

# Colonel brandon is the moral centre of sense and sensibility

Literature



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Sense and Sensibility was the first of Jane Austen's published works. Though initially called "Elinor and Marianne", Austen jettisoned both the title, the central characters and the epistolary mode in which it was originally written, but kept the essential theme: the necessity of finding a workable middle ground between "sense" and "sensibility", that is, passion and reason. The contrast between the sisters' characters is eventually resolved as they each find love and lasting happiness. This leads some to believe that the book's title describes how Elinor and Marianne find a balance between sense and sensibility in life and love.

Austen is particularly known for her sharp portraits of early-nineteenth-century upper-class English society and for her remarkable talent in creating complex, vibrant characters. Sense and Sensibility is no exception. The novel is a sharply detailed portraiture of the decorum surrounding courtship and the importance of marriage to a woman's livelihood and comfort. Two sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, with their mother and younger sister, Margaret, are forced into poverty through the untimely death of their father, Mr.

Dashwood was previously married and all of the Dashwood fortune and the estate of Norland are then bequeathed to John, his son by his first marriage and his selfish wife Fanny Ferrars, leaving the Dashwood women practically penniless. Elinor and Marianne are polar opposites where love is concerned. Marianne is the incurable romantic and Elinor is the practical, down-to-earth person. Elinor falls in love with Edward Ferrars and Marianne, for Willoughby. They spend happy moments in the company of these men and hope to be married to them.

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However, Edward turns out to be engaged to another girl, Lucy Steele and Willoughby plans to marry Miss Grey, a rich debutante. Next, Elinor learns of the marriage of Lucy Steele to Mr. Ferrars. Marianne goes through a period of depression and falls seriously ill. Elinor feels miserable to think of her Edward united with a lesser woman. Marianne renews her enthusiasm for life and starts realizing the worth of Colonel Brandon. Elinor is relieved when Edward reveals the truth to her and then proposes. Marianne marries Colonel Brandon and Elinor marries Edward Ferrars.

Elinor is entirely sensible and prudent; her sister, Marianne, is very emotional and never moderate. Margaret, the youngest sister, is young and good-natured. Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters stay at Norland for a few months, mostly because of the promising friendship developing between Elinor and Edward Ferrars, Fanny's shy, but very kind, brother. Elinor likes Edward, but is not convinced her feelings are mutual; Fanny is especially displeased by their apparent regard, as Edward's mother wants him to marry very well. Austen gives us a sketch of Brandon quite early on, in Chapter Seven.

Brandon is almost taciturn; he is the strong, silent type. He is a romantic, and although I have lost the reference, I have read a theory that all army officers are romantics at heart, looking for dragons to slay and fair maidens to impress. Be that as it may, Brandon soon falls in love with Marianne; indeed, his friend Sir John Middleton points this out to the Dashwood women as early as Chapter Nine: " Poor Brandon! He is quite smitten already, and he is very well worth setting your cap at, I can tell you, in spite of all this tumbling about and spraining of ancles [sic]"

When young, beautiful and over-romantic Marianne first meets Colonel Brandon — a close friend of Sir John Middleton, she thinks that he is much too old for love at over 35. Silent and grave, he doesn't seem animated enough to be capable of falling in love at his age. She also sneers at his talk of ' flannel waistcoats' which she associates with age and infirmity. Colonel Brandon, on the other hand, falls in love with Marianne at first sight and remains constantly devoted. He first sees her playing the piano and singing and admires her from then on.

In spite of the fact that they do share an interest in music and that he is not vulgar like the Jennings, Marianne doesn't have much time for him. She forgets all about him when handsome and lively Willoughby appears on the scene. Willoughby also sneers at Colonel Brandon calling him: " the kind of man whom everybody speaks well of and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see and nobody remembers to talk to. " Marianne agrees, but Elinor who likes the Colonel is upset by Willoughby's disrespect.

When Willoughby, who does love Marianne to some extent, breaks her heart by marrying the very wealthy Miss Grey for her money Colonel Brandon decides to tell Elinor what he knows about him. His seeing Marianne in such a state upsets him very much. Elinor discovers that Colonel Brandon has a romantic past. He fell in love a long time ago with Eliza a ward of his father. She married his brother to please his father although the brother did not love her and treated him unkindly. Colonel Brandon tried to help her but couldn't save her from becoming a ' fallen woman' who left his brother and had had affairs with other men.

Eliza left her child in Colonel Brandon's care. She was a headstrong schoolgirl and became seduced by Willoughby who left her penniless and in a state of despair. Colonel Brandon's tragic, romantic past appeals to Marianne and makes her think much less of Willoughby. When she becomes sick and almost dies because her heart is so badly broken his devotion to her makes her see him in a new light and she gradually becomes affectionate towards him. She also appreciates his kindness in giving Edward, Elinor's boyfriend, a parish so that he can become a Minister. The narrator says, " In

Colonel Brandon alone, of all her new acquaintance, did Elinor find a person who could in any degree claim the respect of abilities, excite the interest of friendship, or give pleasure as a companion. . . . Colonel Brandon, unfortunately for himself, had no such encouragement to think only of Marianne, and in conversing with Elinor he found the greatest consolation for the total indifference of her sister" Realizing how good Colonel Brandon is, Marianne agrees to marry him. It is a marriage based on strong esteem and lively friendship on her side at the start.

Colonel Brandon's character can be much likened to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice's* Darcy. Elizabeth is full of prejudice for him in the onset of the novel, just as Marianne is for Colonel Brandon. It is Marianne's childishness owing to her ripe age, which blinds her towards Colonel Brandon's worth. Just as Elizabeth is attracted to Wickham, overshadowing Darcy's love, Marianne, similarly finds Willoughby worthy of her feelings and Colonel Brandon worthy of contempt. Austen asks us to consider Brandon's status as a gentleman, re-examine it, turn it inside out, and think about it again.

The subplot about the two Elizas (Williams) is a contrast between a licentious and libidinous Willoughby and a "caring and sharing" Brandon. He undoubtedly is one of the greatest heroes of Austen, embodying morality, commitment and honesty. Though many critics have considered Colonel Brandon to be dull and boring, he nonetheless remains the moral centre of the novel. All the flaws in Willoughby are further deepened by the good in Colonel Brandon. He stays by his love and his loved ones at the time of need and despair.

He justly gets his deserved prize in Marianne's consent for marriage. Thus, in spite of the reserved and introvert nature, Colonel Brandon's character appeals to the readers due to the goodness, honesty and morality preserved in the same. Modern readers and critics, on the whole, do not consider *Sense and Sensibility* to be Austen's best work. Her characterization is flat in parts, her two heroines, Elinor and Marianne, are both too extreme and two-dimensional to be truly sympathetic, and many have found Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon very dull indeed.

The story is somewhat unsatisfying because Marianne's change of heart and her regard for Colonel Brandon are hastily discussed in a paragraph at the end of the novel, and the relationships between Edward and Elinor and the Colonel and Marianne are not well fleshed-out. The ending is also regarded as Austen's weakest, as elements, such as Lucy's elopement with Robert, and Marianne and the Colonel's marriage, seem to come from left-field and are badly justified by the text. However, this novel was an auspicious

beginning for Austen, and is a valuable look at the start of her writing career and the beginning of her development as a novelist.

Nonetheless, *Sense and Sensibility* makes its mark through the careful and sensitive portrayal of the blooming of love in less-expected places. Colonel Brandon is a constant reminder of humanity and love where characters like the philandering Willoughby and the weak Edward Ferrars fail to do so and earn our contempt and prejudice in the process. Colonel Brandon is truly a figure of difference, a good one obviously, amongst the other weak and immature characters of the novel. Marianne's true maturity is to be accounted in her wise decision to marry Brandon and let go of her childish and foolish emotions for the undeserving Willoughby.

#### Reference

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