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CLASSICISM V/S ROMANTISISM: A STUDY OF TEXTUAL INTERVENTION IN THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF JANE AUSTEN'S SENSE AND SENSIBILITY INTO THE MOVIE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to make a comparison between the characters, Elinor Dashwood and Marianne Dashwood, the two Dashwood sisters from the novel *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen. The former, who is the eldest of the three Dashwood sisters, is highly reserved and shows a greater tolerance in character than her younger sister, who is highly romantic in nature. So, to be precise, we can say that Elinor stands for the 'sense' half of the novel; whereas, her sister Marianne represents sensibility. In other words, one stands for Classicism, while the other represents Romanticism; two important movements of English Literature. Elinor follows strict rules in life and is highly restrained, like Classicism that follows strict rules. Marianne is highly spirited in nature; she is too impulsive, passionate and straightforward, like Romanticism. Through this novel, Austen is trying to imply that too much of sense or sensibility is not good; there must be a proper balance between the two in a man's character. In order to make this idea clear, the novel was adapted, using the theory of textual intervention, into the movie released in 1995 (directed by Anglee).

Keywords: Jane Austen, sense, sensibility, Classicism, Romanticism, adaptation, textual intervention.

No introduction is necessary for Jane Austen's book *Sense and Sensibility*. When it was first published in 1811, readers could only learn that it was "by a lady" in the caption. The Dashwood sisters, their mother, and the various issues they ran into in their love lives are all depicted in the book.

The study examines the literary texts' adaptations or transformations into movie scripts. As has frequently been stated, literary adaptations are thought to be a better way to introduce the general public to the literary classics of a time period (the works of Jane Austen). A work will frequently have numerous intricate concepts and words that the general reader may not be able to understand. Making a literary work into a movie is one way to do this and make it understandable to the general public.

Numerous scenes from the original text must frequently be shortened or changed to better suit the tastes of the audience. This is accomplished by the textual intervention method, which entails the conversion of a text into a motion picture. Since text adaptation requires "cutting" it up, it improves language awareness while providing insight into the works being studied. It clarifies discourse and presents a different (re)reading of the original material.

Jane Austen was very concerned about the excessive "sensibility" that was common in the romantic novels of the second half of the eighteenth century, which gave importance to people's emotional and sensitive attitudes rather than their reasoning faculties. She thus wanted to raise awareness of the risks associated with "excessive sensibility" through this work. Elinor and Marianne, the sister characters in this book, stand in for "sense" and "sensibility," respectively.

Elinor, as mentioned before, is the "sense" part of Jane Austen's title *Sense and Sensibility* since she is the intelligent and quiet oldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood. At the start of the book, she is 19 years old. Even at this young age, her parents respect or have confidence in her. In the movie, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood have a conversation about depending on her to take care of her younger siblings in the days to come following her parents' passing. On his deathbed, Mr. Henry Dashwood is relieved to entrust Elinor, who is still a little girl, with the care of his widow and younger daughters. She prioritises the welfare and interests of her family and friends over her own and suppresses her own powerful emotions in a way that makes others mistake her for being heartless or cold-hearted. She always feels a tremendous sense of duty to them. Considering her financial obligations, Elinor keeps her love for Edward Ferrars, her sister-in-law's (Fanny's) brother, a secret.

In the adaptation, Elinor is shown as a girl who is twenty-seven years old; this is deliberately done to bring out the mental pangs of remaining a spinster even at such a late age and Marianne was aged sixteen in the novel, but is around twenty in the movie. Another change that was brought about in the adaptation was that Marianne in the novel was very fond of Cowper, but the Marianne of Ang Lee's movie was very fond of and often quoted William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 116". Such changes are brought about to suit the 'situations' of the time; another instance of textual intervention.

Many characters like Lady Middleton and her children, Anne Steele and her many flirtatious relationships, Eliza – the Colonel's ward - and the like which are there in the novel, are either omitted or given minor roles for just the sake of it, in the movie version. Edward's warm-hearted relationship with the Dashwood women, his close friendship with Margaret, Fanny's snobbishness, etc. are explained in detail in the novel; but these scenes are either cut short, or not included at all, to keep the duration of the movie in check; the time frame has to be kept in mind while adapting a novel, especially a lengthy one like this novel.

This is evident in almost all their actions. Elinor seems not at all bothered about how shy Edward is; his good manners are what attracts her to him rather than any of his passionate behavior or good looks. Edward seems to play along with Elinor in the library when they were looking for Margaret. His nature is very pleasing and Elinor admires him greatly. She even confesses to her sister Marianne that:

I have seen a great deal of him, have studied his sentiments and heard his opinion on subjects of literature and taste; and, upon the whole, I venture to pronounce that his mind is well – informed, his enjoyment of books exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his observation just and correct, and his taste delicate and pure. His abilities in every respect as much upon acquaintance as his manners and person. At first sight, his address is certainly not striking; and his person can hardly be called handsome... (*Sense and Sensibility*, 20)

These words from Elinor shows the warmth that she has for Edward, even when he is not physically that handsome; she gives importance to the intellect and inner qualities of Edward. When questioned by Marianne she replies that 'she thinks highly of him- that she greatly esteems him' (pp.21). This reply of hers enrages Marianne to a great extent.

Marianne on the other hand, is truly passionate about everything around her. Her adieu to the yew trees, before leaving the Norland estate is explained in detail in the novel. She always dreamt that her suitor would appear through the rain storm on a horse back and then they would fall in love with each other. This is what that exactly happened when she met Willoughby for the first time. Elinor was always against the explicit show of affection between the two, but her mother also supported Marianne; which really infuriated Elinor. Marianne kept on complaining that Edward lacked the vigorousness of a passionate lover; she once complained to her mother that:

Oh! Mamma, how spiritless, how tame was Edward's manner in reading to us last night! I felt for my sister most severely. Yet she bore it with so much composure, she seemed scarcely to notice it. I could hardly keep my seat. (*Sense and Sensibility*, 17)

Elinor's adherence to strict rules is shown through the emotionless countenance that she displayed when Lucy Steele confided about her secret engagement to Edward. She was stunned for a while, but soon retains her composure and behaves as if nothing happened. At first, she believed everything that Lucy told her; but towards the end of the novel, we can see that Lucy proved to be a scheming gold-digger. Edward was disinherited by his mother, for not going back on his promise to marry Lucy, and she prepared a will bequeathing all the wealth to Robert, his younger brother; thus, Lucy started to shift her affection slowly towards Robert and finally married him.

Both the sisters' treatment of colonel Brandon is also worth mentioning. Colonel Brandon falls for Marianne, immediately after seeing her; but she was not empathetic enough to at least befriend him. Elinor, on the other hand, develops a deep friendly affection for the Colonel and learns the truth about Willoughby's villainous character from him. Marianne never once does understand the true intentions of the colonel; he wants to protect her always and seeing her happy is more than enough to make him happy. The charming and dashing Willoughby impregnates the Colonel's ward Eliza and is disinherited by his wealthy aunt; here, Willoughby also proves to be a money-seeker as he runs away from the Dashwood's' cottage at Devonshire and marries a rich heiress Ms. Grey, leaving Marianne heartbroken and sick. Later on, when she knows about the truth, she admits to Elinor that Willoughby would not have been happy with love alone, he would have left her sooner or later.

When Marianne falls sick at the Palmer's after realizing the truth about Willoughby, it is the colonel that brings her mother to the mansion, in spite of the bad weather and gives moral support and company to the family, especially to Marianne in particular. When he understands the situation in which Edward was, after being disinherited by his mother, the Colonel provides his parish cottage to Edward to do services there and lead a peaceful life with Elinor. Slowly, Marianne starts to develop affection towards the colonel, whom she used to think was much older than her, because of his trustworthy nature and caring attitude for the others. The film ends with the marriage scene; the lavish wedding between Marianne and the colonel, gold coins are shown thrown up to show his immense wealth. In this novel, the character of Marianne undergoes the greatest change, as she tries to become a little more matured like her elder sister.

In short, we can say that Jane Austen is trying to bring out the difference in the nature of the two sisters by contrasting the two major literary movements of English literature—Classicism and Romanticism. Despite being two significant landmarks of the English Literary Period, the two differ substantially. Elinor represents "Classicism," whilst Marianne represents "romanticism" at its most extreme. The strict adherence to culture, clarity of structure, perfection, restrained emotions, explicit appeal to the intellect, etc. that Elinor also possessed, was required during the age of classicism when everything, including art and architecture, had to adhere to many rules and theories that were confounded at the time. In contrast, romanticism was a creative, literary, musical, and philosophical movement that placed an emphasis on emotions and imagination, much like Marianne's personality did. The author claims that having both in excess is not beneficial. The sisters realize that in order to achieve a happy and peaceful family life, there should be a proper balance between the two emotions – both rationality and emotions should blend in a perfect ratio in each individual.

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