

Book Review

“Sense and Sensibility” by Jane Austen

by [Student's Name]

Foundation Course – Course

Tutor: [Tutor's Name]

Educational Institution

Department

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Jane Austen completed her “Sense and Sensibility” in 1811, and it was her first published book. In it, she has opened the themes due to which she would become well known around the world. When she first published “Sense and Sensibility”, she did so anonymously, as nobody knew the young writer at that time. Moreover, when she wrote her book, the novels were a new genre and as a woman writer, she was pioneering a path in the genre of romantic novels. She was a clergyman’s daughter in England, and grew up in a respectable middle class home. Her themes were confined to the social environment even though she lived during the Napoleonic Wars and the industrial revolution. Anyone reading this book and expecting these aspects to glimpse, will be disappointed. The writer's focus is extremely narrow, confined to the relationships and marriages of her characters.

Austen wrote this book under another title, as she did with “Pride and Prejudice”. The first title of what has later become known as “Sense and Sensibility” was “Elinor and Marianne”. The initial title was aimed at reflecting the main characters: Elinor who was responsible and sensible, and her sister Marianne, who had the emotional side of her personality prevail, and, therefore, identified as sensibility. This sets the tone of the book. It is the age-old dichotomy, passion versus logic in human relationships. Later, Austin rewrote it into a third person narrative and published it with the title we know today.

Obviously, the writer has been influenced by the era she lived in, which was Romanticism in literature and in arts. Austin's peers were William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott, so she had been writing at the beginning of the Romanticism in literature. It is a charming novel, written with satire and humor, concerning the coming age of an English young women in the that-day English society. The society which has been built on propriety, manners, and solid common sense. The main characters are young women without a father, who, in that era, has been considered to be the center and the 3 figurehead of the family. This leads the young women to search for different paths in their lives, and causes them to make mistakes. However, the harsh reality of life and the pressure of society pull them straight.

Austen introduces the issue of passion into this calm, sensible world. Thus, one of the main characters, Elinor says, "Sense will always have attractions for me." (Austen 2001, p. 69). She had passions, but had learned to control (or suppress them depending on your point of view). She had become a conformist to society's demands. When her father, Henry Dashwood, died and the family were impoverished, sensible Elinor ensures they live within their new restrictions. In Chapter 37 we read, "Elinor was to be the comforter of others in her own distresses, no less than in theirs..." (Austen 2001, p. 105). Elinor constantly suppresses her emotions as she lives by social conventions and personal responsibilities. She loves Edward, but does not expect him to purse her hand in marriage.

Marianne the passionate young woman learns from her impassioned pursuit of Willoughby. After her unfortunate experience with him, she has a match with Colonel Brandon. Austen comments, "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" (Austen 2001, p. 241).

As the book unfolds, the clear differences of these two women graphically demonstrate the difference between the sense and passion. They both find that their extreme positions need tempering. In the end, they discover life involves both common sense and passion. If you want an enjoyable, thought provoking and humorous insight into respectable middle class English society in the 1800's you will enjoy this book.

4 References Austen, J. 2001, Sense and Sensibilitie. San Val Publishing, Malden, MA.