austen's fiction is generally correct in most respects, it is guilty of oversimplification – and, in the case of Austen's last novel, of inaccuracy. Through a survey of various points throughout Austen's career, it becomes possible not only to identify the true nature of her take on sensibility, but also the ways in which these opinions change over time.

This investigation will begin with *Lady Susan*, an epistolary novella that functions as a bridge between the burlesque style of her juvenilia and the more serious style of her later novels. As a piece written at the tender age of nineteen, it serves as a valuable point of reference for one seeking to understand the insights and ideals of Jane Austen's teenage mind. For the time in which it was written, it is remarkably silent on the subject of sensibility itself; rather, it stands out primarily for its exploration of different variations and applications of sense. Nonetheless, sensibility's role within it is worth scrutiny. *Sense and Sensibility*, as the first of Austen's full-length novels, is next. It may be interpreted as an important milestone of authorial development in Austen's adulthood – not only for the length of the work, but also for the serious, subtle, and refined critical voice inherent within it that simply is not found in *Lady Susan*. Of particular importance within this work is a persistent ambiguity pertaining to sensibility, which introduces an element of moral conflict that is not adequately explored in its precedent. I further compare these novels to *Persuasion*, Austen's last completed work. As a step in this continual evolution

of the moral and social criticism of sensibility, it is the apex; as a medium through which this is expressed, it is at once the most subtle, nuanced, complex, and distinguished.

The execution of this perspective is largely accomplished through the use of a "model of excellence," a term of my own choosing used henceforth to denote the particular combination of behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities implied to stand for Austen's ideal. These characters as seen in *Lady Susan, Sense and Sensibility,* and *Persuasion* are Mrs. Vernon, Elinor Dashwood, and Anne Elliot, respectively. In these novels, these women enjoy both the implicit support of the narrator and the achievement of their long-standing desires. They are not exactly traditional heroines of sensibility; neither, however, are they heroines of sense. It is "sentiment" in the original meaning, the quality that Todd refers to as "the elevated mind influenced by emotion" and "the combining of head with heart" that these women possess. With graceful manners and attention to propriety on the one hand and a heart no less receptive to powerful emotion (albeit *checked* emotion), on the other, these ladies outshine exemplars of either sense or sensibility alone.

These qualities stand for far more than simply personal modes of expression. At the heart of this issue lies a powerful tension between the individual will and society's, between the fulfillment of desire and conformity. What is the price to be paid for putting one's own will, however uncouth, before propriety? And – a question of even greater import – what is the price to be paid for *loyalty* to propriety? Samuel Johnson's definition of sense as an external force regulating action and sensibility as an internal one calls attention to the necessity of asking such questions, as one quality seeks to rule over the other. Indeed, as each heroine of sentiment's potential for sensibility increases, her balance of sense and sensibility shifts; in turn, the reader is allowed fewer and fewer opportunities to take either quality's characteristics for granted. In her

increasingly complex and nuanced mixture of such qualities, each model of excellence marks a new milestone in Austen's treatment of the issue.

Differing attitudes pertaining to the qualities of sense and sensibility are expressed in a variety of ways, some of which are more obvious than others. One sort depends on a purposeful dichotomy between characters (or groups of characters) in which one quality is ridiculed by way of being exaggerated or caricatured in the behavior of the respective individuals. The second method of expressing this change lies in the presentation of one or the other of these qualities as something valuable and necessary to be learned, effectively making the novels *bildungsromane* for their respective "students" (these may be referred to as *bildungshelden*). Finally, these characterizations are compounded by the bias of the narrator and the consequences incurred in being ruled by one quality or the other.

Austen's 1794 novella *Lady Susan*, widely thought to have been completed years before *Sense and Sensibility's* first drafts appeared on paper, introduces the heroine of sentiment.[4] As this novel's ever-changing viewpoint and epistolary medium reveal both the outer and inner characters of the men and women contained therein, one may – with regard to both biases – form a far more solid understanding of how Austen meant for the reader to react to each. Lady Susan, as the primary "villain" as well as the driving force for the plot throughout the novel, is the most obvious foil against which the virtues of the heroine of sentiment are made apparent.

Though she portrays herself as a rather pitiful victim of circumstance in letter one to her brother Mr. Vernon, the reader soon reads the true cause of her concerns in letter two, addressed to her confidante Mrs. Johnson. Within it, she explains that, having seduced the head of the

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[4] Christine Alexander, chronology to *Love and Freindship* [sic] *and Other Youthful Writings* (London: Penguin, 2014), lx.

Manwaring household and purposefully detached the young and wealthy suitor Sir James Martin from the daughter of that house, she is forced to flee from the environment of unchecked wrath and jealousy to her brother's, an "insupportable spot" in the country. Carmen Rodriguez has provided some excellent research on this type-figure in her essay on the subject. With the above description, the stage is set for Lady Susan's categorization into what David Jackel, citing Jay Arnold Levine's work on the subject, identifies as the 'merry widow' archetype: a character signified by her independence, elegance, coquettishness, scorn for country manners, and vivacity. Rodriquez synthesizes these scholars' ideas on this figure and how it relates to Lady Susan in particular:

> A beautiful, polished, and hypocritical aristocrat who seeks refuge in the country to re-establish her reputation and is greeted rather coldly; the values of the town and the countryside are opposed; [she uses her] talents skillfully; and finally, [she does not have] a "natural" personality (i.e., [her] charms are rather the result of art).[5]

In letter two and beyond, Lady Susan's seemingly absolute trust in Mrs. Johnson allows the reader a relatively unaltered look at Lady Susan's true thoughts, desires, and intentions. Even here, however, she avoids complete honesty. She tells Mrs. Johnson that her scheme to attach Sir James Martin to her daughter was "the sacred impulse of maternal affection," adding that it was for her daughter's advantage only; however, she calls her daughter the "greatest simpleton on earth," who was "born to be the torment of [her] life" in the very same letter. At the end of this particular correspondence, Lady Susan informs her friend that she is depositing her daughter at a

[5] Carmen María Fernández Rodríguez, "Another Mistress of Deceit? Jane Austen's Lady Susan and Sarah Harriet Burney's Geraldine Fauconberg." *Persuasions* 36, no. 1 (2015), 1.

school in town, "until she becomes more reasonable."[6] Lady Susan considers this defiance a personal affront, effectively belittling and suppressing her daughter's will. This scheme of Lady Susan's, one of several, is succinctly worded in her own hand:

> Some mothers would have insisted on their daughters' accepting so great an offer on the first overture, but I could not answer it to myself to force Frederica into a marriage from which her heart revolted; and instead of adopting so harsh a measure, merely propose to make it her own choice by rendering her thoroughly uncomfortable till she does accept him (273).

This toxic mother-daughter relationship – and indeed, most of the plot surrounding Frederica specifically – is strikingly Gothic in its execution. Lady Susan assumes the classic "tyrannical parent" role, while Frederica plays the dejected, melancholy, and oppressed gothic heroine. Patricia Murphy's summarization of this kind of relationship, though usually seen in father figures, applies quite well to Lady Susan:

> [Parental] figures are to be feared in [Gothic novels] for the incredible power they wield over the heroines and the unjust exercise of their authority. Rather than protecting the unmarried females who are dependent upon them and have no other ready recourse until under the protection of a husband, these [parental] figures instead concern themselves with their own aggrandizement and subject the heroines to both emotional and physical danger in pursuit of…self-serving goals.[7]

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[6] Jane Austen, *Love and Freindship* [sic] *and Other Youthful Writings*, ed. Christine Alexander, 10th ed. (London: Penguin, 2014), 262-263 (I refer to this edition throughout this paper).

[7] Patricia Murphy, *The New Woman Gothic: Reconfigurations of Distress* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 2016), 199.

The abundance of Gothicism elsewhere in the book heightens this impression. Frederica's attempted flight from school emphasizes her feelings of desperation and fear in the face of the looming threat of her unsavory suitor Sir James Martin, and – in conjunction with her forced silence and pseudo-imprisonment later in the novel – present her as a kind of embryonic heroine of sensibility. Austen's medium may not place undue emphasis on emotionalism, but Frederica's situation is undoubtedly ghastly. With such clichés at Austen's disposal, making a parody of the Gothic – and of the sentimentalism associated with Gothic heroines – would have been all too easy. That she chooses not to do so is remarkable. Frederica is never made to seem ridiculous or paranoid; Sir James Martin remains as unsavory and foolish as ever; and, finally, Lady Susan is not (despite her best efforts) acquitted in the eyes of others for her inexcusable tyranny. In lieu of overt criticism, Frederica and the potential for sentimentalism she provides are simply marginalized. The fact that she is given only one letter in a novella of 41 to speak for herself is tantamount to a dismissal. In *Lady Susan*, the heroine of sensibility is both cursed and saved by the actions of others; compared to Mrs. Vernon and Lady Susan, whose letters account for the bulk of the work, she is a near-helpless and peripheral figure.

Not content with controlling only her daughter, Lady Susan extends this tendency towards Reginald De Courcy, endeavoring not only to reverse his initially negative bias towards her but also to "subdue [his] insolent spirit" and to "humble the pride of [the] self-important De Courcies still lower, to convince Mrs. Vernon that her sisterly cautions have been bestowed in vain, and to convince Reginald that she has scandalously belied [Lady Susan]" (290). Much to Mrs. Vernon's chagrin, she succeeds in this task in a mere fortnight. In either conquest or relaxation, Lady Susan's relation to others is one of precedence. Her one friend in the novel, Mrs. Johnson, acts as a mirror in which all of Lady Susan's concerns may be supported and

reciprocated, essentially stripping Mrs. Johnson of any real individuality other than her role as a less potent version of her pen pal. This power complex applies to lovers as well as friends and daughters, as seen in Lady Susan's reason for appreciating Mr. Manwaring: "I infinitely prefer the tender and liberal spirit of Manwaring [over that of Reginald De Courcy], which impressed with the deepest conviction of my merit, is satisfied that whatever I do must be right; and look with a degree of contempt upon the inquisitive and doubting fancies of the heart which seems always debating on the reasonableness of its emotions" (290). Reginald, for the folly of once doubting her, is deemed unworthy of real affection.

When considered collectively, the various qualities one can attribute to this talented woman – malevolence, selfishness, unsympathetic command, vanity – bar her from any real claim to sentiment or sensibility, both of which are primarily characterized by good will and sympathy towards others. However, she can be said to epitomize sense – that is, the purely economic and self-interested variety. Though she expresses disinterest in actually heeding society's mores, she places great importance on giving others the *impression* of doing so. "Those women are inexcusable," she remarks, "who forget what is due to themselves and the opinion of the world" (290). Besides her desire to emotionally manipulate and subjugate others, her motives are essentially financial in nature; in Reginald De Courcy and much later in Sir James Martin, she courts men that she views with various shades of disgust; nevertheless, the financial support these men can provide is invaluable to a dependent woman of her standard of living.

A world apart from Lady Susan is the immaculate Mrs. Catherine Vernon, who acts as a foil to the former in almost every way imaginable. With her keen judgment, genuine dedication to propriety and decorum, and selflessness, she serves as the novel's model of excellence. Mrs. Vernon stands apart from every other character through her uncanny ability to see through Lady

Susan's artfulness and deceit, even when the most initially skeptical have already fallen under her spell. From Mrs. Vernon's first letter, addressed to her mother and confidant Lady De Courcy, she reveals both a distrust of her sister-in-law's motive in suddenly visiting the Vernon household and a general dislike of Lady Susan's character at large, calling her "inexcusably artful and ungenerous," as well as an "inattentive, if not unkind" mother (265). If not for the evidence of the truth of these claims being presented by the accused herself in the very next letter, such accusations could be considered cruel – Lady Susan is a recent widow, after all.

At first glance, Mrs. Vernon seems as much an exemplar of socially-validated sense as Lady Susan is of the economic variety: her behavior is pristine. She performs her roles as mother, wife, sister, and daughter faithfully, and comes from an ancient, respectable family to boot; by the standards of late eighteenth-century England, she is a perfect woman who follows all of the rules. Such rigorous attention to decorum does have its consequences, however, as evidenced by Mrs. Vernon's sensible, prim, and rather cold prejudice towards Frederica Vernon, a girl she has never met: "Miss Vernon is to be placed at a school in town before her mother comes to us, which I am glad of, for her sake and my own. It must be to her advantage to be separated from her mother; and a girl of sixteen who has received so wretched an education would not be a very desirable companion here" (265). The reversal of this prejudice forms the cornerstone of Mrs. Vernon's respectability more than any other of her personal qualities, and cements her position as the novel's model of excellence.

Almost immediately upon meeting the girl, Mrs. Vernon's coldness towards her evaporates. The matriarch of the Vernon household instead becomes Frederica's advocate, immediately seeing through Lady Susan's lies about her daughter's "untractable" temper. She remarks to Lady De Courcy, "[Frederica] looks perfectly timid, dejected, and penitent…I never

saw a face less indicative of any evil disposition than hers" (292-293). Due to her uncanny knack for sensing others' intentions with precision and accuracy, Mrs. Vernon's judgment on such matters is weighty. She thereafter devotes a large portion of her concern and sympathy to this ill-used daughter, and by doing so displays a particular brand of feeling that sets this apart from her family relationships. Sympathy and devotion to her husband, children, brother, and parents are expected; towards Frederica, they indicate the balance of powerful feeling with rational purpose reserved for the heroine of sentiment.

The ultimate contrast between the exemplar of sentiment on the one hand and that of personal, economic sense on the other are neatly delivered to reader in the last pages of the novel. It is seen in Lady Susan's abdication of the role of mother of Frederica and its subsequent assumption by Mrs. Vernon, an event that simultaneously confirms both the former's self-absorption and the latter's capacity for love. Concerned that Frederica's well being is in danger after her letters indicate censorship by Lady Susan, Mrs. Vernon insists that her husband take her to London to fetch the girl as soon as possible. Luckily for everyone involved, Lady Susan has already resolved on such an outcome: with continued insistence from Mrs. Vernon that Frederica stay with them in the country for a time and the added pretense of removing her daughter from the harm of a "spreading influenza," Lady Susan gives her consent. The news of Lady Susan's immediate marriage to Sir James Martin following her daughter's departure makes a predictable mockery of her doubtful motherly concern, and underscores Lady Susan's emphasis on materiality over maternal duty. While this freedom is certainly a boon for Frederica, gothic heroine that she is, it is damning for her mother's character – which, admittedly, has been dubious from the beginning.

In being unburdened of her daughter and eventually ceasing communication with her, Lady Susan is also freed. Her need for control in every social relationship requires the ability to dismiss those who prove disloyal to her in any way. Attempts at removing Frederica temporarily through enrollment in school have failed due to her attempted escape, and thus Lady Susan is forced to assume the grating task of dealing with her daughter's dislike and reluctance on a daily basis. Therefore, after failing to completely subjugate Frederica through marriage to a man she detests despite many months of torment and abuse, Lady Susan's only hope for satisfaction rests with the dismissal of motherly duties as a whole. Thomas Gilborne's 1797 work *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, one of many conduct books flourishing in the early nineteenth century, puts this issue into a popular historical perspective:

> Of all the duties incumbent on mankind, there are none which recommend themselves more powerfully to natural reason than those of a parent…'If any,' saith St. Paul, 'provide not for his own, and especially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith…he disobeys one of the clearest injunctions of Christianity'…that these words of the apostle include parents, is a truth which will not be questioned.[8]

If this serves as Lady Susan's most critical lapse from duty, it follows that the assumption of additional motherly responsibility by Mrs. Vernon – already a faithful mother to several young children – is the pièce de résistance of her moral perfection. Thus, the reader is presented with two diametrically opposed models of behavior. Unapologetic self-absorption, informed and purposeful manipulation, concern for propriety only insofar as it concerns superficial

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[8] Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell, 1797), 362-363.

appearances, and devotion only to one's own desires and whims: all such qualities represent the worst extremes of personal and economic sense. In Lady Susan, sense is perverted; it neither upholds society's standards nor encourages peaceful social cooperation. Mrs. Vernon's unwavering sense of duty and powerful capacity for feeling achieve both.

Mrs. Vernon is compensated for her admirable behavior with Lady Susan's dismissal and Reginald and Frederica's marriage. Interestingly, the latent heroine of sensibility is even more amply rewarded than her benefactor – she achieves both freedom from her dominating mother and the man she loves. Such conclusions as to the fate of Lady Susan's happiness are more elusive. For all her tireless persistence in the endeavor of getting what she wants, her victories are hollow and transient. Consider Lady Susan's remark to Mrs. Johnson in letter 2: "I have more than once repented that I did not marry [Sir James Martin] myself, and were he but one degree less contemptibly weak I certainly should, but I must own myself rather Romantic in that respect, and that Riches only, will not satisfy me" (262). Yet the novel's conclusion sees the two married anyway. She and Mr. Manwaring, her "uncommonly pleasing" lover who reciprocates her feelings intensely but nevertheless shares her understanding of the necessity of keeping up appearances, cannot have a socially validated life together. The hint of her dire financial situation – found in the very same letter vaunting her romantic tendencies – foreshadows the inevitable compromise of her real desires. She must marry if she is to maintain her current standard of living. Even Lady Susan's indomitable will falters in the face of pauperism. The ironic narrator leaves the reader with the following parting words regarding her fulfillment: "Whether Lady Susan was, or was not happy in her second Choice – I do not see how it can ever be ascertained – for who would take her assurance of it, on either side of the question? The World must judge from Probability. – She had nothing against her, but her Husband, and her Conscience" (342).

While she almost certainly escapes tangible punishment, her social and emotional isolation underscores the exclusion she faces from the kind of genuine attachment shared by the Vernons and De Courcies.

Sense and Sensibility shifts away from purely personal and economic sense as its object of criticism, focusing instead on the figure *Lady Susan* marginalizes: the heroine of sensibility. Marianne Dashwood's categorization into this role comes immediately, but the eldest sister's is less obvious. Despite what the title may suggest, Elinor Dashwood, like Mrs. Vernon, is actually a heroine of sentiment; as such, she represents the amalgamation of firm social sense with powerful empathy and feeling. Ballaster's view on the novel's juxtaposition of these figures stands in stark contrast to the method employed in *Lady Susan*: "Marianne suffers by comparison with the virtues of her sister Elinor, less her opposite than her 'better half.'"[9] Moral judgments are similarly blurred. Though the heroine of sentiment keeps her position as the model of excellence, the heroine of sensibility is by no means wicked in contrast – given this figure's natural benevolence and sympathy, this would be a contradiction. Despite her overzealousness, Marianne's character proves quite as compelling and admirable in her own way as her sister's. The crux of Austen's message lies not in the heroine of sensibility's personal faults (though of course she is teased relentlessly), but rather in her incompatibility with a cold, uncaring, and decidedly unromantic reality. At its core, the novel's preference for sentiment over pure sensibility is one of necessity. Though the novel concludes with Marianne relinquishing her excessive sensibility and joining "sensible" society, a feeling of dissatisfaction persists. Whether intentionally or not, Austen fails to present sensibility as entirely unappealing.

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[9] Ros Ballaster, introduction to *Sense and Sensibility,* viii.

The novel's own introduction of its characters is the most succinct available, as Austen uses rhetoric to both praise the separate worth of Elinor and Marianne and to instill in the reader a bias in the former's favor:

> Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counselor of her mother…she had an excellent heart; – her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught. Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever; but eager in every thing; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was every thing but prudent. The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great.[10]

Elinor, as the novel's "model of excellence," is described in terms of her virtues; Austen initially allows Marianne a semblance of the same praise, but pairs each with an excess or fault. By no means is Marianne thoroughly outclassed, however:

> [Marianne's] form, though not so correct as her sister's…was more striking; and her face was so lovely, that when in the common cant of praise, she was called a beautiful girl, truth was less violently outraged than usually happens… and in her eyes, which were very dark, there was a life, a spirit, an eagerness, which could hardly be seen without delight (48).

[10] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Ros Ballaster, 23rd ed. (London: Penguin, 2008), 262-263 (I refer to this edition throughout this paper).

The dichotomy between Elinor and Marianne is therefore a far cry from *Lady Susan's* opposition of virtue and vice. The novel's primary concern is rather the difference between two quite different ideologies, only one of which is compatible with the demands and realities of practical society. Shawn Lisa Maurer's "At Seventeen: Adolescence in Sense and Sensibility" offers the idea that the difference in Elinor and Marianne's ages – 19 and 16, respectively –does much in the way of offering an alternative explanation (and perhaps justification) for the latter's behavior: "Marianne's deeply felt emotions and selfish, often impulsive actions—regularly coded as sensibility— might also exemplify behaviors we now associate with the developmental stage of adolescence."[11] This novel therefore portrays its primary object of criticism as immature, rather than wicked. If one may partially attribute Marianne's personal faults to her youth, it follows that age and experience will undue them. This is precisely what Austen does.

The exemplar of personal and economic sense earlier manifested in the character of Lady Susan returns here in the form of Lucy Steele, and occupies a comparatively peripheral position; nonetheless, her presence underscores the moral superiority of both Elinor and Marianne. Like her predecessor, Lucy is bereft of the benefits of a formal education and relies on flattery and artfulness to make up for the lack. However, her conspicuous grammatical errors in speech suggest that she fails to do so in quite as convincing a manner (see, for instance, her use of the wording "you was" on page 127). As in *Lady Susan*, her charms are not sufficient to fool the heroine of sentiment:

> Elinor saw, and pitied her for, the neglect of abilities which education might have rendered so respectable; but she saw, with less tenderness of feeling, the thorough

[11] Shawn Lisa Maurer, "At Seventeen: Adolescence in *Sense and Sensibility*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 25, no. 4 (2013), 723.

> want of delicacy, of rectitude, and integrity of mind, which her attentions, her assiduities, her flatteries at the Park betrayed; and she could have no lasting satisfaction in the company of a person who joined insincerity with ignorance; whose want of instruction prevented their meeting in conversation on terms of equality, and whose conduct toward others made every shew of attention and deference towards herself perfectly valueless (122-123).

If anything, this novel's rendition of the Lady Susan-esque heroine of sense proves even more insidious than her predecessor. Lucy targets not a tertiary character, but a primary one; as such, her persistent aggressions are directly and keenly felt by the reader rather than relayed second-hand. Her insincerity serves as a foil not only to the Elinor, but to Marianne as well – her contrived semblance of sensibility cannot compare to that young woman's simple honesty and integrity of feeling. With her "vulgar jargon and sentimental attitudes," Lucy stands for what Janet Todd dubs the democratized, cheapened sensibility of the masses.[12] She is, after all, chiefly concerned with financial stability – a fact made abundantly clear by her immediate abandonment of Edward following his wealthier younger brother's attentions to her. The effect of this characterization and level of narrative focus is as damning for Lucy's character as it is revealing for Elinor and Marianne's; without her, neither the true depths of Elinor's emotional fortitude nor the extent of Marianne's sincerity as a genuine heroine of sensibility could have equal opportunity to make themselves known.

Just as *Lady Susan* flirted with the conventions of Gothic literature, *Sense and Sensibility* does so with the "picturesque," a particular way of seeing the world – especially nature –

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[12] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction,* 133.

common to Romantic prose and poetry. Unlike its predecessor's treatment of Gothicism, however, this work recognizes no need to withhold mockery. Consider the parody made of Marianne in chapter 18, in which Edward makes the picturesque aesthetic ridiculous in comparison to the practical:

> I call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere…I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles, or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower – and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world (95).

Edward's poignant defense of "fine country…uniting beauty and utility" over the idealized landscapes favored by Marianne and other romantics is especially sharp considering his parodic use of their own linguistic conventions. Her predictable reaction of shock at his apparent lack of sensibility only reinforces his point, and – as with many of her interactions with Elinor throughout the novel – Marianne becomes the butt of the joke.

Marianne is a fervent believer in novelty, and loathes the spirit of conformity – hence her deprecation of the "mere jargon" that the admiration of landscape scenery has become, expressing contempt for those who "pretend to feel and try to describe with the taste and elegance of him who first defined what picturesque beauty was." Edward Ferrars' subsequent assurance that Marianne "really feel[s]… all [she] professes to feel" is tactfully spoken indeed,

for it assures her that this expression of sensibility is genuine. Additionally, it allows Marianne to maintain her spirit of fierce individualism despite holding a particular set of beliefs (admiration for the picturesque and the pathos it represents) that were already, by the early nineteenth century, "worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning" (95). This conversation between Marianne and Edward provides a crucial hint for the devastation in store for Marianne upon hearing that Elinor – the supposedly cold and rather unfeeling older sister – has not only borne nearly the exact manner of anguish as she, but also suffered in silence and solitude all the while. The nail is driven home in Elinor's passionate defense of her own capacity for feeling following Marianne's accusation that her sister's composure in the face of hardship indicates a lack of it:

> I understand you. – you do not suppose I have ever felt much. For four months, Marianne, I have had all this hanging on my mind…*knowing that it would make you and my mother most unhappy whenever it were explained to you* [my emphasis]…in a manner forced on me by the very person, who by her prior engagement ruined all my prospects; and told me, as I thought, with triumph…I have known myself to be divided from Edward forever, without hearing one circumstance that could make me less desire the connection…I have had to contend against the unkindness of his sister, and the insolence of his mother; I have suffered the punishment of an attachment, without enjoying its advantages…if you can think me ever capable of feeling – surely you may suppose that I have suffered *now* (247).

Marianne's "subdued" state following Elinor's explanation reflects two senses of the word: on one hand, she is abruptly countered in her condescension and subdued in her line of argument; on the other, Marianne's very faith in the validity of her own actions and beliefs itself

is subdued. Thus exhibited against the superior conduct of the self-sacrificing and no less abundant in feeling Elinor, Marianne is suddenly and forcefully evicted from the security of her own perceived primacy of feeling. She is left not even the comfort of distinctiveness in suffering – Elinor's confession has stamped this out, as well. This event marks the beginning of a radical change in Marianne's character and conduct, and firmly places her on the trajectory towards the "learning" of sense – more specifically, learning to be ruled by it rather than by her own sensibility.

Such an endeavor is not completely resolved upon by the young woman herself until the climax of this "reinvention": namely, the illness that Tony Tanner, author of the appendix to the novel, refers to as "psychosomatic."[13] The period immediately preceding her near-fatal illness commences with her bidding adieu to the house and city containing all the memories of her suffering for Willoughby, which she cannot leave without tears. Upon arriving at Cleveland Estate, she devotes herself wholly to "solitary rambles," wherein she might engage in "moments of precious, of invaluable misery" (283). This final and intensely passionate expression of sorrow abruptly crosses the mind-body boundary to become a physical phenomenon, and within days Marianne lies on the brink of death, suffering in alternating fits of confusion and painful slumber. Though the younger Dashwood sister regains her life and health in this struggle, she also loses much.

Tanner calls attention to the curious and irrevocable change that falls upon Marianne after the conclusion of her illness by first discussing the rhetoric accompanying her revival:

> Before her illness her eyes are bright, eager, full of wayward spirit; after her illness – it is the very sign of her recovery – she looks up at Elinor with 'a rational

[13] Tony Tanner, appendix to *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Penguin, 1969), 361.

> though languid gaze.' '"My illness has made me think," she says, when apologizing for her previous '"want of kindness to others"'…Her vision is now clearer; but her energy is turned to languor. She is tamed and ready for 'citizenship' (361).

"Tamed" is a fitting word indeed for the transformation Marianne undergoes in and after this scene. In a striking speech to Elinor, Marianne deplores her previous selfishness and imprudence concerning Willoughby, resolving henceforth not only to endeavor to actively discipline herself, but to "live solely for [her] family." As for her sensibility, she declares that it shall henceforth be "regulated…by reason, by religion, by constant employment" (322-323). Even Elinor's revelation to her sister concerning Willoughby's true state of affairs moves her only temporarily; by all accounts, she seems truly changed. Her marriage to Colonel Brandon acts as the denouement of Marianne's re-education; and, in the last two pages of the book, Austen summarizes her education thus:

> Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favorite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with *no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship* [my emphasis], voluntarily to give her hand to another…instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion…she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, a mistress of a family, and a patroness of a village (252).

Critics like Barbara Seeber have noted that dubbing this change in Marianne's behavior and constitution simply an education belies the somewhat unnatural manner of its coming about;

she continues, noting, "What is involved here is a violent purgation, a re-education, and a rewriting of the past. Marianne dies, is reborn, and this birth is a birth into another ideology."[14] Though the narrator informs the reader that Marianne's heart "…became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby," the overall impression is that Elinor, married to her long-beloved Edward, has ended up the better off of the two sisters despite her lesser material condition (352). Her dream is fulfilled even after it has seemed hopeless for much of the novel; Marianne's, on the other hand, becomes a sham that quite nearly ends in self-destruction. For the good of herself and of others, she must abandon it. While each woman is married to a man she strongly *esteems*, there is no explicit focus on passionate love in the story's conclusion. Peaceful domestic cooperation – with or without passion, for that is beside the point– is the only real aim. The moral conclusion, as related by Tanner, seems to be thus: "Jane Austen has gone out of her way to show that romantic feelings [more accurately, the excessive sort displayed by Marianne rather than the subdued kind evinced by Elinor] are utterly non-viable in society" (379). With age and experience, Marianne is made explicitly aware of the faults inherent within her earlier outlook; however, this experience does more than produce an older and more mature Marianne. It in fact renders her incompatible with her previous sentimental precepts.

In both *Lady Susan* and *Sense and Sensibility*, the heroine of sentiment represents moral perfection. She exemplifies social grace and proper attention to decorum, and as an additional boon manifests just the right amount of sensibility to grant her humanity and sympathy in the eyes of the reader. Similarly, the heroine of sense, specifically of the economic sort, remains a thoroughly unpleasant model of how *not* to act if one is interested in being a decent person. The

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[14] Barbara K. Seeber, "'I See Every Thing as You Desire Me to Do': The Scolding and Schooling of Marianne Dashwood." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11*,* no. 2 (January 1999), 223-233.

treatment of sensibility, on the other hand, becomes rather complicated. Despite her frequent excess and silliness compared to the older and wiser Elinor, Marianne is difficult to hold in contempt; she and her ideals are too good to deserve such a response. Something in Marianne's education thus strikes one as melancholic. Seeber expands upon this persistent feeling by noting that it is shared by several of the characters themselves:

> The "pang" that Elinor and Willoughby continue to feel about the match that was not meant to be further underscores the contradiction at the heart of Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon. The text strips [proper] sense, the dominant discourse, of the power to legitimize itself. Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon is not a natural occurrence. It needs some hefty assistance: John Dashwood, Mrs. Dashwood, Elinor, and Edward "felt [Colonel Brandon's] sorrow and their own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of all." The novel asks "With such a confederacy against her ... what could she do?" Clearly, Marianne is powerless against this communal wish (226).

Within just a few short pages, Marianne is thus disposed of. Notwithstanding Colonel Brandon's inherent goodness, their marriage presents less a "tying up of loose ends," as Elinor and Edward's marriage is, than an inevitable introduction to reality. Nevertheless, this proves the best possible ending given the circumstances. Brandon's unremitting affection for Marianne throughout the novel attests to his genuine love; Willoughby, on the other hand, proves himself unfaithful to every woman he covets. This pang is therefore less a realistic wish for Marianne and Willoughby's reunion than a reflection on the impossibility of the romantic ideal that lies behind it. Austen herself may have felt it alongside Elinor and Willoughby: as Tanner states in his appendix to the novel, "It is abundantly clear that [Austen] put quite as much of herself into

Marianne as into Elinor, so from one point of view we can imagine this to be a psychological parable written partly at least for her own benefit – the two sisters adding up to one divided self" (378). Marianne therefore functions as an attractive and charming personality that – however bright and earnest – must eventually "submit to new attachments."

On the other hand, Laurence Lerner has dubbed Marianne's position within *Sense and Sensibility* as fulfilling that of an "anti-Jane." According to his work on the subject, the novel's didactic tone attempts to establish a suitable and attractive example of behavior in Elinor Dashwood, the novel's model of excellence. However, Marianne's alluring – though doomed - ideology and accompanying personality make uniformity difficult by giving this idea a competitor. In his anti-Jane thesis, Lerner calls into question both Austen's consistency of characterization and consistency of personal belief:

> Even if Jane Austen held to these beliefs, runs this objection, even if she placed principle before love, and love based on principle before love based on passion or impulse, did she *really* hold them? Did the novelist always support the moralist: or do the principles impose a check on, even contend against, the very emotions that her creative power engenders? If this is so, the ambivalence will be most evident in those characters who charm but are to be rejected: those too attractive for the stern check which the moral scheme of the book imposes on them: those who embody too much of the kind of energy Jane Austen rejects, but cannot make us reject.[15]

Though Lerner comes close to the truth with the notion that a schism exists between the separate ideologies of the moralist and the sentimentalist, I nevertheless feel that his terminology

[15] Laurence Lerner, *The Truthtellers: Jane Austen, George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 156.

implies a greater disagreement with Tanner's judgment than actually exists. If a part of Austen's mind does indeed find Marianne and her ideology attractive, as he suggests, then these feelings constitute less of an anti-Jane than simply an ordering of priorities. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Elinor and her accompanying ideology are demonstrated as superior – not because they are altogether better in every way, but because they operate with, rather than against, society. They are therefore necessary. Marianne's treatment may be unsatisfying to romantically inclined readers, but she is in fact amply rewarded for adopting an ideology similar to Elinor's. Marianne need not be vilified as Lady Susan was for Austen to express the sentiment that, however beautiful, youthful, and romantic, her outlook cannot survive the transition into proper, mature society. In light of the fact that Austen's last heroine is in many respects a fusion of the characters of Elinor and Marianne, Lerner's contention that the anti-Jane finally "win[s] her mistress over" in *Persuasion* is at least partly incorrect (166). When viewed as the union of the parts of the "divided self" mentioned by Tanner, the picture becomes clearer.

It is ironic that the last of Austen's heroines of sensibility, *Persuasion's* 27-year-old Anne Elliot, should be the woman to achieve the passionate and romantic end initially envisioned by Marianne Dashwood – the latter having said with scorn that "a woman of seven and twenty…can never hope to feel or inspire affection again."[16] Indeed, the primary theme of *Persuasion* seems to purposefully turn that judgment on its head. In celebrating the romantic and deeply emotional precepts usually reserved to the heroine of sensibility *in addition* to the calm, collected, and sensible demeanor common in the heroine of sentiment, *Persuasion* reaches a new and surprising conclusion concerning the former's compatibility with proper society.

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[16] Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Gillian Beer. 12th ed. (London: Penguin, 2011), 40 (I refer to this edition throughout this paper).

Anne's varied character traits resist basic efforts to dub her an exemplar of any one quality. As I suggested before, she is a mixture: she possesses the keen intuition and emotional awareness of Mrs. Vernon, the demure mannerisms, restraint, and politeness of Elinor, and, of course, the potential for passionate love evinced by Marianne. The expression of the last of these, as the conclusion of Anne's personal development, occupies the foreground of the novel's commentary and action. Ann Astell, in her essay on the subject, refers to Anne's story as an "education of romance."[17] This does not imply a miraculous acquisition of dramatic and exaggerated Marianne-esque sensibility, but rather the reaffirmation of the will after a long period of repression, the renewal of self-confidence, and the achievement of her desires after much doubt and hardship. The result is the inverse of *Sense and Sensibility*: the heroine is allowed to choose romantic love and romantic precepts over "esteemable" alternatives. Not only is her marriage to Wentworth *just*, but also romantically satisfying.

In the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to an Anne Elliot who is "nobody with either father or [older] sister," despite having an "elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding." The Anne seen here is a young woman disappointed in her youthful dreams and largely unappreciated; as it is, her spirits are kept up to their current minimum level in this sterile environment by the aid of her one friend, confidante, and godmother, Lady Russell. This disappointment is made physically manifest: "A few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early…she was faded and thin" (7). Here and in the rest of the novel, Anne's self-confidence is directly linked with her physical appearance. Her sister Elizabeth, though approaching spinsterhood and disappointed in the prospect of marrying Mr. Elliot, is at least

[17] Ann W Astell, "Anne Elliot's Education: The Learning of Romance in Persuasion." *Renascence: Essays On Values In Literature* 40, no. 1 (1987), 3.

maintained in her youthful vigor by her self-confidence, ambition, and vanity of position; indeed, she is described immediately after her younger sister as being "handsomer at twenty-nine than she was ten years before" (8). Anne has no such source of real confidence or hope for a change in her material condition. Even Captain Wentworth, upon seeing her again for the first time since the latter broke off their engagement, contemptuously says of her to Mary that she is "altered beyond his knowledge" (57). Of course, this is partly due to his resentment at her earlier rejection. Luckily for Anne – and perhaps more so for Wentworth – the bloom of health and beauty, like spring after a long winter, is destined to come again. If Marianne's fate in *Sense and Sensibility* is harshly realistic, Anne's in *Persuasion* is dulcet in comparison. Renewed interaction with Wentworth, clipped and lacking in verbal discourse as it is at first, seems to play only a small part in the rejuvenation which marks its official beginning with Mr. Elliot's admiring glance; the restoration of her self-confidence is the key, achieved by her removal from Kellynch Hall and the respect afforded her by the society of Uppercross.

Anne's gentle, selfless demeanor and excellent listening skills quickly lead her sister Mary and most of the Musgrove family to confide in her their various frustrations (usually concerning each other). Considering this, the narrator remarks: "How was Anne to set all these matters to rights? She could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other; give them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbors, and make those hints broadest which were meant for her sister's benefit" (44). This indication of the worth of her opinions, even if it rests primarily on Anne's impressive listening skills rather than their interest in her, improves her mood a good deal. For the most part, however, she remains in a state of emotional isolation; like her musical talents, her sensibilities have no outlet with which to be truly appreciated by others:

> [Anne] played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves; but having no voice, no knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted, her performance was little thought of, only out of civility, or to refresh the others, as she was well aware. She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself; but this was no new sensation: *excepting one short period of her life* [my emphasis], she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste. In music she had always used to feel alone in the world…(44).

But for its conspicuous absence of an attentive Colonel Brandon, this scene is remarkably similar to the conclusion of *Sense and Sensibility's* chapter seven. Marianne holds that earnest listener in contempt, but Anne – older, wiser, and lonelier – fully recognizes the value of such genuine affection and attention. In such ways as this, Wentworth's memory serves as more than a reminder of a lost love – it also stands for the lost opportunity to be justly valued and appreciated by someone besides her only current friend, Lady Russell. With her mother and Wentworth, her real emotions, opinions, and desires could be known and reciprocated – death and necessary propriety have rendered those opportunities lost. While she indeed has a concerned confidante in Lady Russell, Anne cannot discuss with her the deepest affair of her heart – namely, her issues with Captain Wentworth. Compounding this isolation is a persistent guilt that proactively stifles full involvement in the outside world and hence with others. Linda Bree identifies this controlled suffering as resulting from an internalized "submissive negativity, an embracing of pain and loss that is stifling any engagement with the world around her as she

goes on punishing herself for the choice she made."[18] Though the majority of the first volume of the novel deprives Anne of a person to whom she can fully express herself, the narrator's expression of her thoughts and feelings at least allow her to do so secondhand to the reader: through the increased implementation of free indirect discourse, *Persuasion* takes on Anne's voice even more than *Sense and Sensibility* does Elinor's.

One such example of Anne's uncommunicated taste arises on a walk through the country, wherein her romantic appreciation of nature – if not as outwardly obvious as Marianne's – has all of the wonder and imagination of that paradigm of sensibility:

> Her pleasure in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousands of the poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season from which has drawn every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling (78).

Austen, who in *Sense and Sensibility* had Elinor chide Marianne for her "passion for dead leaves," now seems to be offering a different perspective entirely. Impractical and inhuman nature becomes a thing to be appreciated and admired for its own sake; at the end of the walk, the comparatively orderly Winthrop stretches before her "without beauty and without dignity" (79). A similar fluency with the poetic feeling and language of sensibility is found in Captain Benwick, whose friendship and similitude serve as a catalyst for the beginning of Anne's "second spring of youth and beauty." He, like Anne, is suffering the loss of a lover and deals

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[18] Linda Bree, "'In a State of Alteration, Perhaps of Improvement': Form and Feeling in Persuasion." *Women's Writing* 23, no. 3 (August 2016), 392.

with said loss through the comforts of poetry and literature: “He had been engaged to Captain Harville’s sister, and was now mourning her loss…[Wentworth] considered his disposition as of the sort which must suffer heavily, uniting very strong feelings with quiet, serious, and retiring manners, and a decided taste for reading, and sedentary pursuits” (90). Through her conversation with Captain Benwick, Anne is able to consider his – and therefore her own – situation from the view of one outside looking in. Her self-reflection following her advice to this man is tinged with self-deprecation: “Anne could not but be amused at the idea of her coming to Lyme, to preach patience and resignation to a young man whom she had never seen before; nor could she help fearing, on more serious reflection, that, like many other great moralists and preachers, she had been eloquent on a point which in which her own conduct would bear ill-examination”(94). Yet she is not fair to herself. Though not evident at this particular junction, Benwick’s mourning proves shorter lived than Anne’s – a fact that gives her later argument concerning the longevity of men and women’s feelings powerful support and amply demonstrates her own patience. To top it off, a mere few weeks’ exposure to the tantalizing reminder of the loss of her dearest hopes is all it takes for her to refer to the agony of Wentworth’s company as having “become a mere nothing”(93).

The effects of this revelation – whether or not Anne herself recognizes them – almost immediately assume physical from. As I mentioned earlier, Anne’s emotional wellness and physical appearance have a direct relationship; with this in mind, the “miracle” that occurs the following morning takes on a clearer justification:

> [Anne] was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had also

> produced. It was evident that the gentleman, (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance, – a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, "That man is struck with you, – and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again" (97).

With Anne's revitalization begun and a pretense for jealousy founded, the stage is set for a rekindling of Wentworth's love for Anne. However, he cannot do so in earnest while still supporting the anger and pride sustaining their estrangement; on this point, the text follows the first two almost immediately. From his earlier allusion to the durability of the hazelnut, the reader is made explicitly aware of his disdain for the quality of persuadability, the very thing that snatched Anne from him years before. This conviction is quickly shattered when he fails to persuade Louisa Musgrove against jumping from the sea wall and she is nearly killed by her own stubbornness. Wentworth, like most of the group, is struck dumb – he is paralyzed with despair, "as if all his own strength were gone." Anne alone maintains her sense. "Attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct provided," Anne takes control of the chaotic situation. Consider the following scene:

> [Charles and Wentworth] seemed to look to her for directions.
>
> "Anne, Anne," cried Charles, "what is to be done next? What, in heaven's name, is to be done next?"
>
> Captain Wentworth's eyes were also turned towards her.
>
> "Had not she better be carried to the inn? Yes, I am sure, carry her gently to the inn."
>
> "Yes, yes, to the inn," repeated Captain Wentworth (103).

The balance of power is thus suddenly and conspicuously shifted. Though nearly reverting to her accustomed submissive role in her question to Wentworth, she nevertheless corrects herself and boldly assumes command: "Yes, I am sure." Anne's graceful response to crisis is nothing new – recalling her reaction to her nephew's bad fall in chapter nine, her reaction here is perfectly logical. Rather, it is the clear, powerful articulation of Anne's *voice* – something denied her in almost every social setting up to this point – that merits the reader's attention. From this point onwards, Anne's will becomes less and less confined to the boundaries of her imaginative fancy.

Along with this renewal of confidence comes a marked disillusion with authority figures. First among these is her father Sir Walter, who expresses contempt over her benign (and quite morally sanctioned) visits to her sick and crippled friend Mrs. Smith. As Claudia Johnson points out, Mrs. Smith is, socially speaking, "a nobody," whom Anne visits "without as much as informing [Sir Walter], let alone seeking his permission."[19] Predictably, Sir Walter is disgusted at the thought of Anne visiting a woman so beneath her station: "And what is her attraction? Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Every thing that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you" (148). Such an obvious juxtaposition does more than highlight the insufferable snootiness displayed by the landed gentry against the underserving fringes of society; in this case, it gives Anne's disregard of such opinions the benefit of the narrator's favor. Johnson continues by

[19] Claudia L. Johnson, "*Persuasion*: The Unfeudal Tone of the Present Day." *Jane Austen's Persuasion* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 145.

saying, "…once his disapproval is expressed, [it] is ignored without a fuss. For Anne, no hard conflict is implied by defying or simply ignoring her father."[20]

In the case of Lady Russell, this steadfastness is most obviously apparent. Consider, for instance, Lady Russell's stance regarding Mr. Elliot's suit for Anne's hand in marriage: noting his easy grace, excellent manners, interesting conversation, and prominent name, she immediately recommends him as a suitable husband. When sheer reason will not work, Anne's mentor resorts to nostalgic domestic fantasy:

> "I own that to be able to regard you as the future mistress of Kellynch, the future Lady Elliot, to look forward and see you occupying your dear mother's place, succeeding to all her rights, and all her popularity, as well as to all her virtues, would be the highest possible gratification to me. You are your mother's self in countenance and disposition; and if I might be allowed to fancy you such as she was, in situation and name, and home, presiding and blessing in the same spot, and only superior to her in being more highly valued! My dearest Anne, it would give me more delight than is often felt at my time of life!"… Lady Russell said not another word, willing to leave the matter to its own operation (150).

Though her heart and mind are temporarily "bewitched" at the thought of taking her late mother's place as the mistress of Kellynch Hall, she realizes that this dream is not her own: "The charm of Kellynch and of 'Lady Elliot' all faded away. She never could accept him" (150). Lady Russell undoubtedly possesses a keen mind and a good will; nevertheless, she has "prejudices on the side of ancestry…[and] a value for rank and consequence, which blind her a little to the faults

[20] Ibid.

of [the gentry]" (12). Anne has no such prejudices. Rather, she judges intuitively. Consider, for instance, her thoughts on Mr. Elliot:

> Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished, – but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the good or evil of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection…she felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped (151).

Having once rejected her instincts in favor of decorum, Anne now recoils from the opportunity to do so again. By no means, however, does this imply complete autonomy. She is ultimately at the mercy of the quality of her options: "How she might have felt had there been no Captain Wentworth in the case," she thinks, "was not worth enquiry; for there was a Captain Wentworth; and be the conclusion of the present suspense good or bad, her affection would be his for ever" (181). In Captain Wentworth, the *ideas* of honest esteem and passionate romance separately represented in *Sense and Sensibility* by Colonel Brandon and John Willoughby combine: only through him can Anne possess both. Her hypothetical question is therefore significant: in light of *Sense and Sensibility's* treatment of the issue, Wentworth's existence borders on the miraculous. Though superior in terms of pedigree, Mr. Elliot is crucially lacking in the sort of authenticity of feeling and comportment seen in Wentworth; for, even in the midst of the "madness" of his resentment, the very same that leads him to pretend Anne is no longer of any consequence to him, Wentworth wears his heart on his sleeve.

Among the heroines of sentiment covered thus far, Anne is the only one whose behavior is significantly changed. The reasoning for this seems clear: Mrs. Vernon and Elinor Dashwood

are essentially perfect from the start, and need no further development. Notwithstanding her "elegance of mind and sweetness of character," something in Anne is therefore deserving of alteration. A particularly memorable passage from chapter four illustrates this phenomenon in full: "She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older: the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (29). How very unlike Marianne's similarly remarkable education in *Sense and Sensibility*! While the restraint of impulse and the moderation of sensibility lead Marianne Dashwood to a life of domestic comfort, the same behavior in Anne results in years of discontent; it is only by *yielding* to such desires that she achieves permanent satisfaction. While Anne of course acknowledges the correctness of her prior actions, such reasoning nevertheless strikes one as rather tenuous:

> I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad *only as the event decides* [my emphasis] (230-231).

One wonders, then, if powerful foresight gives one the liberty to slight propriety. Though Robert Hopkins explores just such a proposition in his essay "Moral Luck and Judgment in *Persuasion*," this philosophical consequentialism seems out of place in a novel of the early nineteenth century, and especially in one of Austen's.[21] That the statement implies a compromise between sentiment and sensibility is more likely. The social and moral rules of the world these characters inhabit have changed little since *Lady Susan*; however, the peculiarity of

[21] Robert Hopkins, "Moral Luck and Judgment in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 42, no. 2 (1987), 144-145.

circumstances Austen creates for the heroine has. In *Persuasion,* powerful emotion is no longer entirely dependent upon a sensible context. Rather, it can be celebrated for its own merit, and love especially so. Consider the conspicuously unsarcastic observations of Anne's romantic daydreams: "Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy, could never have passed along the streets of Bath, than Anne was sporting with from Camden Place to Westgate Buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way" (181). Of course, any reflection on such matters would be incomplete without a tribute to what Hopkins calls "Jane Austen's most memorable love scene"[22]:

> [Anne's] eyes devoured the following words: "I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own than when you almost broke it, eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you["] (222).

Her response is just as indicative of extreme, refined emotion as Wentworth's confession: "Such a letter was not to be soon recovered from…It was overpowering happiness… The absolute necessity of seeming like herself produced then an immediate struggle; but after a while she could do no more. She began not to understand a word [Charles, Mary, and Henrietta] said (223).

Anne thus represents a new sort of heroine of sensibility: by combining romantic and sentimental precepts with the qualities of the heroine of sentiment, sensibility is reconfigured

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[22] Ibid.

into a respectable and mature form. In *Persuasion*, sensibility is neither marginalized nor discouraged, nor is it associated with immaturity; rather, the expression of it is the very sign of the heroine's completed development. In this regard, readers disappointed at the fate of Marianne Dashwood have cause for happiness: though that young woman's sentimental precepts were spoiled, they find occasion to ring true at last. Such qualities could not have manifested in a character better suited to demonstrate their worth. Anne Elliot, more than any other character discussed here, proves – in the words of the rather villainous but nonetheless accurate judge of character Mr. Elliot – "a most extraordinary young woman; in her temper, manners, mind, a model of female excellence" (149).

The question of whether one model of excellence is necessarily "better" than another is an idle one. Certainly Anne is the most psychologically complex and nuanced of the women discussed here, but her personal merit is not obviously greater than either Mrs. Vernon's or Elinor Dashwood's. The difference is rather the precise combination of thoughts and actions – the particular ideologies of behavior, if you will – made manifest in each woman. Just as Mrs. Vernon and Elinor Dashwood prove the necessity and justice of sentiment in their respective novels, Anne does the same for the heretofore criticized and neglected values of sensibility. That such values are authentically expressed in a woman as reasonable and proper as Anne Elliot is the best defense of their validity within society possible; in this regard, *Persuasion* marks a new and remarkable reconfiguration of sensibility in Austen's writing.