

# Themes in sense and sensibility



Compare and contrast the sisters, Elinor and Marianne, in *Sense and Sensibility* to Cecily and Gwendolyn in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Be sure to consider the personalities of each woman as you analyze how the demands and requirements of courtship dominate her attention and her interactions with others. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood VS Cecily and Gwendolyn In this paper, I intend to show the similarities and differences between the sisters in *Sense and Sensibility* and those in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, the two main characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, represent sense and sensibility, respectively. Cecily and Gwendolyn adhere to similar principles but instead of sense, earnest is the catalyst for their development.

However as similar as the pairs may be, it is in their difference's that has much to do with how the novels play out. Sense being defined as practical intelligence; reasonable thought; something sensible or reasonable. Elinor and Fairfax fit into the definition of the word perfectly. Sensibility is defined as the capacity for feeling; mental susceptibility: capacity for being affected emotionally or intellectually. Marianne and Cecily, just like their sisters fit that definition as well. They are intensely emotional and sensitive.

The primary difference lies in their attitudes and interactions with the people around them. Elinor Dashwood is the oldest of the three sisters and is considered strong-willed and does not believe in giving in to her emotions. Her views on love are very different from Marianne's; she believes that it's best to fall in love within your class, with a sufficient amount of money in the picture, and in such a way that you would not cause problems. Elinor

demonstrates this sense through her relationship with Edward Ferrars. Her relationship and affections towards Edward are proper. She always takes into account others and how her actions will affect them.

Elinor's growing affection for Edward soon comes to a standstill when he admits his secret engagement to a childhood sweetheart. Soon after Edward comes to visit the Dashwoods he seems unhappy and seems to distance himself from Elinor. She fears that he no longer has feelings for her, but unlike her sister, does not give in to her sadness. She feels that it is her duty to remain strong for herself and her family. She understands that Edward does not love Lucy, but that he will also not dishonor her by breaking their engagement.

Elinor hides her disappointment, and continues to persuade Lucy that she feels nothing for Edward. Soon after they learn that Lucy has broken off the engagement with Edward to marry his wealthy older brother Robert. After the news of his brother's engagement Edward asks Elinor to marry him and she accepts. Marianne Dashwood has good sense but on the other hand is overwhelmed by her immoderate sensibility. Marianne demonstrates an inordinate amount of sensibility. She thinks with her heart and it causes more heartache for her than happiness.

She becomes infatuated with the dashing and handsome Mr. Willoughby, when he had arrived to her rescue, after she fell on her ankle. They begin to spend every day together and she finds herself falling for him more as time goes on. Marianne is heartbroken when Willoughby announces that he must go to London on business, not to return for at least a year. She is only to find

out that he has lied and left her to be engaged to the wealthy Miss Grey. Marianne recovers and admits that, although she loved Willoughby, she could not have been glad even if he stood by her.

In addition she also realizes that her illness from staying out in the rain was a result of just wallowing in her own grief. Marianne then commits to following Elinor in courage and good sense. As time passes Marianne matures and decides to marry the Colonel even though she feels more respect than passion for him. However, after the marriage she realizes that she truly loves him.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, earnest stands for everything that is honorable and good. The two main characters in this play are Cecily Cardew and Gwendolyn Fairfax, who believe the word earnest embodies everything they like most; only men with this name interest them. Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff, the protagonists in the play and the men both women believe to be named Earnest, place themselves into a complicated situation. The men pretend to be someone that they are not and lie to the women about being named Earnest until eventually the truth is revealed. Gwendolyn Fairfax is strong minded, speaks with authority and is a model of elegant fashion. She displays many of the same attributes that Elinor does, except for obvious differences such as her tendency to be somewhat artificial and pretentious.

Gwendolyn finds herself falling in love with Jack, who she knows as “Earnest”, a responsible and respectable young man, a major landowner and Justice of the Peace in Hertfordshire. Jack confesses his love to Gwendolyn

and she proclaims hers, which is particularly because his name is Earnest and to her the name “ seems to inspire absolute confidence” (Wilde 301). After Lady Bracknell, Gwendolyn’s mother, refuses to give her consent to the marriage, Gwendolyn and Jack, against her mother’s wishes, meet at Jack’s country estate. At his country estate, they meet Cecily, who is in love and engaged to Algernon and also believes him to be named Earnest, Gwendolyn is surprised to hear that “ Earnest” is also engaged to Cecily. Cecily being the “ Marianne” of the novel, only Cecily has noticeably more intent and somewhat malicious reasons for her behavior.

They soon find that both Jack and Algernon have lied about being named Earnest, but only to win their hearts. Cecily Cardew, Jack’s ward, is also obsessed with the name Earnest for she also believes that the name inspires absolute confidence. Cecily has fallen in love with Jack’s imaginary brother “ Earnest,” who he has created to have more time to spend with Gwendolyn. After over hearing Jack tell Gwendolyn where his country estate is, Algernon arrives and is immediately drawn to Cecily. He proclaims his love for Cecily and tells her his name is Earnest and he is Jack’s brother.

Cecily accepts his proposal and just as Gwendolyn had done, she explains that she particularly loves him for his name. Gwendolyn and Cecily arrive to find that they have been deceived and confront the men. They confess that they have lied on about their names and neither of them is named Earnest. In conclusion, the sisters have quite a lot in common fundamentally, but also differentiate as well. Each novel has one sister on either side of the spectrum, one that can demonstrate sense and the other which can be overwhelmed by her emotions. The parallel being Elinor is to Gwendolyn as

Cecily is to Marianne, with Elinor and Marianne revolving around sense, and Gwendolyn and Cecily dealing with earnest.

Elinor and Gwendolyn are strong-minded and can maintain their composure while Cecily and Marianna give under pressure. Elinor and Gwendolyn differ in terms of attitude however; Elinor is kind and considerate while Gwendolyn can be brash and rude. Similar could be said of Cecily and Marianne, Cecily being more malicious as compared to Marianne who ultimately commits to change herself for the better and follow Elinor's example. Works Cited "Wilde, Society, and Drama" People's Light & Theatre Company.

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