The Annotated
SENSE
AND
SENSIBILITY

JANE AUSTEN

ANNOTATED AND EDITED BY DAVID M. SHAPARD

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A young woman reading a book outdoors.
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Annotations to the Front Cover

1. Umbrellas for protection against inclement weather had been developed in the early eighteenth century, and by the end of the century were a standard accoutrement, especially among the wealthy. Of course, then as now, people did not always remember to carry them: one of the most important scenes in *Sense and Sensibility* occurs when one of the heroines, Marianne, is caught in a sudden rainstorm and tries to race home to escape it.

2. Walking outdoors was the principal form of exercise for ladies at this time, and Marianne is particularly devoted to it. The countryside where she lives and often takes walks with her sisters is mostly open and hilly, like the terrain depicted here.

3. Large muffs like this one were fashionable in this period; Marianne carries one when she ventures out during the winter.

4. The twisted, leafless trees and rustic hovels in the background were features admired by advocates of the picturesque, an influential aesthetic concept that is discussed by several of the main characters in the novel. Landscapes that were irregular, rugged, forlorn, or ruined in some way were considered to be particularly picturesque.

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Notes to the Reader

The Annotated Sense and Sensibility contains several features that the reader should be aware of:

Literary interpretations: the comments on the techniques and themes of the novel, more than other types of entries, represent the personal views and interpretations of the editor. Such views have been carefully considered, but inevitably they will still provoke disagreement among some readers. I can only hope that even in those cases the opinions expressed provide useful food for thought.

Differences of meaning: many words then, like many words now, had multiple meanings. The meaning of a word that is given at any particular place is intended only to apply to the way the word is used there; it does not represent a complete definition of the word in the language of the time. Thus some words are defined differently at different points, while many words are defined only in certain places, since in other places they are used in ways that remain familiar today.

Repetitions: this book has been designed so it can be used as a reference. For this reason many entries refer the reader to other pages where more complete information about a topic exists. This, however, is not practical for definitions of words, so definitions of the same word are repeated at various appropriate points.

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Introduction

Sense and Sensibility was Jane Austen's first published novel. Its appearance, in 1811 when she was thirty-five, marked the formal beginning of her literary career, but that career, and this novel itself, originated in much earlier, unpublished literary efforts.

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, in Hampshire, a county in southern England. Her father, George Austen, was a clergyman and her mother, Cassandra Leigh Austen, whose father was also a clergyman, came from a family consisting principally of landed gentry; thus Jane Austen grew up among the social class she consistently depicts in her novels. The Austens were a large family of six boys and two girls, and they valued books and education. Her father supplemented his income by running a school for boys, and several of her brothers tried their hands at literary composition. The family also encouraged Jane's literary efforts, the first surviving examples of which date to when she was thirteen. Her earliest writings were highly comical, and show the influence of other literary works of the time, many of which she satirized. As she matured, she wrote longer and more serious works, which reveal an increasing interest in the delineation of character.

One of these longer works was an early version of *Sense and Sensibility*. According to the later reminiscences of family members this early version, *Elinor and Marianne,* was written in the form of letters, a popular literary device of the time that she used for some of her other early writings. It was probably done in 1795, when she was nineteen.[1] Late in 1796 she began *First Impressions,* which many years later became *Pride and Prejudice*. Her father sent the manuscript to a publisher, but it was rejected. Toward the end of 1797 she returned to *Elinor and Marianne,* modifying it and changing its name to *Sense and Sensibility*. She followed this with a new novel, *Susan;* it was also submitted to a publisher, who purchased the rights but never published it. Many years later it appeared, without significant modifications, as *Northanger Abbey*.

During this time Jane Austen continued to live with her parents and

her sister, Cassandra, in her childhood home in Steventon, Hampshire. Her surviving letters indicate regular attendance at balls and other social events, and an interest in men, but no sustained romance or offer of marriage. The first known major event of her life occurred in 1801, when her father retired and moved the family to the popular spa and resort town of Bath. The family lived there, at various addresses, for the next four years. In 1805 Mr. Austen died, after which Mrs. Austen and her two daughters left Bath, settling eventually in Southampton, a port city in Hampshire. During this whole period Jane Austen did not complete any other novels, though she began at least one, the fragment called *The Watsons.* She also rejected, after briefly accepting, her one known offer of marriage. Finally, in 1809, she and her mother and sister were able to move into a cottage owned by her brother Edward in the quiet village of Chawton in Hampshire.

This new setting gave her the opportunity to devote herself more fully to writing. In 1810 she finished *Sense and Sensibility;* in October 1811 it appeared, though with a title page that simply said, "By a Lady." It enjoyed modest sales, along with a couple of favorable reviews. January 1813 saw the publication of *Pride and Prejudice,* identified as "By the Author of 'Sense and Sensibility.' " It experienced even greater success, and in 1814 and 1815 *Mansfield Park* and *Emma,* both completely new compositions, appeared. Unfortunately, in 1816 she grew increasingly ill; her ailment has not been identified for certain, though many have suggested it was what is now known as Addison's disease, an endocrine disorder caused by a malfunction of the adrenal glands. She did manage during this period to finish one more novel, *Persuasion,* and to begin another, *Sanditon.* Eventually, however, she grew too weak to write, and on July 18, 1817, she died in the town of Winchester in Hampshire. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published later in the year, along with a brief biographical notice by her brother Henry that finally revealed her identity to the world.

Sense and Sensibility is in some ways the most didactic of all Jane Austen's novels. It is one of three whose titles consist of the names of abstract concepts, the others being *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion.* This signals from the start that a moral message will be central to the story. But while the ideas that pride and prejudice are dangerous and that it is good to be somewhat but not too susceptible to persuasion

are not particularly controversial, *Sense and Sensibility* engages in a contentious debate of its day and takes a stance at odds with a prominent cultural trend.

The term "sensibility" first appeared in English in the fifteenth century, used for either mental awareness or the power of sensation or perception. In the eighteenth century the term assumed additional meanings, and became more widely used. It came to denote a person's general emotional consciousness or feelings, as well as, most significantly, a particular acuteness and sensitivity of feeling. This extra sensitivity could mean various things: among the feelings that were identified as especially strong in a person of sensibility were compassion for suffering and the unfortunate, empathy with others' feelings, love of natural beauty, delicate artistic taste, and instinctive aversion toward immorality. Many argued that these qualities had become more pronounced in their own time, and that this signaled the progressive improvement and refinement of society. Sensibility was also believed by many to be more prevalent among the affluent and educated classes and among women. Much of the literature of sensibility emphasized the feminine nature of its qualities, and extolled women for being naturally more tender, delicate, emotional, and morally pure, especially when it came to sexual morality.

Important strains of eighteenth-century thought inspired and informed ideas of sensibility. One of these was the tendency among philosophers to explain human consciousness and knowledge as the product of sensations and experiences, rather than divine inspiration or rational deduction. Another, the theory of the moral sense, was an influential philosophical doctrine that explained morality as the product of an instinctive sense of benevolence in human beings. This sense allowed people to understand moral principles, served as proof of the validity of moral laws, and gave people a reason to act morally, since such actions would naturally produce pleasure while immoral actions would produce pain. Most of the major philosophers of the century advocated one or both of the above doctrines.

Even more influential in spreading the cult of sensibility were the novelists of the time. It was during the eighteenth century that the novel emerged as a major literary genre, one that attracted both a large readership and a host of writers to cater to that audience. The novel, thanks to the opportunity it provided for intensive exploration of inner emotion, proved to be an ideal vehicle for advocates of sensibility. Samuel Richardson, the most popular of all eighteenth-

century novelists, one who more than anyone made the genre influential and respectable and who exercised a critical influence on Jane Austen, created potent representations of sensibility in his work. His first two novels, *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), both concern highly virtuous and beautiful young women who are subject to a series of cruel trials, principally involving powerful men who wish to rob them of their virginity. Both heroines are creatures of acute feeling and sensibility, and the novels, especially *Clarissa,* devote considerable space to the elaborate exposition of their feelings, often at the expense of plot movement. Both novels also show the heroines' purity and virtue exercising a powerful influence on the feelings of others, and inspiring them to better conduct. Richardson's last novel, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754), concerns a man who is a model of sensitivity and tenderness; a central purpose of the book was to show that such qualities, even if particularly associated with women, were compatible with manliness.

The two other leading novelists of the mid-eighteenth century, Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne, also express approval of important elements of sensibility in their works. Fielding satirizes some parts of Richardson and rejects an ideal of extreme tenderness and delicacy, especially for men. Yet both his heroes and heroines are creatures of strong emotion, whose good actions spring more from instinctive generosity than from reason. Sterne goes even farther in this direction, for his most famous novel, *Tristram Shandy* (1760–67), presents a world of disorder and incoherence in which rational forms of understanding, planning, and communication are ultimately impossible, and the characters' benevolent, though frequently illogical, feelings provide the only possible source of happiness, good actions, and true connection with their fellow creatures. His other novel, *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), helped popularize the term "sentimental," which was recently coined and linked to sensibility. That novel is an almost plotless chronicle of the hero's intense emotional reactions to a variety of mundane experiences, in which the quality of feeling is elevated above every other consideration.

The later decades of the eighteenth century witnessed many more novels of sensibility. A succession of books appeared with heroes and heroines who displayed the most acute feelings toward the sundry events of life, even the most trivial, and who were designed to evoke similar feelings in the reader. Two of the most popular novels of the 1770s were Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* and Goethe's

Sorrows of Young Werther (sensibility was admired throughout Europe, most notably in France, whose sentimental fiction influenced many English writers). The title characters of both these novels are men of such extreme sensitivity that they are unable to cope with the frequently cruel and harsh world around them, and ultimately die from a broken heart. Both men are presented sympathetically, and the extremity of their misfortunes provoked copious tears from their many readers, tears being considered by that point a great mark of virtue. One woman later remembered reading *The Man of Feeling* when she was fourteen and dreading that she would not cry sufficiently "to gain the credit of proper sensibility."[2] Her reaction is not unique: "contemporary letters and memoirs, especially those of women, show a society very ready to weep and tremble, and to take credit for doing so."[3]

By the end of the eighteenth century there was also an increasing reaction against the cult of sensibility. Its extravagant celebrations of the most extreme emotions inevitably provoked dissent, even among those who approved of sensibility in moderation. Both Mackenzie and Goethe, especially the latter, expressed later reservations about what their popular novels had extolled. Others articulated more complete critiques. Samuel Johnson, one of the leading writers of the time and another important influence on Jane Austen, rejected basing morality on feeling on the grounds of human fallibility and the inevitable unreliability of emotion. His objection stemmed partly from traditional Christian doctrines. Although many advocates of sensibility, most notably Samuel Richardson, were devout Christians whose writings contained strong religious elements, central aspects of sensibility clashed with fundamental tenets of orthodox Christianity. Traditional Christian doctrine emphasized the inherent sinfulness of humanity, the importance of controlling our often sinful passions, and the need to rely on divine guidance rather than personal sentiments in determining right from wrong.

"The Triumph of Sentiment": a satire on the vogue for sentimental literature; here a butcher weeps over The Sorrows of Werther, even as his wife disembowels a carcass in the background.
[From Joseph Grego, *Rowlandson the Caricaturist* (London, 1880), Vol. I, p. 210]

[List of Illustrations]

During the 1780s, and even more so the 1790s, a series of novels appeared explicitly denouncing sensibility. In them one or more characters of ardent emotion, often inspired by ideals of sensibility, are led by these ideals or their own feelings into foolish, self-destructive, or even immoral behavior. Sometimes the character ultimately sees the error of his or her ways and reforms, sometimes not. One of these books, Jane West's *A Gossip's Story,* probably exercised some influence on *Sense and Sensibility*. It concerns two sisters, Louisa and Marianne Dudley, who represent, respectively, rational sense and excessive sensibility. Marianne Dudley, like Austen's Marianne Dashwood, is led by that sensibility to bestow her love imprudently, and in her case there is no final redemption; meanwhile, her sensible sister avoids trouble and finds happiness.[4]

Other novels take a mixed position, while still showing the strong influence of the issue. Ann Radcliffe, whose gothic horror novels were bestsellers of the 1790s (and were satirized in *Northanger Abbey),* strives hard to arouse emotions in the reader, including those of sentimental pity, and devotes considerable space to fulsome evocations of the beauties of nature similar to those found in writers who advocate sensibility. But she also delivers a consistent moral message about the need for rational self-control in her heroines as they confront various terrors and trials. The political climate of the

1790s, marked by the fierce reactions to the French Revolution, also shaped debate on these issues. Because novels of sensibility gave primacy to individual standards over social mores, many conservative writers in this period castigated them for allegedly encouraging radicalism. There was no strict political correlation, however; for the leading conservative book of the decade, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* contains strong appeals to sentimental feelings, while many radical writers openly eschewed the idea of sensibility.

This cultural context suggests why Jane Austen would have been stirred in the latter part of the 1790s to begin a novel exploring sensibility. Marianne Dashwood's feelings and ideas exemplify central principles espoused by its advocates, while the miseries she inflicts on herself and others echo those evoked or portrayed by its critics. The years after 1800, when Jane Austen was revising the novel, saw explicit discussion of sensibility fade. But the underlying issues remained, for most of the main elements of the doctrine were replicated in Romanticism, which emerged during these years as the dominant force in much of the art, literature, and thought of the Western world. The final version of the novel reveals an awareness of these new trends by mentioning Sir Walter Scott, whose Romantic narrative poems were the greatest sellers of the age, as one of Marianne's favorite writers, and by satirizing the Romantic taste for the cottage, a new fad among the wealthy in England in the years after 1800. While it is not certain whether Austen would have set out to write a novel criticizing sensibility during this later period, she undoubtedly sensed, with justification, that the issues it raised and the points it made remained highly pertinent.

Jane Austen's interest in exploring the value of sensibility shapes the entire plot of the novel, as well as many of its other features. Most strikingly, it results in the only Austen novel with two heroines. In every other novel one person is the focus; here, though everything is told from Elinor's perspective, Marianne is consistently present and the sisters' respective stories are given equal weight. The novel follows a pattern of regularly switching back and forth, after approximately equal intervals, between each sister. It also provides parallel developments within the two story lines, by having each sister face the loss of the man she loves. Thus the very different reactions of the two demonstrate the relative strengths of sense and sensibility.

In making this comparison the author portrays Elinor's sense more