

FEMALE SUBVERSIVENESS IN *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*: AN ANALYSIS OF
THE CHARACTER MARIANNE DASHWOOD

*SUBVERSÃO FEMININA EM SENSE E SENSIBILITY: UMA ANÁLISE DA
PERSONAGEM MARIANNE DASHWOOD*

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ABSTRACT: This work aims at analysing the behaviour of the character Marianne Dashwood in the novel *Sense and Sensibility*, by Jane Austen, demonstrating that her sentimental conduct is a means of protest against the behaviour expected from women in nineteenth-century England. Based on Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, this article explores the way Austen's character contributes to a critical and feminist view of women's role in Regent society.

Keywords: Jane Austen; feminism; sensibility.

RESUMO: Este trabalho objetiva analisar o comportamento da personagem Marianne Dashwood no romance *Razão e Sensibilidade*, de Jane Austen, mostrando que sua conduta sentimental é uma forma de protesto contra o comportamento esperado das mulheres na Inglaterra do século dezanove. Com base em *Theory of Moral Sentiments* de Adam Smith e *A vindication of the Rights of Woman* de Mary Wollstonecraft, este artigo a forma como a personagem de Austen contribui para uma visão crítica e feminista do papel das mulheres na sociedade Regente.

Palavras-chave: Jane Austen; feminismo, sensibilidade.

The world has faced significant historical changes that have transformed our society considerably, especially since the Industrial Revolution, considered by Eric J. Hobsbawm (2013) as the major turning point of this period, causing a massive population growth and great development in scientific knowledge.

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What is commonly thought of women's role in the patriarchal society of that time is that they were destined to play a supporting role, always shadowed by the male figures. However, according to Geneviève Fraisse & Michelle Perrot,

it would nevertheless be wrong to think that time was only the period of a long domination, an absolute submission of women. In fact, this century [19th] marks the birth of feminism, an emblematic word that means both major structural changes (wage labour, autonomy of the civil subject, the right to education) as the collective emergence of women in politics². (FRAISSE & PERROT, 1991, p.9)

It is therefore the time when women began to reflect upon their own condition and to look for ways to express their dissatisfaction, either consciously or unconsciously.

It was in the beginning of that century that the first works of the British writer Jane Austen were published. If one thinks about the hard task of being a woman in the start of the 19th century, it is nothing compared to the even tougher undertaking of being a female writer. Virginia Woolf, a modernist writer and an advocate of feminist causes, wrote in her essay *A Room of One's Own* about the difficulties of the female writer to find her place in the history of literature, and acknowledged the achievements of 19th-century female writers like Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Brontë sisters.

According to Woolf (2014), women lacked the proper atmosphere to the act of writing, which was possible to men but denied to them: an independent and private room where she could write without being interrupted, a fair amount of money that would allow her to buy something more than clothes, and, surely, the liberty to come and go in search of new experiences that were worth being told. "Such material difficulties were formidable; but much worse were the immaterial. "The indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to

² My translation.

bear was in her case not indifference but hostility" (WOOLF, 2014, p. 78). Men laughed at women's attempts to write, for they strongly believed that was a manly task, not compatible with the female intellectual inferiority. However, this hostile scenario did not entirely prevent great names of the literature written by women from arising, Jane Austen amongst them.

1. *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*

Sense and Sensibility was originally published in October, 1811. This was the earliest book by Austen to be published, even though it was not the first to be written by the author. Initially, *Sense and Sensibility* had been thought as an epistolary novel, a very common genre in the previous century, however already in decline since the beginning of the 19th. Austen's original idea was to reveal the plot through letters written by the Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne. Nevertheless, this plan was discarded by the author, and the book was rewritten as a novel, the way we know it today. In fact, the novel was the most popular literary genre among women at that time. According to Virginia Woolf (2014), this is due to the fact that

all the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion. Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room. People's feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eyes. Therefore, when the middle-class woman took to writing, she naturally wrote novels. (WOOLF, 2014, p. 98)

Jane Austen was no exception.

Sense and Sensibility tells the story of the women of the Dashwood family, who, because of the death of the family patriarch, were forced to resign their land and possessions to John Dashwood, the only son of Mr. Dashwood's first marriage. The women were thus obliged to change their residence and to drastically limit their

spending. The story focuses on the lives of Elinor, the elder sister, and Marianne, the middle one, whilst they adapt to a new way of life, discover love and suffer the restrictions imposed on the female gender by the society in which they lived.

Although this book was written over two hundred years ago, the 21st century readers still connect to the story of the Dashwood sisters. A few years back, scholars have re-discovered Austen's work and realized that, beyond the superficial novel of manners, the books of the British writer have a depth of meaning, irony and social criticism. In her essay *Austen Cults and Cultures* (2011), Claudia L. Johnson explains that this enthusiasm for Jane Austen and for the details regarding her character broke out during the last two decades of the 19th century. According to Johnson (2011), up to the beginning of the 20th century, Austen's works were considered a simple representation of the manners and customs of the English bourgeois class from the late-18th and early-19th centuries. It was with the publication of the essay *Regulated Hatred*, written by Professor D. W. Harding in 1940, that the criticism regarding Jane Austen changed its path.

Harding's depiction of Austen as a subversive opponent of dominant values proved helpful to the next generation of academics, especially feminists, who also considered Austen at odds with dominant values, and to all readers who took candidly non-moralistic and non-moralizing pleasure in her sarcasm (JOHNSON, 2011, p. 240).

As soon as this deeper layer is discovered, Jane Austen's production becomes even more fascinating, giving rise to multiple interpretations.

Today Austen is considered one of the great names of English Literature. Nevertheless, it was not without difficulties that she entered the traditional literary canon, so marked by the massive presence of male writers. According to Pam Morris (2000), the tendency to regard women writers as *special cases* is the consequence of the "perception of a heroic tradition of literature composed entirely of a succession of

great fathers and great sons. There are no mothers or daughters within the dynasty of the literary canon as constructed by male critics" (MORRIS, 2000, p. 47). Therefore, the literature written by women as it is seen today is without precedents.

In view of this "rediscovery" of Austen's writings, the present paper proposes a critical analysis of Marianne Dashwood's character in the already known story by Jane Austen. Through a new perspective, based on feminist, philosophical and literary theories, this article aims to propose, through an examination of Marianne's behaviour, that she is a woman that does not conform to the role destined to the female gender in the society in which she takes part, illustrating how she exteriorizes her discontent through an excessive and ironic sensibility.

2. STATE OF ART

Much has been written about feminist traces in Jane Austen's work, however *Sense and Sensibility* is not much prioritised by scholars in the field. When it is, the character Marianne Dashwood is usually overshadowed by her sister Elinor, considered by many the protagonist of the story.

In her work *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (1997), Margareth Kirkham dedicates a short chapter, only two pages long, to the novel *Sense and Sensibility*. She explains the dichotomy *schema* between Reason and Sensibility, chosen by Jane Austen to represent the two sisters. Elinor characterizes "female good sense and prudence" (p. 86), while Marianne is "led into error and difficulty by impulsiveness and excesses of feeling and conduct" (Ibid). Nonetheless, the author does not consider Marianne's behaviour as a non-conforming and feminist attitude.

Other feminist analyses of Austen's works have already been made. One of these which takes into consideration the Dashwood sisters' story is the essay *Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility*, written by Thomas Keymer (2011). The author points

out the incongruity of behaviour between the two Dashwood sisters, stating that "it is certainly easy to detect a pattern in which Marianne's extravagant demonstrations of feeling are unfavourably contrasted with Elinor's self-command and commitment to propriety" (p. 33). Keymer also regards Marianne's excesses of sensibility as a demonstration of her dissatisfaction towards society.

By contrast, Marianne's habit of causing stirs and making scenes, while at one level a mark of culpable self-absorption, also works to disrupt the serenity of social mechanisms that empower rank and wealth at the expense of both sisters. In this sense, histrionics are her only available means of registering protest or fighting back (KEYMER, 2011, p. 36).

Keymer asserts that Marianne's behaviour is a protest to the rules of the society, although he does not link it to a feminist attitude of the character. In my view, this protest-like behaviour is the way Marianne finds of exteriorizing her beliefs, which can be considered feminist as I will argue in the analytical part of this article.

3. THEORETICAL BASIS

It is perceptible in Marianne an on-purpose breaking with the standard female behaviour of her time. In order to better understand her attitude, and how it influences her development as an independent and active woman, the text *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, written by Adam Smith and published for the first time in 1759, will be used as a theoretical basis for the literary analysis of Austen's character.

In this work, Smith explains five main principles of his theory. The first one is the concept of *sympathy* and how it affects human relations. According to him,

pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever. (SMITH, 1790, p. 06)

In other words, sympathy is the feeling that overwhelms us when we see others going through experiences of happiness, misery, or pain, and we put ourselves in their skin. Smith mentions examples that are clarifying: for instance, when we see someone who is about to take a stroke in the arm or in the leg, we tend to feel the same anxiety, and once the stroke is received, we seem to feel the same pain; or when we see an artist balancing on a tightrope, we recoil just as if we were on the tightrope ourselves. Smith states that "in every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the by-stander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer" (SMITH, 1790, p. 06). As it may be inferred from Smith's theory, it is inherent to human nature.

The second principle postulated by Smith is the pleasure that comes from mutual sympathy. "Nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary" (SMITH, 1790, p. 9). According to his romantic view, the human being feels the need of this compassion, and of the sense of security that it provides.

The next principle refers to the relation between propriety and affections. If a particular passion is in line with the emotions of the spectator, or society as a whole, it is considered fair and appropriate. However, if the opposite happens, society judges the affections of the individual unfit and non-justifiable. According to Smith, "in the suitableness or unsuitableness, in the proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it, consists the propriety or impropriety, the decency or ungracefulness of the consequent action" (SMITH, 1790, p. 13)). And from this decision regarding the merit or demerit of the behaviour in question, a reward or punishment is resulted.

As fourth principle, Smith reflects on the amiable and respectable virtues. As amiable virtues, he considers "the virtues of candid condescension and indulgent

humanity" (SMITH, 1790, p. 18), and the respectable virtues are "the virtues of self-denial, of self-government, of that command of the passions which subjects all the movements of our nature to what our own dignity and honour, and the propriety of our own conduct require" (Ibid). Based on these virtues a human being is considered honourable and his conduct worthy and proper.

Finally, Adam Smith discusses the various passions and their degrees of compatibility with convenience. He considers the passions that arise from the body the ones originated from imagination, the unsocial, social and selfish passions.

According to Susan Manning (2004), "the novel [*Sense and Sensibility*] plays out the implications of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* [by Smith]: as a condition where emotions exceed words" (MANNING, 2004, p. 85), not just in relation to Marianne Dashwood, but also to other characters. Elinor, Marianne's sister, is, according to Manning (Ibid), a better Smithian than many economists and philosophers. She states that "Smith's *Theory* contained insecurities that were exactly suited to the kinds of inquiry explored in Austen's fiction" (Ibid). Those kinds of enquiry will be investigated in the analysis of the character in this article.

Moreover, it is perceptible in Marianne, as a justification for her lack of virtue, a purposeful subversiveness of behaviour, as a means of protesting to the role reserved for women in the beginning of the 19th century. For a better understanding of the women's claims of this period, the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792, was also taken as theoretical basis.

Mary Wollstonecraft is considered the first feminist and her treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a feminist declaration of independence. Wollstonecraft begins her work discussing the rights of the human race as a whole: men and women. According to her, the rights and duties of the human race can be summarised in three words: reason, virtue, and knowledge. It is the degree of each one

of these qualities that every person possesses that regulate the laws and harmonize society.

The author criticizes the division of power in the society of her time, especially its unreasonable detention by kings and noblemen. According to her, "all power inebriates weak men; and its abuse proves that the more equality there is established among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society" (2004, p. 24). According to this statement, every subordination is incompatible with freedom.

From this first reflection, Wollstonecraft further investigates the subordination of women. They were taught since an early age to obey the male sex in order to guarantee their protection. From birth, women's beliefs about their own role in society were imbued with prejudice. "The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 28). According to Wollstonecraft, the way to break these barriers is through education. The best kind of instruction, in her opinion, is "such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 31). It is through education that the individual becomes independent. However, at that time, women still had little (or none at all) access to education.

According to the author, the woman is left in ignorance on purpose, for thus she will always be obedient. "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 34-35).

Deprived of education, women were forced to devote their time to superfluous pastimes and to find a good match for marriage. In one of Wollstonecraft's many questionings, she ponders that

women ought to endeavour to purify their heart; but can they do so when their uncultivated understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for employment and amusement, when no noble pursuit sets them above the little vanities of the day, or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every passing breeze has power? To gain the affections of a virtuous man is affectation necessary? (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004. p. 40)

She also deliberates about the lack of ambition of women of her time, who spent their lives dreaming, not exercising their mind or body instead of seeking reasonable pleasures and becoming notable when practicing virtues that honour humanity.

This lack of ambition and extreme concern with frivolous pleasures are, according to Wollstonecraft, reasons for the degradation of the women's status. "Pleasure is the business of woman's life, according to the present modification of society, and while it continues to be so, little can be expected from such beings" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 72). Women, according to the author, did not have, at that time, enough virtue to fight for their freedom.

Finally, Mary Wollstonecraft discusses women's preoccupation in maintaining a good reputation in the society they lived. For her, this fear is like poison, through which morality deteriorates substance. "Women acquire, from a supposed necessity [of having a good reputation] an [...] artificial mode of behaviour" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 164). This behaviour is the result of the false morality of the time, which prevented women from taking heroic and innovative attitudes. There were few women who had the courage to face that intimidating society; Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen were amongst them.

Based on these works by Adam Smith and Mary Wollstonecraft, the behaviour of the character Marianne Dashwood will be analysed. She was a woman who did not hesitate to externalize her feelings even if that lack of decorum was condemned by the conservative society of the early 19th century.

4. ANALYSIS

Marianne is the Dashwood sister who represents Sensibility in the opposition presented in the book title. Her older sister, Elinor, is the personification of Reason. According to Thomas Keymer (2011), "it is certainly easy to detect a pattern in which Marianne's extravagant demonstrations of feeling are unfavourably contrasted with Elinor's self-command and commitment to propriety" (KEYMER, 2011, p. 33). While Elinor "possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 4), Marianne was "sensible and clever, but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation" (p. 5). The fact is not that Elinor was not capable of feeling, quite the contrary, 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" (p. 4-5). This is the main difference: both sisters were capable of love, but Marianne had no control over her emotions.

Based on Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Marianne's attitude does not correspond to the emotions of her spectators, the other characters in the novel, and, therefore, is considered improper. Her sensibility is considered 'excessive' by Elinor.

In chapter 5, *Of the amiable and respectable virtues*, Adam Smith delineates what proper behaviour is. "What noble propriety and grace do we feel in the conduct of those who, in their own case, exert that recollection and self-command which

constitute the dignity of every passion, and which bring it down to what others can enter into" (SMITH, 1790, p. 19). In other words, Elinor is the embodiment of Smith's definition of respectable conduct. Marianne, on the other hand, is the representation of the opposite. Smith (Ibid) states that "we are disgusted with that clamorous grief, which, without any delicacy, calls upon our compassion with sighs and tears and importunate lamentations". Society feels disgusted by Marianne's excessive sensibility.

Furthermore, Marianne is, in opposition to her elder sister, a lover of nature and the life outdoors, characteristics which are compatible with her free and wild spirit. Conversely, Elinor prefers the security of the inside of her house, preference which reflects her moderate and diffident style.

The comparison of the male ideals of Marianne and Elinor also points to the fundamental difference between the sisters. While Willoughby, Marianne's favourite, is charming, attractive, mysterious and gallant, features which attracted Marianne's bold essence, Edward Ferrars did not have

any peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing. He was too diffident to do justice to himself; but when his natural shyness was overcome, his behaviour gave every indication of an open, affectionate heart. His understanding was good, and his education had given it solid improvement (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 13).

Such are the characteristics which attracted Elinor's spirit, peaceful and straightforward, but which did not draw Marianne's attention.

The same concern with which Elinor judges what is sensible and proper is also noticed in social events, such as the cordiality in ordinary conversations. If the situation required it, Elinor was ready to use strategies, as the use of commonplace lies, to maintain civility. Marianne, however, did not have the same control over her emotions. "It was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the

occasion; and upon Elinor, therefore, the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it always fell" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 118). Elinor camouflages her feelings with great composure, even in the hardest moments. For Marianne, such self-control would be unthinkable, against her own essence.

Throughout the whole novel, the way of thinking and acting towards women of the society in which Marianne lives is noticeable. Marriage was seen as the main objective in the life of a woman from that time, something encouraged to girls as young as seventeen years old, like Marianne. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (2004), discusses this essential goal in the lives of women from the 18th century and condemns it, stating that women would never be able to purify their hearts if they remained entirely dependent on the search of a man's affection. According to Wollstonecraft, "the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practicing various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 40). Women, in accordance with Wollstonecraft, should go beyond the search of a husband, and exercise her mind and body, acquiring new knowledge. As she wrote, "strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience" (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 34).

However, this is not the predominant belief in the society depicted in *Sense and Sensibility*. In this community, a good marriage was still seen as the major achievement in a woman's life. For instance, Mrs. Jennings, the rich widow, did not have a better pastime than planning weddings to all young people of her acquaintance. Since the beginning, she saw in the union of Colonel Brandon and Marianne a great match. "She was perfectly convinced of it. It would be an excellent match, for *he* was rich and *she* was handsome" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 34). The best characteristic that a woman could possess was beauty, while the man was supposed to be rich and able to offer a life of comfort and abundance to his wife.

It is not every character that shares this belief towards women. Marianne is a young lady who, little by little, starts to realize the absurdity of this distinction of roles and to condemn the way women were seen by the society. When talking to Sir John Middleton about young Willoughby, she shows a certain interest for the gentleman. Sir John teases her, saying she would "set her cap at him". Marianne promptly reacts:

That is an expression, Sir John [...] which I particularly dislike. I abhor ever common-place phrase by which wit is intended; and 'setting one's cap at a man', or 'making a conquest', are the most odious of all. Their tendency is gross and illiberal; and if their construction could ever be deemed clever, time has long ago destroyed all its ingenuity (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 43).

Marianne's speech illustrates her condemnation of Sir John's belief that the objective of any woman is "to make a conquest", corroborating with Wollstonecraft's ideal. For Marianne, love must be the union of two passionate souls, and not a sealed contract with profits and interests. The way Sir John referred to women was seen by Marianne as rude and vulgar, limiting them to a role of inferiority and superficiality.

In certain passages of the novel, Marianne's self-awareness towards her own behaviour is perceptible. She was so inserted and used to the society's rules that she realizes her conduct differs from the norm. After her first encounter with Willoughby, Elinor reproaches Marianne for being too open, and Marianne admits:

I have been too much at my ease, too happy, too frank. I have erred against every common-place notion of decorum! I have been open and sincere when I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful. Had I talked only of the weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes this reproach would have been spared (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 46).

However, there is an intense irony in Marianne's speech. As much as she admits her behaviour to be inadequate according to the standards of the time, she laughs at these conventions. For her, a woman who limits herself to a subservient and

superfluous role, who just talks about ordinary subjects, like the weather or the roads, is stupid and artificial. Mary Wollstonecraft (2004) states that

the grand source of female folly and vice has ever appeared to me to arise from narrowness of mind; and the very constitution of civil governments has put almost insuperable obstacles in the way to prevent the cultivation of the female understanding — yet virtue can be built on no other foundation! (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 2004, p. 71)

Marianne shares this conviction. According to her, women must have and always be in search of knowledge in order to avoid the "narrowness of mind". She "never had much toleration for anything like impertinence, vulgarity, inferiority of parts, or even difference of taste from herself" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 123), she values intelligence and demonstration of good taste through interesting conversations, and knowledge about music, literature and art.

Marianne, because of her exaggerated sensibility, may even be seen as a satire of the Sensibility Novel characters, very popular at the time. Susan Manning (2002) affirms that "the reputation of the eighteenth-century literature of Sensibility has never quite recovered from its embarrassing association with displays of unmeasured, extravagant emotion. It was 'excessive'" (MANNING, 2002, p. 80). Marianne is truly an ironic representation of this type of literature. However, her attitude goes beyond this purpose. According to Thomas Keymer (2011), "Marianne is more at such moments than a vehicle for satire on novels of sensibility, and she both demonstrates and articulates an element of social critique in Austen that is no less real for being partial and indirect" (KEYMER, 2011, p. 36). Marianne's protest is done indirectly, but not less intense because of that.

5. CONCLUSION

This work intended to bring forward another perspective of one of Jane Austen's character, Marianne Dashwood, usually overshadowed by her sister, Elinor, in most literary analyses. The goal of this paper was to show that, far from being only a novelist of manners, Jane Austen created deep characters, who are intensely ironic and critical to the society in which they lived.

It is important to emphasize that this literary piece was written in the beginning of the 19th century, a time when women struggled to find their space in a patriarchal society. In the field of Literature, Virginia Woolf (2014) wrote about the silence of women writers which lasted for many centuries and was only broken with the works of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontë sisters. They opened the path so other women writers could break into the masculine literary world. Their difficulties to enter the publishing market, nonetheless, were immense, and their participation was marginalized, for writing was not considered a feminine endeavour. Despite all the hardships, Jane Austen wrote six novels which obtained great success during her lifetime, and even greater nowadays.

In order to analyse *Sense and Sensibility*, and especially its character Marianne Dashwood, Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was used as a theoretical basis. Its five main principles were here explained: the concept of *sympathy*, the satisfaction derived from mutual sympathy, the relationship between affections and propriety, amiable and respectable virtues, and the degrees of compatibility between affections and the sense of propriety. Smith advocates that if we put ourselves in someone else's place, we are capable of feeling the other's passions, judging them as respectable or reproachable, according to our own beliefs and our society's. Such judgment is constant in *Sense and Sensibility*, chiefly between the two sisters. Just as

Elinor condemns Marianne's exaggerated and uncontrolled behaviour, Marianne reproaches her sister's conducts for considering them coward and artificial.

Another theory that based this paper was Mary Wollstonecraft's treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a feminist manifesto. In this work, Wollstonecraft supports the equality among men, in relation to mankind as a whole, as in relation to the equality among men and women. She states that women must be independent, and the only way to achieve this is through education, the strengthening of the mind and body. Marianne, after suffering a love disappointment, gets stronger, becomes more critical and independent, and learns to look for happiness in her own self, not in others.

Marianne's behaviour does not fit with the standard female behaviour of the 19th century. She does not surrender to submission, illustrating Wollstonecraft's assertion of the importance of women's independence. Different from other women of the time, Marianne sees marriage as the union of two passionate souls, not a businesslike submission contract. Rather, marriage for Marianne, as it was for Mary Wollstonecraft, is a tie of equals, where the woman is the husband's companion, and not his dependent. Marianne's notion of marriage develops with the character, who, after many love deceptions, finds the balance between Sense and Sensibility when she marries Colonel Brandon at the end of the novel. Far from betraying her essence, Marianne finally realizes that her happiness depends only on herself, and that sharing her life with someone who cherishes her is a lot worthier than submitting to exaggerated passions and even bigger disillusion.

In conclusion, Marianne's excessive sensibility is a lot more than juvenile whims. It is her way of protesting against the conventions of the society of her time. Her protest is, therefore, done indirectly, but not less real or effective. It is through her histrionics that Marianne externalizes her discontent with Willoughby's actions, with the male domination, the overrating of self-control, the imposed female submission

and her impotence of acting as she wishes, for being a woman. *Sense and Sensibility* is, in this way, a reflection on women's role in the 19th-century society and a maturation of feminist ideals. Austen's work, through this lens, shows a number of layers of meaning, which, when discovered, fascinate her readers with the capacity of this important writer in the history of the literature written by women.

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