# SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

## JANE AUSTEN

EDITED BY CLAUDIA L. JOHNSON

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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## Jane Austen

# SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
CONTEXTS
CRITICISM

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*Edited by*

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# Acknowledgments

*Sense and Sensibility* was the first novel by Jane Austen that I read, and for years it was a secret attachment. Reviewing each word has inspired me to declare openly that I can feel no sentiment of approbation inferior to love.

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Norton Critical Editions are teaching texts, and students enrolled in my Spring 2000 graduate class on Austen and Edgeworth—Timothy Aubry, Jasmin Darznik, Marah Gubar, James Moyer, Alexandra Neel, Kimberly Oldenburg, Robin Schore, Natasha Tessone, and Amanda Wilkins—provided me with wonderful advice regarding the kinds of information likely to help diverse students. Julie Park, Paul Kelleher, and Roger Schwartz were exceptionally helpful.

My deepest thanks go to Carol Bemis of W. W. Norton and Company for her patience and assistance, and to Sarah M. Anderson for her uncompromising scholarship and her unstinting encouragement.

# Introduction

*Sense and Sensibility* was Jane Austen's first published novel, and until recently it has been the least appreciated. To the general public, as well as to a good number of literary critics, *Pride and Prejudice* was the model for what a novel by Jane Austen ought to be, and, set against that model, *Sense and Sensibility* came up short. With all the wishfulness and mercy of high comedy, the loss of affluence and status remains for the Bennet women no more than a remote threat, thanks to the improbably fabulous marriages of the eldest daughters. The worthy Dashwood women aren't so lucky, for *Sense and Sensibility* begins with their abrupt fall down the social ladder, and the injustice with which that fall is strongly marked shadows the entire novel. Nor, taking second place to the sister-sister and mother-daughter relationships, is the conventional love plot in *Sense and Sensibility* permitted to be as idealized, much less as freighted with social and ethical significance as it is in *Pride and Prejudice*. No wealthy, handsome, effectual, and (eventually) accomodating equivalent of Darcy here. One of the good guys is painfully shy—well-intentioned to be sure, but idle and rather weak; and if the other, older hero seems more promising as a romantic lead by virtue of being rich, reserved, and brooding, his bouts of rheumatism keep us from getting too carried away. For most of the novel, the men whom the heroines love are offstage, doing the heroines know not what, and when the couples *are* brought together, their repartee is marked not by the combination of wit and passion that proves so thrilling in *Pride and Prejudice*, but by a misunderstandability and at times even a dullness that baffle the heroines themselves. And the double marriage at the end, which customarily augments and multiplies a sense of pleasure, here produces a decidedly underwhelming felicity that is defined solely in negative terms: "among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne," the narrator writes, "let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands" (269).

Clearly, *Sense and Sensibility* is a far cry from the "light & bright & sparkling" work that many—wrongly—assume is quintessentially

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Austenian.[1] Laboring under this uninspired and uninspiring assumption, critics up to the 1970s tended to produce somewhat schematic readings. Rather like Austen's own niece—who, not in the secret of Austen's authorship, came across the novel at the Alton circulating library and exclaimed, "Oh that must be rubbish I am sure from the title"[2]—generations of critics have based their readings of the novel on a misapprehension of the title, and, as if the titular conjunction were (as Margaret Doody has observed) "versus" rather than "and," have held that the purpose of this novel is to depreciate "sensibility" and recommend "sense," rather than to explore their shared vulnerabilities.[3] More recently, the critical fortunes of the novel have improved. As historicist and feminist criticism suggested new and more complex readings of the novel, and as the appearance in 1995 of Ang Lee's feature-length motion picture of it, based on an excellent screenplay by Emma Thompson, showed the general public how gripping, funny, and unsettling it was, *Sense and Sensibility* has for perhaps the first time ever been accorded the dignity it deserves in Austen's canon.

Begun reportedly as an epistolary novel as early as 1795 under the title "Elinor and Marianne," *Sense and Sensibility* has a complex developmental history about which we shall probably never know as much as we wish.[4] In 1797, it was recast as a third-person narrative, and the dating of several allusions proves that Austen revised again, perhaps at the turn of the century, and certainly between 1805 and 1810. In 1811 it was published at her own expense by Thomas Egerton. Like most new authors, Austen was fondly absorbed in preparing it for publication—"I am never too busy to think of S&S," she wrote her sister, "I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child"[5]—and in doing so she was coming of age. *Sense and Sensibility* thus encompasses a large portion of Austen's career, and its roots are in her earliest work. It has several affinities with *Love and Friendship* (1790), for example, one of Austen's most polished juvenile pieces, a raucous and high-spirited satire on sentimental fiction that pokes fun at some of the conventional features of heroic love and sentiment that Marianne

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[1] This is how Austen's description of *Pride and Prejudice* is often quoted. In fact, Austen's description is somewhat more critical, for in full it reads, "too light & bright & sparkling." See *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), February 4, 1813, p. 203. Subsequent references to Le Faye's edition of the *Letters* will include the dates alone.

[2] This story is recounted in William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, revised and enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye (London: British Library, 1989), p. 171.

[3] See Margaret A. Doody's splendid Introduction to *Sense and Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1990), especially pp. xiii–xx and xxxiii–xxxviii.

[4] For a detailed discussion of the probable composition of *Sense and Sensibility*, see B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary MSS* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), pp. 55–57.

[5] Letter to Cassandra, April 25, 1811.

Dashwood cherishes, such as love at first sight, love-madness, and a somewhat shortsighted (if not hollow) contempt for worldly riches. In the novel's several discussions of money, and even more forcibly in places like volume I, chapter 9—where Marianne's highfalutin faith in the joys of nature is followed fast by a driving rain set full in her face—we can discern the youthful Austen's penchant for undercutting her heroine's adherence to the heroic codes of sensibility.

But while *Sense and Sensibility* is indeed a youthful work, it is not a juvenile one, and to read it as a mockery of sentiment à la *Love and Friendship* would be to misread both works. What *Sense and Sensibility* shares with the very early work is the irreverence, the exuberance, and at times even the delicious blatancy of its satire—delicacy, nuance, and irony, after all, are the qualities readers are more likely to associate with Austen than vigor and excess, and some of the revisions Austen introduced in the second edition suggest an attempt to rein in these qualities. The mordant description of the poverty of the Middletons' domestic life—"Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured her children; and these were their only resources" (26)—is clearly akin to the devastating élan of Austen's earlier understatement, "Our neighborhood was small, for it consisted only of your mother."[6] The differences are equally striking, however. As Austen grew up and turned from parody—which exposes the valences of literary forms—to social criticism—which exposes the interests of social forms—the stakes get higher, and the zany shades into the sardonic. We can afford first to enjoy and then to forget Austen's description of Miss Simpson—who "was pleasing in her person, in her manners, and in her disposition; an unbounded ambition was her only fault"[7]—because her ruthlessness is frankly unreal. But the comparable trenchancy of her characterization of John Dashwood—"He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold-hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed" (7)—is more unnerving because we're not in the world of parody any longer, but in a far more referential work where John Dashwood does harm.

Set against the artistry Austen achieved when she was hitting her stride—say in *Emma*, where the narrative voice is almost completely effaced—*Sense and Sensibility* seems to give us exceptionally generous access to authorial voice. In the narrator's remarks on ill-behaved children and the fatuity of their indulgent parents, for ex-

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6. *Love and Friendship*, Letter 4th in *Catharine and Other Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Doody (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1993), p. 77.
7. "Jack and Alice," in *Catharine and Other Writings*, p. 11.

ample, we have the impression that Austen is inviting us into her own mind, and that hers is a mind impatient with the vapid and the vulgar, as opinionated and as superior to the commonplace as Marianne's (though more bemused than pained by it, perhaps), a mind that looks upon the worldlings around her in much the same way as Elinor looks upon Robert Ferrars's "sterling insignificance" (156). When we read that the bland and excruciatingly proper Lady Middleton does not like Elinor and Marianne Dashwood because they "were fond of reading"—and on these grounds, "she fancied them satirical: perhaps without exactly knowing what it was to be satirical; but that did not signify. It was censure in common use, and easily given" (174)—we can be forgiven for wondering whether at least some of her family and acquaintance felt the same way about Austen herself. Perhaps implicated in the same process of social climbing as Lady Middleton, Austen's earliest biographers—her brother, and then her nephew—were eager to assure the public that Austen was uniformly sweet and denied the obvious fact that her work is patently, though not exclusively, "satirical." The same qualities of intelligence, penetration, and judgment and the same capacities for sarcasm and ridicule that endear the Dashwood sisters to us are evident in the narrator of *Sense and Sensibility* as well.

The satire that drives *Sense and Sensibility* emerges from the social criticism of the 1790s, when the novel was first drafted and revised. Like characters in the political fiction of the time, characters here are conscious of how ideology—an only apparently natural system of priorities, practices, and attitudes—conditions not only our social behavior, but also our means and methods of acquiring knowledge (or what we take for knowledge) about each other, and the novel exposes how dominant ideology privileges—that is, gives more authority, standing, money, status to—the greedy, mean-spirited, and pedestrian. Whereas didactic, conservative novels in the 1790s teach young women the social codes they must adopt if they are to live as good Christians and as good wives and daughters, integrated into their communities, this novel makes those codes and those communities the subject of its interrogation. What kinds of public status and what sorts of behavior give a man or woman credibility? What is important to know, what kinds of "evidence" do we consult when we form judgments about people? Do we consider their tastes, their status in the neighborhood, the source of their income, the extent of their property, their words, their conduct, their hunting dogs?

The question is not academic, for the world as Elinor and Marianne encounter it is more opaque than either of them has any reason to suspect, and collective judgments are as fallible as private ones, for Edward and Willoughby both, as it turns out, have secrets. Like the terms "pride" and "prejudice," the titular abstractions of "sense" and "sensibility" can start a conversation about the novel, but not finish one, for the novel highlights not an opposition between reason and feeling (or between the inevitable binaries of public and private, disciplined and undisciplined, good and bad that have all too predictably followed from them). Rather the novel is organized around epistemological problems—problems of knowing and assenting—that baffle Elinor and Marianne equally. The characters sometimes formulate this problem explicitly. When Elinor argues with her mother about Willoughby's sudden departure and the possible ill it forebodes for Marianne, Mrs. Dashwood, asks indignantly, "Are no probabilities to be accepted, merely because they are not certainties?" (59). Terms like "doubt," "belief," conjecture," "certainty," and "probability" recur on every page, and characters are always making the wrong inferences. Accepting probabilities as certainties can be a dangerous business, and what is at stake finally is not propriety, but something more like survival. Marianne believes the world and people in it are transparent, and if Willoughby encourages her belief in him, that very belief almost makes him believe in himself as well. And these beliefs are shared: all onlookers know or think they know the honor of his intentions, and count on that knowledge as certain. By contrast, Elinor hesitates to equate hope and knowledge; she wants formal proof—and not surprisingly so, in a novel that opens with a solemn but private, oral promise that a man who passes for respectable in the world never keeps—and her skepticism is derived not from an allegiance to doctrines of propriety, but from a need to protect herself from wishing, dreaming about, and finally depending upon what may never be. But one of the deepest ironies of the novel is that, with the prominent exception of her doctrine about second attachments, most of Marianne's convictions—after seeming silly, credulous, naive—are vindicated. She has been right to think that Edward behaves inappropriately for a suitor, right to believe that Willoughby really loves her, and right to infer that he did not write that cruel letter. And, on her side, Elinor's skepticism has not saved her from erroneous conjectures, nor has her self-control preserved her from heartbreaking dependency. *Sense and Sensibility* is the only novel Austen wrote in which the heroine almost dies. In a world driven by wealth and status, where even gentlemen of wealth and status do not consider themselves independent or free, where people often do not honor their trusts, what almost kills Marianne is the intensity—even the obsessiveness—of her desire for, belief in, and dependency on Willoughby, a sort of raw and helpless need that the cagier, almost hypercautious Elinor resists.

This is a dark and disenchanted novel that exposes how those sacred and supposedly benevolizing institutions of order—property, marriage, and family—can enforce avarice, selfishness, and mediocrity. If it is sometimes scathing in its exposure of calculation and triteness, it is sometimes wonderfully tolerant as well, as a character like Mrs. Jennings (first dismissed as vulgar by Marianne and by Elinor as well) ultimately surprises us by a warmth and genuineness which, like so much else in the novel, we could not have predicted. Once the force of *Sense and Sensibility* is acknowledged, Austen's canon looks entirely different. The sobriety of *Mansfield Park* no longer seems odd. The venturesomeness of *Persuasion*, with its disdain of prudence and its impatience with the world of status-seeking and manor houses, will look more like a continuation rather than a reversal. And Austen's most popular novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, will seem exceptional among the novels in the harmony and felicity it accomplishes. *Sense and Sensibility* promises no such concord. It is only by recourse to incalculable acts of chance that Austen gets her heroines happily married at last, and that happiness is marked by a refusal of moral compromises. Marianne changes her opinions about second attachments, but she is never obliged to surrender to the "commonplace," and in permitting her to inhabit a world where her sensitivity will be protected rather than harmed, *Sense and Sensibility* grants her the highest happiness it can imagine.

Because *Sense and Sensibility* is so richly implicated in the literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the opportunity to select backgrounds is rewarding as well as risky, and the very wealth of secondary material can overwhelm the novel itself. In selecting the background texts, I have attempted to broaden as well as to complicate the inevitable subject of sensibility, and to contextualize issues such as sense, judgment, self-control, family, inheritance, second attachments, and characterization. Space restrictions prevented the inclusion of excerpts from Austen's *Love and Friendship*, Jane West's *A Gossip's Story*, Mary Brunton's *Self-Control*, to say nothing of works by William Gilpin. It is hoped that the extensive selection of critical essays can compensate for these lacunae. *Sense and Sensibility* has been well-served by recent criticism, which has uncovered social and political contexts, re-examined Austen's relations to her publishers and to her own writing, and de-centered the titular terms in favor of issues such as plotting, desire, and inwardness. In order to include as many selections as possible, I have kept the critical essays fairly brief. The footnotes to these essays have been edited and renumbered where necessary. A bibliography is provided at the end of this volume to point interested readers toward material that regrettably could not be included here and to supplement the sometimes abbreviated bibliographical material mentioned in the critical essays.

## The Text of *Sense and Sensibility*

Jane Austen's autograph manuscript of *Sense and Sensibility* is not extant. The first edition of *Sense and Sensibility* (hereafter called *A*) was published in November 1811 by Thomas Egerton at Austen's expense. After it sold out, a second edition (hereafter called *B*) was printed in November 1813, at Egerton's suggestion. *B* corrects as well as revises *A*, and because it incorporates Austen's latest revisions, it has been the basis of virtually all editions of *Sense and Sensibility*. It is adopted here as well.[8] Nevertheless, *B* introduces errors of its own, and while there is nothing uncommon in this, these errors, along with those *A* and *B* share, have prompted the speculation that *B* was printed from a copy of *A* that Austen corrected by hand and was not corrected by her later in page proof as well.[9] In a letter dated April 25, 1811, Austen does mention correcting proofs of *A*; and though she announces the plan to print a second edition in a letter of September 25, 1813, she does not mention correcting proofs for it.[1] Clearly, *A* is the text to consult where *B* errs.

With only two versions to collate, establishing the text of *Sense and Sensibility* is straightforward. Still, *Sense and Sensibility* shares with *Mansfield Park* the distinction of being one of the two novels Austen revised for a second edition, and because Austen is a writer whom scholars and students read very closely, it is worth describing the differences between *A* and *B* in some detail. While the vast majority of the differences between *A* and *B* consist of variations and errors that Austen described in another context quaintly and dismissively as "Typical,"[2] some are substantive. *Sense and Sensibility* was Austen's first published novel, after all, and Austen's satisfaction was probably the keener given her previous lack of success in publishing early versions of *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prej-*

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[8] One exception is the Penguin edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, edited by Ros Ballaster with the textual advice of Claire Lamont, published in 1995, which is based on A. Although it is certainly intriguing and valuable to be able to see Austen's earlier version in full, it is hard to imagine a text critical reason for preferring *A* over *B* given the significant revisions Austen made in the second edition.

[9] See for example James Kinsley's "Note on the Text" in the Oxford World Classics edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, first published in 1980, p. xlvii.

[1] For a complete discussion of the circumstances surrounding the publication of the first and second editions of *Sense and Sensibility*, see Jan Fergus's *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp. 129–36, 141, excerpted below on p. 325.

[2] January 29, 1813.

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*udice*. Tracking Austen's revisions can help us think about how she may have read and responded to seeing her work in print for the first time.

The changes of most interest to literature students are those that can be attributed to Austen herself. Austen revised *A* in several contained but significant respects. In two separate places—both occurring in the first volume—she cuts whole sentences and in the process mollifies the pointedness of her satire, a quality that typifies her early work. Further, whereas most of the substantive changes to *Mansfield Park* are confined to one chapter in the third volume, in each of the three volumes of *Sense and Sensibility*, she makes a number of smaller revisions, mostly in the form of one-word changes or deletions here and there in the interests of precision, emphasis, and control (e.g., replacing *division of* with *charge on, scarcely* with *certainly not, Mr. Edward Ferrars* with *Mr. Ferrars*). At the very outset of the sixth chapter of volume III, she goes so far as to tidy an entire clause. R. W. Chapman has asserted that the "changes" to *Sense and Sensibility* "made by the author" are "less interesting" than the changes she made to *Mansfield Park*,[3] but I cannot agree. In the later novel, Austen's revisions concentrate mostly on the accuracy of nautical and marine terminology. By contrast, the revisions to *Sense and Sensibility* afford us a glimpse of more general aspects of Austen's compositional process, and cumulatively they suggest how and where she considered exactitude, modulation, and the control of suspense important. In all instances where authorial revision is at stake, the present text will print *B* and note the readings from *A*.

Sometimes the differences between *A* and *B* are equivocal, however, consisting either of minor authorial alterations or of printer's interventions that produce intelligible readings (e.g., replacing *affections* with *affection; suspicion of its nature* with *suspicion; their* with *her; round to her* with *round her*). Such differences must be eyed carefully. Where cases in *B* can almost certainly be attributed to the inadvertent errors introduced when the text was set, *A* will be preferred; in cases where Austen may be fine-tuning her prose, particularly with respect to maintaining parallel structure, *B* will stand. Equivocal variants of these kinds will be noted.

A further class of equivocal differences consists of the addition or deletion of particles (e.g., *to persuade* for *persuade*), conjunctions introducing relative clauses (e.g., *told him* for *told him that*), articles (e.g., *time of the year* for *time of year*), and prepositions (e.g., *give* for *give to*). In all probability, printers are responsible for such

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3. "Introductory Note to *Sense and Sensibility*" in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1933) I: xiv.

changes, in *A* and *B* alike, but because authorial revision cannot be ruled out, *B* will be followed and the reading from *A* will be noted.

Most of the minor differences between *A* and *B* are corrections of outright printing errors in *A*. *B* corrects *A*'s numerous slips regarding plural possessives, misplaced or missing quotation marks, failures to indent for dialogue, as well as its occasionally wrong pronouns and omitted words or letters. In all such instances where *B* is clearly correcting *A*, *B* will be followed without note.

As stated above, in the process of resetting the text, *B* introduces errors of its own, such as misspellings (e.g., *sooth* for *soothe, Davis* for *Davies*), wrong pronouns (e.g., *he* for *her, her* for *their*), dropped letters and spaces (e.g., *ever* for *every, unpremidated* for *unpremeditated, Thset* for *This set*), missed or misplaced quotation marks or apostrophes for plural possessives, and failures to indent for dialogue. I will adopt *A* silently to correct clear errors in *B*.

In several places, errors in *A* have been carried over into *B*, unnoticed and uncorrected by Austen as well as by the printers of *B*. Where *A* and *B* agree in blatant error—regarding, for example, the misnumbering of volume I, chapter 22, or the mishandling of quotation marks and indentations—I correct silently. In the single instance where the correction of both *A* and *B* involves inserting a word, I supply a note.

It is worth noting that *A* and *B* differ on matters of spelling and punctuation. Like most novelists of the time, Austen left such matters to the printers, as printers' manuals advised, on the grounds that printers have by "constant practice" acquired "a uniform mode of punctuation."[4] Since this edition is for students of novels, rather than for students of early-nineteenth-century printing, I will not note punctuation differences between *A* and *B* unless they impinge on sense. Most of these differences consist of variations in the use of a dash after an endstop (e.g., .— or ;—); in the treatment of commas, semicolons, and colons; and in the printing of compound words (e.g., *good breeding/good-breeding, piano forté/piano-forté/pianoforté, every body/everybody*). Nor will I note or regularize spelling variants between and within volumes of *A* and *B* (e.g., *stile/style, inquiry/enquiry, entreat/intreat*), or differences regarding capitalization (e.g., *Gentleman/gentleman, Park/park*). Finally, in resetting the text for the Norton Critical Edition, I have retained the hyphens in compound words that fall at linebreaks in *B* in cases where such words are usually hyphenated elsewhere in *B* (e.g., *head-ache; house-keeping*). Although it is safe to say that *B* hyphenates compound words somewhat more heavily than *A*, the practice of typesetters in both texts does not appear to be systematic or consistent. But because eliminating hyphens at linebreaks would introduce an entire class of emendations that would be invisible to readers, I have elected not to do so.

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[4] C. Stower, *The Printer's Grammar; or, Introduction to the Art of Printing* (London, 1808), p. 80. Stower's claim notwithstanding, pointing and spelling are less than uniform even within volumes set by the same printer.

Until quite recently, the undisputed authority on the texts of Austen's novels was R. W. Chapman, whose *The Novels of Jane Austen* first appeared in 1923, revised slightly by Mary Lascelles in subsequent editions. Chapman's edition was the first full-scale scholarly edition not only of Austen's novels, but of any set of novels in English, and it deserves its status as a landmark. But although Chapman's editorial principles are sound, and his judgments always worth consideration, some of his editorial decisions seem questionable. It is hoped that the editorial style of the present edition is more conservative and less prone to overcorrection.

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# SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

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