

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY: Shameless Want of Taste

The period from 1775 to 1817 is the lifetime of Jane Austen. The period was essentially marked by challenges to the traditional hierarchy of English class society. Consequently, the period itself punctuated challenges to conventional social roles and responsibilities. In England the decisive agent of the change was not just the French Revolution but also the more subtle, more gradual, dissemination of the values and behaviour associated with capitalism. By the first decades of the nineteenth century birth into a particular class no longer exclusively determined one's future social or economic status. The traditional authority of the gentry, and of the values associated with their life-style, was a subject under general debate. In the midst of such changes, the assumptions that had theoretically been shared by the eighteenth century moralists and their audiences seemed increasingly problematic, requiring radical change. Jane Austen, a product of the time responded radically to the issue. Here in the present chapter of the dissertation we would like to examine the novelist's traits of radicalism

and transitionalism as well in respect of her first published novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen viewed individualism's challenge to paternalism. Here in this novel the most fundamental conflict is between Austen's own imaginative engagement with her self-assertive characters and the moral code necessary to control their desires. In the greater part of the novel Jane Austen's strategies endorse the traditional values associated with her 'sensible' heroine, Elinor Dashwood. Almost every action in the novel suggests that individual will triumphs over principle and individual desire proves more compelling than moral law. In the climactic final encounter between Elinor and Willoughby, Elinor is aroused to a pitch of complex emotion. She cannot unreservedly praise the man she wants to marry. 'At first sight' she admits, 'his address is certainly not striking; and his person can hardly be called handsome, till the expression of his eyes which are uncommonly good, and the general sweetness of his countenance is perceived. At present I know him so well that I think him really handsome; or at least, almost so' (20).

Austen also attempts to control the allure of Marianne's romantic desire by refusing to consider seriously either the social origin or the philosophical implications. The novelist consistently provides men's behaviour with a realistic explanation by describing the social or psychological contexts that shaped it. Mr. Palmer's general contempt, Elinor concludes 'was the desire of appearing superior to other people' (112)--a desire that is an understandable compensation for Palmer's initial error: 'his temper might perhaps be a little soured by finding, like many others of her sex, that through some accountable bias in favour of beauty, he was the husband of a very silly woman' (112).

The only female character Austen appears to explain is Lucy Steele. Initially, Lucy's 'deficiency of all mental improvement' seems to be the effect of her neglected education and in this point Jane Austen takes her radical view. She holds: 'Lucy was naturally clever; her remarks were often just and amusing ... but her powers had received no aid from education, she was ignorant and illiterate, and her deficiency of mental improvement ... could not be concealed from Miss Dashwood' (127).

Austen explicitly ridicules the notion that Lucy's 'want of liberty' could be 'due to her want of education' by having Edward cling to this rationalization to the end. But in jilting Edward for his brother Robert, Lucy conclusively proves herself inherently flawed. Austen wants to convince the reader that female nature is simply inexplicable and that propriety must put a restraint on this natural, amoral force. At least one other set of female characters also supports this argument, but paradoxically, the episode in which they appear alludes not to an innate female nature but to the constraints imposed on women by patriarchal society and the novelist is seriously aware of it.

Jane Austen at least intuits the twin imperatives that anchor patriarchal society; men want women to be passionate, but, because they fear the consequences of this appetite, they want to retain control over its expression. This anxiety explains why women in this society must experience so problematic a relation to their own desire. In order to win the husband necessary to their social position, women must gratify desires by concealing whatever genuine emotions they feel so as to allow men to believe that they have all the power. In *Sense and Sensibility* the novelist pursues the grim reality that is implicit in her account of the

Dashwood's economic situation. The novel repeatedly dismisses the analysis of society that realism might imply. But Austen's idealism never completely banishes her realistic impulse. She retains both 'principles' and 'romance'. Thus Marianne is made to debunk her own youthful romance and the novel as a whole endorses the 'heroism' (242, 265) of Elinor's self-denial.

Some of the tensions that we finally feel in *Sense and Sensibility* emerge from the conflict between the realism in which the action is anchored and the romantic elements that Austen harnesses to this realism. She also suggests that Elinor's self-denial- her refusal to reveal Lucy Steele's secret and her willingness to help Edward even to her own disadvantage, ultimately contributes to her own happiness as well as to the happiness of the society. The prerogatives of society, Austen suggests, sometimes make secrecy and repression necessary. Despite her recognition of the limitations of social institutions, Austen is more concerned with correcting the dangerous excesses of female feeling than with liberating this anarchic energy. In this context Mary Poovey's observation is worth mentioning. Her book entitled *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago, 1984) is concerned with the way in which the

bourgeois concept of 'the proper lady' is reproduced in the work of Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen. Poovey traces the concept through its formation in the eighteenth century as the middle class takes control of society and locates its women as commodities for exchange in a marriage market. Jane Austen belonged to the lower gentry and her situation enables her to measure her characters in *Sense and Sensibility* against a normative ideology of human values.

The thematic exclusiveness about Jane Austen's first ever-completed narrative *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is that quite artistically in a much-polished manner the novel upholds the theme of the danger of sensibility in temperament and the advantage of sense. In her bid to handle such a binary opposition as sense and sensibility, we would try to point out the traits of Austen's transitionalism and radicalism in the present novel. If we take *Northanger Abbey* as the last work of Jane Austen's early phase, *Sense and Sensibility* is essentially the first of her completed novels. In it, it seems that there has been a change in the novelist's attitude in studying complex spectacle of man's social behaviour. This is evident in her radical portrayal of men and matters in the contemporary society.

Sense and Sensibility is well written. The characters are in genteel life, naturally drawn and judiciously supported. The characters of Elinor and Marianne are very nicely contrasted, the former possessing good sense with a proper quantity of sense, the latter with an immoderate degree of sensibility, which renders her unhappy on every trifling occasion and annoys everyone around her. Elinor has a strong understanding and cool judgement and an amiable temper with strong feelings, which she knew how to control. Marianne is sensible and clever but so terribly impetuous in all her joys and all her sorrows as to know no moderation. Her sensibility is all in the extreme.

The sensibility of Marianne is without bounds. She is rendered miserable and in her peculiar temperament this misery is extravagantly cherished. Elinor on the other hand, has her own love-difficulties to encounter and her own sensibility to subdue, the painful task of endeavouring to alleviate her sister's grief which preys upon her health so much that she is soon reduced to the brink of the grave. Jane Austen's attitude to sense and sensibility question is undoubtedly radical. Her idea of sensibility in a sense

derives from the Richardsonian cult of sensibility - the value of emotion.

A realistic interpreter of life, Jane Austen beyond doubt, leaves a distinct mark of her changing vision of life as well in her *Sense and Sensibility*. The novelist at 36 with this novel made her appearance before the reading public. In her radical alterations in the form of a series of letters Jane Austen suddenly shifts to a narrative form in the novel under discussion. Again, an acute observer of men and women and the decadent society of the Regency period and all its artificial social norms and naked self-interest, the novelist handles themes quite radically in the novel. She even reacts sharply to the individual traits in the individual character. In her critical observation in the presentation of life Jane Austen shows an unusually keen awareness of the inner void in most of the literary and social conventions.

The antithesis in the title *Sense and Sensibility* might be considered not merely as synoptic formulation of the theme of this particular novel, but as a focal point in Jane Austen's perception of men and women in their social relations. B.C. Southam in his introduction to the *Critical*

Essays on Jane Austen considers it from a slightly different angle when he notes: 'a recurrent theme in Jane Austen's writing is the need to distinguish between reality and illusion, to explore and discriminate among conditions of true false vision' (Southam, 1968,xv). What seems more interesting and less recognized so far is the recurring pattern of a journey from ignorance to wisdom. Jane Austen as a radical does not simply contrast the two attitudes, conditions or set of values. She actually portrays man's or woman's inner progress from one condition to the other; trust in the possibility of the progress constitutes the core of her transitionalism and radicalism and also her perception of human individuals as wayfarers on a journey towards sense and sensibility reflecting her deeper commitment to life and art.

Jane Austen's analyses of man's way of knowing and of his relationship to the social world are based on assumptions that were familiar in the eighteenth century. Readers have sometimes been annoyed by Jane Austen's preferences for Elinor, a preference that seems to validate the importance of the social surface and to derogate feelings. Marianne's feelings are apparent because she acts in accord with them. She cares for essentials, not for superficialities. Elinor

in contrast, is intensely interested in social conventions, indulging often in hypocrisies that hide her feelings from others. She wishes to satisfy the demands of society, as well as of the self. 'Understanding' is crucially important to Elinor's complex perspective. She tries to incorporate into her conception of the world all of the trivial, contradictory, anomalous and unpleasant as well as the important, harmonious and pleasant aspects of her life, giving each its due weight. Her attempt is to understand the world, not to change it.

The entire action in *Sense and Sensibility* is organized to represent Elinor and Marianne in terms of rival value-systems, which are seen directing their behaviour in the most crucial choices of their lives. It is the arrangement that necessarily directs the reader's attention not towards what they experience but towards how they cope with experience, away from the experimental to the ethical. Elinor's response to the marriage of Lucy and Robert Ferrars is presented in relation to multiple faculty-heart, imagination and reason and to each is assigned a different and discrete level of comprehension: 'To her heart it was a delightful affair, to her imagination it was even a ridiculous one, but to her reason, her judgment it was

completely a puzzle' (364). Marianne ascertains that Willoughby admires 'Pope no more than is proper' (47). But Jane Austen's view of mankind is not in many respects markedly different from Pope's in **Essay on Man**.

In **Sense and Sensibility** the emphasis is on each girl's (Elinor and Marianne) scale of values as she applies it to both young men (Edward and Willoughby). According to Marianne, Edward does not give free rein to the intuitive side of his nature. She equates lack of 'taste' with lack of response, an inability to enter subjectivity. Willoughby remains in Marianne's mind as an evil force long after his betrayal of her. He becomes a part of her mental topography. Having created a mental world, Marianne cannot escape it, even when her external circumstances change. After losing the stability provided by illusion, she attempts to organize a new order around grief.

Her mind did become settled, but it was settled in a gloomy dejection. She felt the loss of Willoughby's character 'yet more heavily than she had felt the loss of his heart...and the doubt of what his designs might once have been on herself preyed...on her spirits' (212). Willoughby's lurid interview with Elinor during Marianne's sickness reveals

the conventionalized pattern that the romance of Marianne and Willoughby has assumed. Marianne refused to say what she does not feel but she often has little understanding of her feelings. She deals with everything intensely but from very limited intellectual premises; her categories and judgments are finally crude ones. The imaginative unity of Romanticism is to Jane Austen an egocentric and false one. It must be combated by a resolute effort to decentre oneself. One can achieve a mental accommodation of discordant elements but not a resolution of them.

The difference between Elinor and Marianne is one of ideology. In order to give vent to her radical thought Jane Austen put forward the ideological difference between the main characters in the novel. Marianne is optimistic, intuitive, unselfcritical whereas Elinor is far more sceptical, always ready to study the evidence, to reopen a question to doubt her prior judgments. 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. Indeed, Jane Austen clearly argues that we do not find the right path through the cold, static correctness of a Lady Middleton but through a struggle waged daily with our natural predisposition to err.

Again, Jane Austen's version of 'sensibility' that is individualism of self, in various familiar guises--is as harshly dealt with here as anywhere in the anti--Jacobin novels. Mrs. Ferrer's London is recognizably a sketch of the anarchy that follows the loss of all values but self-indulgence. In the opening chapters of the novel **Sense and Sensibility** especially where Marianne is the target of criticism, 'sensibility' means sentimental (or revolutionary) idealism, which Elinor counters with her sceptical or pessimistic view of man's nature. Where the issue is the choice of a husband Jane Austen's criteria prove to be much the same as Mrs. West's: both advocate dispassionate assessment of a future husband's qualities discounting both physical attractiveness while stressing objective evidence. Both reiterate the common conservative theme of the day that a second attachment is likely to be more reliable than a first. The sole element of unorthodoxy in **Sense and Sensibility** lies in the execution and specially in the skillful adjustment of detail, which makes its story more natural. The novel is not natural compared with Jane Austen's later novels. Certainly there is a plenty of evidence in the second half of the novel that Jane Austen was impatient with the rigidity of her framework and all the

modifications she makes. Lucy Steele resembles Isabella Thorpe and Mary Crawford, George Wickham, Henry Crawford, Frank Churchill and William Walter Elliot and in the manner she does not come, like some other authors' representations, vociferously advocating free-love or revolution, or the reading of German novels. She is the harbinger of anarchy for all that.

In a way, *Sense and Sensibility* is worse affected than many clumsy works by lesser writers because it is written naturally, and with more insight into at least some aspects of the inner life. The reader has far too much real sympathy with Marianne in her sufferings to refrain from valuing her precisely on their account. There is plenty of evidence that Jane Austen, anticipating this reaction, tried to forestall it. It is indeed, difficult to accept the way consciousness is presented in this novel. Jane Austen is critical enough in her presenting Marianne and to some extent also Elinor as they are both drawn with strong feelings which the reader is accustomed to sympathise with, and actually to value for their own sake. But it is the argument of the novel that such feelings, like the individuals who experience them, are not innately good. Unfortunately, in flat opposition to the author's obvious intention, we tend to approach Marianne

subjectively. Elinor represents the Christian wisdom that knows correct judgment is hard, that mankind is fallible and the world full of pitfalls. Marianne represents the optimistic idealism of sentimentalism. The differences between the two characters are not simply moral since both are types found in many contemporary novels, which were well understood by readers to personify political issues. The property-owning classes in England were fearful that the example of the French Revolution would increase support for those British radicals who were demanding political and economic equality for all of Britain's citizens. These radicals were from around Eighteen hundred termed Jacobins, a term which originated in a Parisian egalitarian political club which met first in 1789 in the old convent of the Jacobin (i.e. followers of St.Jaqués).

Contemporaries saw *Sense and Sensibility* as one of the genre of anti-Jacobin novels, Marianne signifying the disturbance caused by revolutionary fervour, by a commitment to passion and to the ideal that brooks no social conventions, and to the individual's selfish will rather than social conformity. Like Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, she is a threat, fascinating but needing to be suppressed. Anyway, Jane Austen's sense of 'sense' approximates to the traditional

Christian personal and social ethic, her 'sensibility' to a modern individualist ethic in two different manifestations, Marianne's and Lucy's. This again is no doubt, a pointer to Jane Austen's trait of transitionalism in her art.

Sense and Sensibility like all Austen's novels is a drama of language in which her heroines suffer from what can and cannot be said. The association of women with 'Silence' has become a richly commonplace formula in contemporary theory. In the novel under our close consideration the silences of two women are made powerfully 'audible'. The narrative is punctuated by their repeated but different refusals to speak. Elinor, on the side of sense, withholds her words from considerateness for others. Marianne, on the side of sensibility, refuses to speak because she is careless of social properties because she will not compromise the truth for politeness's sake or because the strength of her feeling defies representation in words. Broadly, the silences of Elinor are those of reserve and integrity; the silences of Marianne are those of non-conformity and emotional powerlessness. While Elinor bravely suppresses the private language of her feelings in order to engage in the public world of sometimes trivial and commonsense, Marianne treats from that world into the serious and desperate privacy of

her sensibility. The main difference is that Elinor's silences result from self-censorship-she listens 'in silence and immovable gravity' to Robert Ferrars, for instance but Marianne's do not. Marianne, after all, stands for the cause of Romanticism in this novel.

In her role as a radical, Jane Austen also plays her part of opposition at places in her delineation of both Elinor and Marianne. Although both the heroines retreat into silence at various points, it is the silence of Marianne, which remains problematic because it is not incorporated into the narrative, like Elinor's. Elinor's silences signify heroic reticence and control and are contained by the language of sense. Marianne's silences signify emotions which have escaped control and which are, therefore, in opposition to Austen's art. Marvin Mudrick writes that 'Marianne represents an unacknowledged depth of her author's 'spirit' (1976, 114). By a different reading again, it is Marianne who retreats from social intercourse, refuses to pay polite visits and is finally rendered speechless in misery and illness. Marianne, with a bias that goes contrary to the apparent sympathies of the author, is the place where the familiar dilemma of women, to speak or not to speak, is played out.

Sense and Sensibility is usually interpreted as an argument of mind against heart, judgment against feeling, policy against spontaneity, Classicism against Romanticism and as a corollary of these, of reticence against self-expression. Such an interpretation reveals Elinor's stoical reticence that triumphs over Marianne's spontaneous outbursts. Of course, sense has the privileges and powers of public speech, while sensibility is private and therefore, powerless eloquence. Any way, Marianne defies the conventions of social intercourse because she is victimized by them and her silences speak against sense because they are refused a hearing in the main text.

A radical as Jane Austen was, she quite efficiently deals with the theme of crisis in *Sense and Sensibility* when Marianne receives Willoughby's cruelly explicit letter of repudiation. Elinor discovers her 'stretched on the bed, almost choked by grief' (237). Marianne thrusts a bundle of Willoughby's letters into Elinor's hands and then Austen writes, 'covering her face with her handkerchief, almost screamed with agony' (237). The word 'almost' used twice as a qualification of Marianne's actions, is crucial. The word smothers the protest, imprisons the sound in the

inarticulateness of mere sensibility and seems to assert the authority of rational control. The phrase magnificently enacts the whole drama of Marianne's rebellion in this novel. Marianne is trapped in 'sensibility', a prison which gives no access to the language of articulated protest but the silence of which is now resonant and violent. Such 'passionate violence' is no longer of the surface but of the depths, and the sign of it is a kind of speechlessness, which is not only Marianne's but also Jane Austen's.

A product of a period of transition (the end of eighteenth century and the beginning of nineteenth century) Jane Austen's version of the female awakening goes contrary to post-romantic expectations. In *Sense and Sensibility*, instead of coming to understand the thwarted sexual nature of her own sensibility, Marianne must grow out of her private and exclusive love for Willoughby and come to accept marriage based on 'no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship'. She awakens into a knowledge of herself which is that commanded by the society around her. Marianne's development from love to 'lively friendship' from illness to health, from egocentric sensibility to conforming sense also takes the form of a development from private inarticulateness to public speech. Such a change is no

doubt, a pointer to the reaction against sentimentalism and the novel of sensibility in the eighteenth century, of which Austen is a prime example and this very aspect testifies to the traits of transitionalism in the author as well.

Jane Austen's own life-time was marked by challenges to the traditional hierarchy of English class society, and as a result, to traditional social stands and responsibilities. Her *Sense and Sensibility* is a fine specimen of the challenges that the writer threw open. The challenges ultimately brought about different changes in social, cultural and other important aspects of life in Austen's era. In England the decisive agent of the changes was not just the French Revolution but the more subtle, more gradual dissemination of the values and behaviour associated with capitalism-agrarian and industrial. Money made itself felt in investment and capital return. Birth into a particular class no longer exclusively determined one's future social or economic status. The traditional authority of the gentry and of the values associated with their life-style was a subject under general debate. As the daughter of a country clergyman with numerous and strong ties to the landed upper gentry, Jane Austen was involved in this crisis of authority in an immediate and particularly complex way. As a clergyman

Austen's father belonged to the lesser realms of the gentry. The wealthy Knight family of Kent adopted one of her brothers, Edward. Two of Austen's brothers James and Henry became clergymen and her two youngest brothers Francis and Charles entered the British Navy and became Admirals. Francis ultimately became a Knight. Thus Jane Austen was raised to a height of the middle-class society but she never wished to emulate the gentry's life-style out and out. She was even able to see the marked differences between the two components of the middle-class; the landed gentry and the urban capitalist class.

As Jane Austen's career progressed, we see her gradually developed aesthetic strategies capable of balancing her attraction to exuberant but potentially anarchic feeling with her investment in traditional social institutions. The balance is embodied in thematic material she chose and the rhetorical strategies that harness the imaginative energy of her readers to a moral design. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen viewed individual's challenge to paternalism. The most fundamental conflict in the novel is between Austen's own imaginative engagement with her self-assertive characters and the moral code necessary to control their anarchic desires. Nearly everything in the plot of *Sense and*

Sensibility undermines the complacent assumption that the Christian principles generally held. Almost every action in the novel suggests that, more often than not, individual will triumph over principle, and individual desire proves more compelling than moral law. Jane Austen here is more prominent in her role as a radical. Moreover, the narrator's prefatory evaluation of John Dashwood, for example 'he was not an ill--disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted and rather selfish, is to be ill disposed' (5) directs our attention most specifically to the way in which what should, in theory, be moral absolutes can and in practice do, shade off into infinite gradations and convenient exceptions. Here again, some pertinent questions crop up- is it always morally wrong to be 'rather' selfish, specially in a society in which such selfishness is the necessary basis for material prosperity? What efficacy will moral absolutes have in such a society?

Woman's assertive subjectivity is a salient theme in *Sense and Sensibility*. By way of raising Marianne's assertive subjectivity Jane Austen seconds the eighteenth century radical view that woman's appetites are particularly dangerous and more akin to inexplicable natural forces. Except for Elinor, nearly all of the women in *Sense and*

Sensibility are given to one kind of excess or another. Mrs. John Dashwood and her mother, Mrs. Ferrars, attempt to dominate the opinions, the professions, and even the emotions of the men who are closest to them. Again, Willoughby's aunt, who is empowered by money and age, is even more tyrannical. Sophia Grey, Willoughby's fiancée, enacts her passion and her will when she commands Willoughby to copy her cruel letter for Marianne. Austen here essentially implies that these women are exceptional only in the extent of their power, not in the force of their desires.

Austen's female characters certainly do not monopolize passion, nor are their little contrivances finally more destructive than Willoughby's deceit. But contrasting them with her presentation of male characters can identify the implications of her characterizations of such women. Austen consistently provides men's behaviour with a realistic explanation by describing the social or psychological contexts that shaped it. Austen is also certainly radical enough when she explicitly ridicules the notion that Lucy's 'want of liberality could be' due to her want of education. Of course, the only female character in the novel Austen appears to explain is Lucy Steele. Initially, Lucy's

'deficiency of all mental improvement' seems to be the effect of her neglected education: 'Lucy was naturally clever; her remarks were often just and amusing... but her power had received no aid from education she was ignorant and illiterate, and her deficiency of mental improvement ... could not be concealed from Miss Dashwood' (127).

Austen's final comments on Lucy are decisive; her behaviour exposes 'a wanton ill nature' (336) characterized by 'an earnest and unceasing attention to self-interest' (376). The harshness with which Jane Austen disposes of Lucy Steele exceeds the necessities of the plot, but it is perfectly in keeping with her radical design. Austen wants to convince the reader that female nature is simply inexplicable and that propriety must restrain this natural amoral force. This however, alludes to the constraints imposed on women by patriarchal society. It is interesting to note how Austen negotiates it.

The episode that begins and ends in Eliza's infidelity to Brandon upholds the truth that the passionate excesses of women ought to be checked. Brandon fears that beneath the romantic refinement of the girl lurks a woman's sexual appetite, which is both 'common' and 'dangerous'. The

anxieties Brandon unwittingly reveals suggest Austen's unmistakable critical insight into the twin imperatives that stabilized patriarchal society: men want women to be passionate but they also want to retain control over the passion. This anxiety explains why women in this society must experience so problematic a relation to their own desire. In order to win the husband necessary to their social position, women must gratify men's desires by concealing whatever genuine emotions they feel so as to allow men to believe that they have all the power. Women must use the allure of 'romantic refinements and the evasion of manners and modesty in order to arouse male desires and lessen male anxieties'. In her first ever-completed novel *Sense and Sensibility* Jane Austen pursues the grim reality of patriarchy that is implicit in the account of the Dashwood's economic situation. However, despite its gestures towards realism, *Sense and Sensibility* repeatedly dismisses the analysis of society that realism might imply and instead embraces radicalism. But Austen's radicalism never completely banishes her realistic impulse either. If in *Sense and Sensibility* some tensions are still felt, they are from the conflict between the realism in which the action is anchored and the radical elements that Austen harnesses to this realism.

Austen is to be considered eternally modern for her ability to teach heightened subjectivity and moral discrimination. Critics such as Lionel Trilling and F.R. Leavis were confident of their ability to discern in Austen a person very much like themselves, someone who believed that a 'moral life should be led privately or domestically behind closed doors'. If Jane Austen concerned herself with social experience, it was axiomatic that this experience had been so acutely understood as to make her representations timelessly relevant: her fictitious communities were essential communities against which actual communities could be measured. Austen's rise to prominence occurred not so much in her own time but in the late nineteenth century when a literary canon was being constructed around the inherently unstable configuration of moral seriousness and political disengagement. In Austen's time every ruling--class family had its relation in the clergy. It was because the power of the church was beginning to decline under the secularizing impact of Darwin and urbanization that Matthew Arnold suggested literary studies as a spiritual and ideological replacement for waning religious faith. It was after the publication of J.E.Austen--Leigh's memoir of his aunt in 1870 that Jane Austen decisively entered the list of great

British writers. Austen, like Flaubert was engaged in the pursuit of a style in the perspective of a radical view and a transitional period of time in respect of her handling the narratives.

Mary Poovey and Isobel Armstrong hold that Austen's texts mediate between an established gentry ideology founded in ideas of untransformable hierarchy and the disruptive ideology of a rising, co modifying bourgeoisie that has a much greater respect for individualistic passion and intelligence. *Sense and Sensibility* bears the traces Napoleonic dictatorship and imperial conquest. Austen's respect is not for the bourgeoisie but for the autonomous woman who has a power founded not in money or status but in her own intrinsic wit. In their discussion of Austen, Gilbert and Guber assume that no woman would be stupid enough to enjoy submission to patriarchy and that Austen's narratives appear to defer to male authority in order for women to gain limited power. Austen remains for them (Gilbert and Guber) a writer whose vigorous awareness of patriarchal power makes it possible for women to recognize strategies of resistance. In *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne Dashwood is attractive because unconventional and rebellious. She does not speak because she finds her

companions not worth speaking to. For Austen, Marianne's silence is a refusal, an act of rebellion that threatens not just social propriety but the fundamentals of her own art. Her rebellious silence must be converted into Elinor's articulate self-repression.

It is therefore, only in Marianne's not said that the real threat lies and it is in the reconfiguration of what her not-said means that we see the real triumph of radicalism in the battle of sense and sensibility. We read Austen's novels as romantic love stories at least as the general readers consider. But a serious reader would surely find in them (novels) something else-social and economic realities of women's lives being exposed but undermined by marriage. Jane Austen in her narratives reveals the gap between sentimental ideals and the actuality of hypocritical and avaricious world that reduces people to commodities to be brokered in a marriage market. Her texts advocate the view of marriage as something that closes down all other possibilities of existence and weds women and men to a structure of bourgeois property relations.