



## Trabajo Fin de Grado

The Heroine Who Felt Too Much: The  
Transition from Neoclassicism to Romanticism  
as Reflected in the Figure of Marianne  
Dashwood

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## Introduction

Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* —first published in 1811— is a novel that wonderfully illustrates the transition from Neoclassicism to Romanticism. The Neoclassical legacy can be seen, among other things, in the novel's formal obsession with symmetrical patterns, so often expressed in its constant use and reliance on parallelisms and contrasts. To put it differently, *Sense and Sensibility* makes use of a technique widely used in eighteenth-century prose, usually labeled as 'clarification through differentiation': readers can easily tell right from wrong, since they are systematically confronted with situations and characters that encapsulate very different, if not at times opposite, attitudes and values; the virtues of the hero and the heroine become all the more clear and praiseworthy when the prime antagonists behave in a despicable manner. Similarly, if there are characters that undergo a remarkable evolution throughout the novel, there must also be flat characters who remain the same from beginning to end, which thus allows readers to realize, not only who the main characters are, but also the importance of learning and acquiring maturity through experience and education. On the other hand, *Sense and Sensibility* can also be studied as a wonderful illustration of some of the Romantic ideas which had emerged as a reaction against the Neoclassical emphasis on taxonomies, generalizations and sophisticated but rather constraining social norms, and which, at that transitional moment, were gathering more and more strength. This essay will strive to understand the meaning and implications of some of these apparently contradictory ideas in this novel by Jane Austen, and more particularly in the figures of its two female protagonists which, at first sight, seem to embody the two ideological extremes.

As regards the text itself, the evolution that the first draft, an epistolary novel, underwent till it became the novel as we know it nowadays does not lessen its quality, nor its didactic aim. The fact that the novel relies on so many parallelisms and contrasts does not mean that it offers a simplistic version of human nature and English society at that time in black vs. white terms. As a matter of fact, the figures of these apparently opposite sisters—Elinor and Marianne Dashwood—will be analysed in order to show that the differences that they so clearly seem to encapsulate on a first and superficial reading are not that radical and clear-cut. This will prove the main conclusion of this essay: that the novel, by means of relying on contrasts, brings to the fore this uneasy ideological balance, to end up clinging to the Neoclassical ideals of restraint and decorum, while warning against the risk and dangers of upholding a purely Romantic ideology when tackling certain social aspects of life. Austen's novel can consequently be seen as a call for balance; its keyword could therefore be 'modulation'. In this respect, language plays a relevant role, and should also be taken into account. Furthermore, in order to fully comprehend Marianne's behaviour —excessively Romantic at times— her upbringing and family relations will also be analysed, since they have definitely had some strong influence on her. In order to undertake this analysis, the opinion of well-known critics, such as Marilyn Butler, H.R. Dhatwalia, Barbara Hardy, Claudia Johnson, David Monaghan, Laura Mooneyham and Myra Stokes, will be taken into consideration.

## Analysis

The first thing worth discussing is the evolution that the original text underwent. Austen first intended it to be an epistolary novel and, as Mooneyham asserts, the fact that the initial form was epistolary and the final outcome is a novel, does not make a contribution to its “roughness” (1988: 30). The final product still contains some traces of the original draft, since certain passages are still written in epistolary form. These passages are letters from characters such as Marianne Dashwood, Willoughby or Lucy Steele, and some play a very relevant role in the development of the plot and the articulation of ideas and contrasts pertaining to the two ideological/ aesthetic movements that were overlapping during this transitional period. In addition to being a transitional novel, this text can be described as a quest into “the discovery of new places, of new people, and of oneself”. (Hardy, 1979: 109). The novel displays a high degree of complexity, especially as regards the internal and external struggle undergone by Marianne Dashwood. According to Barbara Hardy: “Jane Austen gets comedy out of such complex play of contrasting attitudes. It is not a static play” (120). The novel incorporates certain humorous elements and irony, which makes contrasts even more striking at times. For instance, if we compare the Steele sisters with the Dashwood sisters, the former are perceived as lacking important moral values; Anne Steele in particular is portrayed as being rather immature.

In relation to this idea of “contrasting attitudes”, *Sense and Sensibility* can be said to be a “didactic novel which compares the beliefs and conduct of two protagonists” (Butler, 1987:182). Nevertheless, oversimplifications, such as the ones that Marilyn Butler describes as ‘the Heroine who is Right’ versus ‘the Heroine who is

Wrong' (166), should always be avoided. Both characters embody a variety of traits that cannot be possibly classified into strictly positive or negative terms and competing categories. The key idea to understand the novel resides in bringing to the fore both sisters' feelings: they can both be passionate and emotional, but Elinor Dashwood often decides to control her feelings, whereas her sister Marianne cannot possibly do so. However, there is something both heroines share: their intelligence, a trait that most of Jane Austen's heroines possess (Hardy, 1979: 128). Even though they seem to be idle most of the time, they have received some kind of education and present a number of artistic skills related to the fields of literature, music and drawing. Although their intellectual capacity should not be questioned, it is their psychological and sentimental evolution that the novel focuses on.

One of the elements that seem to make Elinor and Marianne sometimes similar is the apparently symmetric pattern that their potential romantic relationships follow. In both cases, a young woman falls in love with a man who seems to behave in a way that shows that this affection is mutual. Then, another lady appears, which makes the heroines suffer enormously. This situation is the climax of the novel, the event around which everything else revolves, that is, love and feelings are a quintessential part of the novel. The nature of the 'other woman', who apparently disrupts and ruins the potential relationship between the hero and the heroine, must be given special attention. Lucy Steele had been engaged to Edward Ferrars for four entire years. The circumstances at the time did not allow them to celebrate the wedding. However, it must be noted that the one and only reason why Edward proposed to marry Lucy was his sense of duty; he felt he had to honour his commitment. Therefore, on Edward's part this engagement was quite noble, not at all mercenary. He ran the risk of facing Mrs. Ferrars's disapproval

and being consequently disinherited by her. As far as his relationship with Elinor is concerned, Edward's mistake consisted in behaving in such an ambiguous way that Elinor did not know what to believe; even though he never actually stated any special affection for her, he behaved in such a way that Elinor, deep down in her heart, felt that there was more to his politeness than met the eye. In Marianne's case, her antagonist appears after Willoughby meets her. Willoughby pays Marianne a lot of attention and openly displays his affection and preference for her, but he does so in a selfish manner. He meets her by accident and, at first, he appears to perfectly fit into the hero role. Nevertheless, his visit is eventually revealed to have been a mere entertainment for him, as he leaves without any intention to return. His engagement to Miss Grey is due to strictly economic reasons; it is his greed and wish to go up in the social scale and live in style that drives his actions.

In terms of feelings, Elinor and Marianne can be said to go through similar phases when it comes to realizing that their partners may not perceive their relationship in the same way. The first reaction they have is one of utter shock and painful astonishment; both heroines faint and find it difficult to keep their composure. Elinor manages to keep calm and be cautious about what she says to Lucy, whereas Marianne makes a scene when demanding Willoughby to explain to her why he treats her differently at the ball. Marianne hides her feelings and immediately suffers fits of sadness, whereas Elinor "mourns in secret" (134). The next step for Elinor is to compose herself and recover, to cope with her sad feelings on her own to avoid becoming some kind of burden to her family. This is something Marianne cannot possibly put into practice. She cannot possibly blame Willoughby for his actions; she would rather think that someone had ruined Willoughby's opinion of her. She refuses to

believe that the person she loves is able, and willing, to hurt her like that. Whereas Elinor manages to keep her true feelings to herself and under control, Marianne cannot but experience a series of turbulent emotions.

As has been argued, even though readers may get the impression that similar events make the two heroines suffer, there are some relevant differences worth discussing. The way in which the Dashwood sisters deal with suffering and get their hearts broken is one of them. To put it differently, the main difference between them lies, not so much in whether one of them suffers more than the other, but rather in their degree of self-control: whereas Elinor shows some stoic restraint, Marianne is unable to control her emotions. According to Marilyn Butler, this difference can be explained in ideological terms, since both sisters are endowed with different personality traits:

It is easy to mistake Elinor's sense for coldness. She is intended to be quite as loving and quite as accessible to 'feeling' as Marianne. The difference between them is one of ideology – Marianne optimistic, intuitive, un-self-critical, and Elinor far more skeptical, always ready to study the evidence, to reopen a question, to doubt her own prior judgements. She can be ready to revise her opinion of Willoughby. She can admit her mistakes, as she does of her wrong estimate of Marianne's illness. (1987: 192)

Hence, these two contrasting "modes of perception" (188), as Butler names them, are what makes the Dashwood sisters stand for apparently radical opposites. The capacity for self-criticism and skepticism towards people is something that differentiates them. Elinor, on the whole, doubts everyone and everything; this could be seen as her defence

mechanism, as her way to find some sort of balance between her head and her heart. Nevertheless, her potential to feel affection and care should not be belittled or doubted. For instance, once Willoughby treats Marianne with utmost cruelty at the ball, Elinor suffers with her sister: “Elinor [...] gave away to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne’s” (1994: 176). A ‘burst’ of tears is not a sign of perfect self-control, nor of coldness. Another example can be found towards the end of the novel, when Edward visits Barton Cottage and says that Lucy has married Robert instead of himself: “Elinor could sit it no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease” (353). As Claudia Johnson states: “one of the deepest and most methodically contrived ironies of *Sense and Sensibility* is that not all of Elinor’s skepticism can save her from erroneous conjectures, nor all her modesty preserve her from depending upon Edward” (1988: 63). Elinor seems to be the model to imitate and may be perceived as more careful than her impulsive sister, but she is far from perfect.

However, Elinor’s ‘outbursts’ seem to be always private: she only has them when she is alone or in Marianne’s company, and then only for a brief moment. She does not allow herself to seem weak and vulnerable in people’s eyes. A relevant theme of this novel is the contrast public versus private, which also contributes to differentiating the heroines. As Laura Mooneyham explains:

The paradox of *Sense and Sensibility* is that because Marianne attempts to isolate herself from society, her romantic defeat with Willoughby is an open secret. Elinor likewise suffers the loss of a lover, but is able to keep her loss hidden from the scrutiny of her acquaintance precisely because she is so

well integrated in society. No one suspects Elinor's grief. In public, Elinor undergoes the constant exertion of restraint. But in private, she is her own mistress. Elinor's is a purely internal freedom. (1988: 39)

Elinor is firmly convinced of her need to remain strong, not only for her own sake, but also for that of her beloved. Elinor even attempts to comfort her sister and try and make her behave as she would do it herself: “‘Exert yourself, dear Marianne’ she cried, ‘if you would not kill yourself and all who love you. Think of your mother; think of her misery while *you* suffer; for her sake you must exert yourself’” (178). Elinor's strength relies on knowing that having self-control contributes to being balanced, as well as saving her mother from suffering. On the other hand, Marianne ends up internalizing and showing her feelings to such an extent that she almost dies.

Both heroines, therefore, encapsulate some degree of weakness, in the sense that neither is a perfect and ‘heroic’ —in the traditional sense of the word— figure. Laura Mooneyham describes them as follows: “Each of Austen's heroines begins in a state of relative innocence as yet untested by the rude events of the adult world. In her attempt to understand and confront society's immorality, foolishness, weakness and disorder, each heroine learns to combat similar forces in her own personality” (1988: 27). The most dramatic moment as regards the differences between Elinor and Marianne is probably one which definitely contributes to Marianne's final evolution. When Marianne is finally informed of Edward's engagement to Lucy, the novel describes how she works through this traumatic moment. This discovery

left her [Marianne] more dissatisfied with herself than ever, by the comparison it necessarily produced between Elinor's conduct and her own. She felt all the force of that comparison; but not as her sister had hoped, to urge her to exertion now; she felt it with all the pain of continual self-reproach, regretted most bitterly that she had never exerted herself before; but it brought only the torture of penitence, without the hope of amendment.

(262)

Marianne now fully realizes Elinor's suffering and exemplary behaviour, while she confronts her own mistakes and lack of experience. Nevertheless, her first reaction is, as regards Willoughby, to give up and be possessed by her own sorrow. Despite their differences, both sisters have gone through similar ordeals. To quote Claudia Johnson's words: "Elinor's behavior has turned out to differ from Marianne's only in degree and not in kind. She has neither smothered her dreams nor even, with all her heroic efforts at screening and concealment, really masked her attachment" (63).

Moreover, the differences between both siblings can also be seen as a reflection of the contrast between Augustan/Neoclassical and Romantic ideologies. Elinor emphasizes "moral exertion and reason" as well as "that age's sense of human limitations" (Mooneyham, 1988:33), and Marianne the "pre-eminence of feeling" (33). Elinor encapsulates the first set of values, especially in the way that she questions people's benevolence and intentions before fully believing in them. Even then, it seems that the only people she can fully trust are her mother, her sisters, and perhaps Edward towards the end of the story. Trust is very difficult to achieve in this society, where appearances and hypocrisy, camouflaged as politeness and good manners, play such an

important role. Elinor is well aware of this and tries to handle the different situations accordingly. Marianne, on the other hand, advocates the pure expression of feelings. She has no restraint whatsoever, and believes that the only satisfactory way to express herself is with absolute freedom and passion: “I have erred against every common-place notion of decorum! I have been open and sincere where 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” (46). Marianne equates any kind of restraint or repression with being a liar.

Now that the contrasts between the two sisters have been taken into account, it is necessary to focus on the figure of Marianne Dashwood. As Marilyn Butler states: “All the novelists who choose the contrast format do so in order to make an explicit ideological point” (1987: 182). In this case, Austen’s novel illustrates the transition from a Neoclassical to a Romantic perspective. As is clearly shown in the novel, the values of the latter are mainly encapsulated by the figure of Marianne. Even though the emphasis on ‘sensibility’ was not a Romantic invention, it was now that its value was particularly emphasized (Stokes, 1991:153-54). Since this is a transitional novel, it seems just natural that its importance should be stressed. The way in which two of the characters which stand for sense and reason in the novel react towards Marianne’s excessive feelings is also relevant. Myra Stokes explains that, for Elinor, her sister needs to outgrow her view of the world and reach a more mature understanding of how society works. On the other hand, Colonel Brandon’s comments and impressions provide readers with another interesting perspective to this: he feels that it would be a pity that Marianne should change altogether and lose her charm (1991: 156). Willoughby, the source of Marianne’s suffering and illness, prevents her from seeing

the world as it actually is. Monaghan considers that she has a “general lack of awareness about her world” and he states that “she never plays much attention to how Willoughby actually conducts himself (1980: 52). In fact, Marianne seems to be in love with love itself; she draws her happiness from Romantic, as well as abstract, concepts. As Laura Mooneyham claims: “Her love for Willoughby results almost entirely from his adherence to and embodiment of Romantic principles (1988: 33). Since he seems to fully share her views, she at first considers him to be her perfect match. Nevertheless, as Mooneyham goes on to argue (34), since Marianne is impressed with whom he seems to be, that is, with sheer appearances, he is quite a dangerous influence on her.

Marianne is far too impulsive. Marilyn Butler highlights that she “reacts to Willoughby with the same whole-hearted impulsiveness with which she reacts to books” (1987: 186). This makes it clear that she is often drawn to Romantic concepts and reacts to them in an excessive manner. Marianne always idealizes the things and people she likes and deeply trusts her perception, mainly because she thinks highly of her own opinions. In addition, as Myra Stokes states: “Marianne tends to look for animation and spirit that matches her own” (1991: 54). Throughout the novel, she believes that she would be incapable of being with someone who did not share her opinions and interests. This is quite ironic, especially when considering whom she ends up marrying: Colonel Brandon, a man she had always found most uninteresting and boring. Marianne is also “grossly self-indulgent” (Butler, 1987: 187), which at first prevents her from learning and evolving, that is, she is not able to change and mature until she realizes that, although she and her sister have undergone similar problematic situations, she has reacted much worse than Elinor. As Monaghan explains: “Marianne also has enormous faith in her powers of judgement, so much so that she cannot

imagine ever being required to change her mind” (1980: 48). Furthermore, Marilyn Butler points out that, to Marianne, “man is naturally good” (187), so she believes that someone whom she judges to be innately good, like Willoughby at first, is not capable of doing any harm consciously. This is how she convinced herself that another woman had ruined Willoughby’s opinion of her instead of blaming Willoughby for her humiliation and suffering.

The heroine tends to “confuse the *spirit* and éclat with which emotions are registered and expressed with the feelings themselves” (Stokes, 1991: 54). Pompous behaviour and ostentation of feelings seem to impress her, and that is how Willoughby succeeds in charming her: he is all appearances. Marianne believes that the more excessively she displays what she feels, the more true and real these feelings will be. This can also be seen in the way she reacts when other characters express their feelings or, rather, fail to do so. For instance, Marianne considers, to quote Marilyn Butler, that Edward’s “lack of response” is comparable to “lack of taste” (1987: 185). According to her standards, not being able to openly display your emotions means not having a desirable behaviour. Furthermore, she perceives people’s inability to disclose their feelings as something negative, and goes as far as to ignore any positive traits that this person might have (Stokes, 1991: 54).

The “*romantic ethos*”, so well encapsulated in the figure of Marianne, reflects this transition from Neoclassical/ Augustan values to Romantic ones. In other words, the novel is a wonderful illustration of “a tradition conceived of as consisting in a shift of emphasis from the social to the individual, from the head to the heart, as it were, and resulting in feeling and emotion acquiring that dominance of perceived value which had formerly belonged to judgement, reason and order” (Stokes, 1991: 153). *Sense and*

*Sensibility* shows that the society in which Marianne lives is not ready for this shift from collective to individual points of view. According to Laura Mooneyham: “The Romantic mode of viewing the world is hazardous because its focus is the individual self. The self is valued over society; the emotional self is valued over the intellectual self.” (1988: 34) This accounts for the two ways in which Marianne’s attitude clashes with society. On the one hand, she clearly puts feelings on top of reason; on the other hand, she gives preference to personal emotions and discards social norms of behaviour. This attitude will bring out much pain and suffering, since she will not comply with the rules that organize the established society. Marianne disregards decorum norms. As Monaghan argues: “she believes that decorum is a form of hypocrisy” (1980: 44). For Marianne, the failure to display one’s feelings can be regarded as lying. To quote Laura Mooneyham again: “Marianne either speaks from the heart or refuses to speak at all; she acknowledges no middle ground of discourse” (1988: 37). She thinks in either/or terms, and does not believe that concealing emotions is an acceptable way to behave.

Myra Stokes explains that terms such as ‘morality’ and ‘integrity’ are “functions of the *heart*” (1991: 165), and that concepts like honour and generosity are related to the realm of the emotional as well (156). Therefore, it is not surprising that Colonel Brandon should empathize with Marianne’s behaviour; sensibility also has its good side, but the case in point here is that being naive ends up causing much trouble to the heroine. On the other hand, Barbara Hardy claims that the violence of her feelings can also have negative effects, because it “hurts guilty and innocent alike” (1979: 30), as when she gives priority to her own feelings, selfishly ignoring everybody else’s. Marianne experiences happiness and sadness in the same extreme manner, to the point that her feelings are often rendered ridiculous. For example, Elinor once ironically

remarks: “It is not every one, said Elinor, who has your passion for dead leaves” (85), when Marianne enthusiastically describes a landscape she particularly enjoys. Barbara Hardy refers to this way of behaving as “romantic radicalism”, and emphasizes her “consistent refusal to control herself” (1979: 30). Marianne cannot possibly survive in her society like this; she is in desperate need of maturity and change. It is not surprising that she should pay such a high price: she marries Colonel Brandon, which does away with the purely Romantic in her. In a way, part of her can be said to die with her marriage.

Barabara Hardy asserts that “there is nothing admirable in her sickness” (1979: 38), and qualifies it as “almost willed and self-destructive delirium”. Marianne clearly feels with too much intensity, in an unhealthy way; she allows her feelings to take control over her body and ends up getting really ill. It is only when she complies with a more conventional and balanced behaviour that she fully recovers from her illness. Later on, she accepts the way of life that the society of her time considered to be right: as was said before, she decides to marry Colonel Brandon, a man much older than her, whom she has never loved. This is the “extraordinary fate” (372) that awaits her at the end of the novel. Marianne Dashwood undergoes a transition from her deeply romantic self towards a more calm and mature frame of mind. It is her naivety and absolute faith in her own idealized beliefs that bring about her downfall.

Considering the mental condition Marianne gradually gets into, the countryside becomes a desirable option of escape. It is a setting closely linked to Romanticism — Romantic writers idealized nature— and it could be seen as a blessing, but also as danger. Marianne leaves London behind “shedding many tears” (294) but, without

doubt, this is due to her leaving behind the place that has triggered off such a traumatic experience. The heroine makes it clear several times that she wishes to go back home, that is, back to the countryside and away from the city. Once she arrives at Cleveland she “rejoices in tears of agony” (295) and soon feels the “happy privilege of country liberty, of wandering from place to place in free and luxurious solitude” (295). She is overemotional and needs a peaceful place to stay during her recovery. Besides, this new setting allows her to make the most of solitude during her walks in nature and the time she spends at the garden. Marianne seems quite content with her apparent freedom, but a sudden weather change forces her to remain indoors, secluded and suffering from a “disorder” of a “putrid tendency” (299). Symbolically, nature seems to portray her state of mind, since the dreary weather and the rain mirror her internal struggle. Her “malady”, described as “universally ill” (300), points towards the fact that her disposition is wretched, not only because of a physical severe cold, but also because certain psychological components exert an influence as well. The individual’s state of mind plays an important role in any illness, and Marianne seems to have given up, until her “rational though languid gaze” (307) gives a glance of hope and proves to Elinor — and to the reader — that she is ready to fight her illness and recover. As Myra Stokes argues, ‘candour’ seems to be Marianne’s “only positive vice” (1991: 170), which clearly suggests how relevant language can be in *Sense and Sensibility*.

As regards language, the vocabulary related to feelings is rich and dense. (Stokes, 1991: 153). As Myra Stokes goes on to explain, “Marianne’s is spirit as denoted ardour, passion, intensity of response. She is a vibrant girl, much more appealing than her more self-possessed sister. The words particularly associated with her are *animation* and *eagernes*” (1991: 52-3, emphasis in the original). Marianne is full

of life, she is an impatient young girl who cannot wait to share her feelings with the people around her, and this is the idea that these two words convey. A relevant expression often used in the novel is “being in spirits” or “out of spirits”. As Myra Stokes clarifies, being “spiritless” means “lacking in ardour” (1991: 69), and this therefore explains why Marianne attributes this adjective to Edward Ferrars. She thinks that he lacks the most important things that she considers to be interesting and attractive: passion and enthusiasm. In contrast, what Marianne almost completely lacks is “exertion”. The character usually associated with it in positive terms is her sister Elinor, who also strives to make her realize that this is absolutely necessary in the society they live in. Marianne does not exert herself until the end of the novel; excessive emotion becomes a real threat to her life.

“Decorum” is another term often used in the novel, and readers must be careful when interpreting it, since it can have two possible interpretations. The first one is the most common: it refers to manners and proper behaviour in a particular social context. On the other hand, Stokes also explains that “decorum” may also be related to appropriateness in a different way; she offers the letter sent by Willoughby to Marianne as an example. In it he apologises for the ‘misunderstanding’ and tries to pretend that he never really felt anything for her. To quote Stokes’s words: “This letter’s cruelty lies precisely in its deliberately distancing politeness – so very inappropriate to the relationship between the writer and the addressee; and decorum appeals by contrast to the gentleman’s obligation to adopt, in whatever circumstances, such behaviour as responds most fittingly (here, honestly and honourably)” (1991: 97). Even though Willoughby is being quite polite in his choice of words and address to Marianne, it is extremely inappropriate, from an emotional point of view, that he should treat her with

such coldness of heart, given the relationship they have had till now. Even Elinor feels offended and scandalized at the mere sight of this letter.

Marianne is also expected to improve her disposition towards sense itself. Stokes defines sense as “(a) intelligence and discernment, with a tendency to connote (b) values that are not superficial” (1991: 127). Marianne’s weakness lies in the fact that she does not know how to discern and make out what someone —such as Willoughby— is like. She bases her choices and opinions on what she superficially perceives, instead of being more careful and slowly building an opinion, as her sister Elinor often does. Another character who seems to be very sensitive, although often in a rather comic and ridiculous way, is Mrs. Dashwood. She is a good example of the pomposity with which words related to the field of feelings are sometimes used. When referring to Edward, Elinor suggests that her mother may like him once she knows him better, to which Mrs. Dashwood replies: “I can feel no sentiment of approbation inferior to love” (14). The way in which she trivializes and uses the word ‘love’ for every single thing or person for whom she feels some kind of esteem makes it clear how superficial Mrs. Dashwood is. She seems to equate showing extreme emotion and enthusiasm with virtue and righteousness, which has a most negative influence on Marianne.

Claudia Johnson describes *Sense and Sensibility* as “a novel of matriarchs” (1988: 70). In the novel under analysis, though, the figure of Mrs. Dashwood is almost a caricature. In order to fully understand Marianne’s behaviour, it is necessary to take her upbringing and family into account, and to note that the concept of family and family relationships also underwent an interesting evolution during this transitional period. According to H.R. Dhatwalia: “Before the eighteenth century, the nature of the bonds

between parents and children was largely economic. The family was considered an economic unit, of which children, especially sons, were contributory members" (1988: 5-6). In *Sense and Sensibility*, the son is the only really wealthy character of the family, while the daughters end up living with a low income. Mrs. Dashwood is extremely interested to marry their daughters off to wealthy men, as is also the case in other novels by Jane Austen, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, where Mrs. Bennet's attitude on this matter is even more ridiculously portrayed. Dhatwalia explains that, since child-mortality decreased, parental bonds became stronger and therefore parents "started paying more attention to the proper nurture of their progeny" (1988: 7). The upbringing of children was understood in rather more liberal terms: "Under the influence of the Romantic tradition in the late eighteenth century, some parents became liberal in their attitude towards children's upbringing" (1988: 10). This is clearly the case of Mrs. Dashwood, who seems to be quite happy when her daughters are socializing, attending balls and meeting potential suitors who may offer them a better future. As Dhatwalia concludes: "Almost all the parents favour wealth in matrimony" (1988: 87).

Consequently, for the entire family marriage became "a major event in their lives. Their whole marital happiness depended upon the right choice of marriage partners" (Dhatwalia, 1988: 14). Marrying a wealthy gentleman guaranteed happiness at the time. This is why it is stated in the novel that Marianne found "her own happiness in forming his [Colonel Brandon's]" (373). She merely adjusts to what she is supposed to do according to the mentality of the society she lives in. Since domestic life was the daughters' duty (Dhatwalia, 1988: 19), marriage seemed to be one of their biggest aims and one of the most important events in their lives. Mooneyham also says that marriage was "the culmination of the educative process" in Austen's novels (1988: 27).

Moreover, she adds that, although partners were expected to be in a “rough equilibrium” as regards economic matters, Austen’s heroines often marry gentlemen who are much wealthier than themselves (1988: 28).

The position of women in Austen’s novels is often one of vulnerability from an economic point of view, as is the case of the Dashwood sisters and their mother. As Johnson states, these are “women who have become marginalized due to the death or simple absence of male protectors” (1988: 50). Owning becomes so relevant that, for many characters, male and female alike, this seems to be an absolute priority. As Barbara Hardy states: “In *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice* there is a prevailing possessiveness. People clutch, hoard and acquire” (1979: 161). Moreover, this almost obsessive thought of marrying someone affluent and owning a valuable property brings about “avarice, shiftlessness, and oppressive mediocrity” (Johnson, 1988: 49). These are the values that Mrs. Dashwood encapsulates. This character partly explains why Marianne Dashwood is the way she is. Her authority is described as “entirely noncoercive” and her attitude towards her daughters as that of “an excessively lax parent, little more than one of the girls herself” (Johnson, 1988: 70). Without a maternal role model to follow, it is quite difficult for Marianne to grow up with the right set of values, especially when her mother encourages her excessive feelings. Luckily, she has her sister Elinor to rely on and support her during her most difficult times.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the novel strives to make it clear that Marianne Dashwood's excess of passion can be dangerous to her own health. The society of her time was not prepared to fully embrace Romantic ideals in such a way. Even though both sisters encapsulate Neoclassical and Romantic values in different degrees, Marianne is the one that can be labelled as stereotypically Romantic. However, there is nothing heroic in her being like this; the novel does not advocate the importance of expressing one's feelings, but rather the dangers that this attitude may entail if this is done in the wrong way and context. Generally speaking, while the society that surrounds her tightly sticks to the principles of decorum and false appearances, Mrs. Dashwood has raised her daughters in a most lenient atmosphere. It is therefore not at all surprising that Marianne should be so prone to taking extremes.

Marianne learns the lesson and undergoes an interesting evolution thanks to the help of her sister Elinor and a heartbreak which could have been avoided if she had not been so naive. The outcome of the story reinforces the whole idea of danger and becomes a warning not to follow her example. Elinor's love is genuine and her marriage to Edward Ferrars is not the result of economic arrangements, nor the result of mere convenience. On the other hand, Marianne ends up marrying the only person she never ever considered as regards this matter: Colonel Brandon. This occurs to make up a pattern, and to satisfy the people around her, together with her own economic needs. In short, this novel is one of personal change, development and maturity. As Laura Mooneyham states: "Either Elinor or Marianne suffers extreme emotional pain throughout most of the novel" (1988: 29). This pain leads to some outstanding transformation in the case of Marianne, the Romantic heroine par excellence.

Mooneyham and Johnson reach a similar conclusion when discussing the ending of the novel. The former asserts that “a happy ending is muted” (1988: 29), while the latter states that the heroines end up in a state of “muted felicity” (1988: 72). In the case of Marianne this is absolutely true: even though she acquires economic stability, she will never love Brandon as passionately as she loved Willoughby. Even though the novel concludes by saying: “Marianne found her happiness in forming his” (373), this does not seem to be at all convincing. The atmosphere portrayed is one of conformism, and readers are left with frustrated feelings. The overly Romantic heroine who, much to her disgrace, takes after her mother, is to undergo some drastic changes so that she can adopt some of her sister’s qualities, such as endurance and exertion, and escape the trap of passion and indulgence. However, this does not mean that the novel disapproves of genuine love in order to favour convenience marriages; Elinor, the character whose behaviour is offered as a model to follow, ends up happily married to Edward. She has genuine feelings, but does not allow her emotions to take over. She knows how to behave and survive in that society and is, over and above everything, patient. Patience is, without doubt, a most rewarding virtue in Austen’s literary universe.

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