

THE ADAPTATION OF JANE AUSTEN'S *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*

**From Novel to Screenplay to Film:
The Adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility***

by

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Abstract

This study of *Sense and Sensibility* comprising three main sections and a concluding appendix, arises out of the current interest in the adaptation of Jane Austen's novels for the cinema. A comparison of the novel with the final production, a comparison that has as its objective the identification of those areas of convergence and divergence, additions and omissions, becomes possible with the publication of Emma Thompson's screenplay and diary of the film-making process.

I concentrate in the introduction on the subject of adaptation, providing a contextual background that shows the sometimes fractious relationship between literary critic, writer and cinematic artist.

The following chapter contains a broad biographical and critical background of Austen that establishes the social milieu out of which she wrote. This provides a ground against which to view the screenplay, a comparison which forms the subject of the following section.

My ultimate purpose in this, the final chapter, is to reveal the extent to which both director and screen-play writer recognize the novel's subtleties, its inherent social commentary, changing only in order to emphasize and to interpret.

The appendix with which I conclude the study consists of some background information pertinent to the film's director, Ang Lee.

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INTRODUCTION

Film and Literature

After many decades of neglect, film is finally receiving some recognition and status in literary and academic circles. In the 1973 edition of the *Guide to College Courses in Film and Television*, published by the American Film Institute, there were 613 schools offering film related courses. Of these, 139 taught film courses as part of the department of English's curriculum.¹ The combined study of literature and film is one example of the ways in which criticism can collapse genre determined borders. This is not to say that the potential, one might even the necessity, for an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of the arts is a purely current phenomenon. In 1801 for example, Hegel criticized the attitude among philosophers to think of the arts in terms of restrictions. Instead Hegel searched for the underlying similarities in all works of art:

¹ See Self in *"Film & Literature: Parameters of a Discipline."* A decade later, Self reports that the AFI had set the number closer to 200, an increase of about 40 percent p.15.

Thus the genuine mode of poetic representation is the inner perception and the poetic imagination itself. And since all types of art share in this mode, poetry runs through them all, and develops independently in each . . . Such, then, is the organic totality of the several arts; the external art of architecture, the objective art of sculpture, and the subjective arts of painting, music, and poetry. The higher principle from which these are derived we have found in the types of art, the symbolic, the classical, and the romantic, which form the universal phases of the idea of beauty itself . . . Thus what the particular arts realize in individual artistic creations are, according to the philosophic conception, simply the universal types of the self-unfolding idea of beauty. Out of the external realization of this idea arises the wide Pantheon of art, whose architect and builder is the self-developing spirit of beauty, for the completion of which, however, the history of the world will require its evolution of countless ages. ²

The twentieth century, comments Keith Cohen in *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange*, began in a "flurry of artistic hybrids." (1) It was characterized by "the gesture of drawing on one art for the enrichment of another . . . Today we can speak, without metaphor and exaggeration, of musicians learning from painters, writers learning from dance, and dramatists learning from cinema." (Cohen 1) At the turn of the century, when the cinema was viewed as "a fantastic amalgamation" (1) of all the arts, Georges Méliès spoke of cinema's capacity to meld together various artistic and aesthetic impulses. ³

Film studies are as much a natural extension of the narrative tradition as they are an extension of the visual arts: painting, sculpture, architecture and music. The theory and scholarship surrounding adaptation, the nature of screenplays, goals of interpretation, theories

² See Hegel's "Introduction to the Philosophy of Art," translated by Joseph Loewenburg in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, pp. 355-355.

³ See Cohen p. 1-10.

of meaning has significantly matured in the last decade since Richardson argued for a direct correlation between the study of film and literature:

I should prefer a climate in which everything written, including of course film scripts, was legitimately considered a part of the study of literature, and it is in this broad sense that I shall argue that film is a branch of literature.
(15)

In 1996, at least a dozen periodicals, many of them published by universities, are now dedicated to the serious study of film. Moreover, literary criticism reveals an increasing tendency to include the cinema in its area of study. George Bluestone's classic work *Novels into Film* (1966) was one of the first full-length books to combine the study of both art forms. Since then Geoffrey Wagner's *The Novel And The Cinema* (1975), Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse* (1978), Michael Klein and Gillian Parker's *The English Novel and the Movies* (1981), Joy Boyum's *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* (1985), Neil Sinyard's *Filming Literature* (1986), Anthony Davies's *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook and Akira Kurosawa* (1988), Seymour Chatman's *Coming to Terms* (1990), Samuel Crowl's *Shakespeare Observed: Studies in Performance on Stage and Screen* (1992), and Robert Giddings, Keith Shelby and Chris Wesley's *Screening the Novel* (1990) are evidence of a steadily growing body of scholarship that includes the study of literature and film.

In its broadest sense adaptation is the act of producing a work of art by adapting elements from another work of art. Since its earliest days, the cinema has borrowed ideas and plots from the older narrative arts, especially the novel and the play, at times with a measure

of success, often with varying degrees of failure. Classical literature has traditionally provided the cinema with ready made stories and themes as well as a ready resource in audience interest and enthusiasm. George Bluestone notes that a sampling of motion pictures from RKO, Paramount, and Universal during the years 1934-35, shows about one-third of the feature films made during those years were derived from novels. In other studies, nearly fifty percent of major productions were reputed to have originated from novels alone.⁴ Hundreds of "silent" one reel shorts were inspired by literary sources including, for example, Dickens' novels, *Romeo and Juliet* (1908), *King Lear* (1909), *Ben Hur* (1907), and *The Scarlet Letter* (1909). The advent of the "multiple reeler" and the expansion of the film industry in Europe further encompassed the adaptation of literature to the screen. For several years beginning around 1908, the rage for lengthy classical works, which included novels, swept across Western Europe. The *Film d'Art*, production company was founded in Paris in 1908 for the sole purpose of bringing quality stage and literary productions to the mass-oriented screen; however the pretentious, grandiose stage-bound productions died out quickly. The early screen adaptations of novels and plays, including those made by Adolphe Zukor's *Famous Players in Famous Plays in America*, were often little more than static, uninspired photographed reproductions. They virtually halted the development of cinema for several years, because they had little or no regard to the particular strengths of motion pictures. They

⁴ See Bluestone p.3. Also, in *The Novel and the Cinema*, Wagner refers to a well known doctoral dissertation by Lester Asheim and Hortense Powdermaker's book both of which studied the percentage of novels made into films. He quotes a 1934 survey that states that one-third of the total output of RKO, Paramount and Universal were films adapted from novels p.26.

were, however, crucial in other ways: they showed the inevitable difficulties of "translations," how the written word expressed in the convention of the theatre was dull on the screen, and so the essential differences between the film and the novel and play required a complete rethinking of the medium's strengths; it brought better educated audiences to the movie theaters, thereby enhancing the medium's prestige; it convinced film production companies of the commercial viability of feature-length films, particularly those films adapted from classic works by well known writers. Most importantly, these early models shaped and set the standards for the increasingly sophisticated adaptations that were to follow; however it wasn't until D.W. Griffith⁵ that literary stories and plays started to be told in cinematic terms.

During the forties and fifties, William Faulkner,⁶ Scott Fitzgerald, Aldous Huxley,⁷ Tennessee Williams,⁸ Arthur Miller⁹ and Graham Greene¹⁰ were among many serious writers

⁵ D.W. Griffith was, of course, the single most important figure in the history of not only American film but also as one of the most influential figures in the development of world cinema as an art form. He personally directed an amazing total of some 450 films, a pace of output unequaled by any filmmaker since. See Cook pp. 61- 109.

⁶ Faulkner screenplays include: *Today We Live* (from his own short story) 1933; *The Road to Glory* (co-sc.) 1936; *Slave Ship* (additional dialogue) 1937; *To Have and Have Not* (co-sc.) 1945; *The Big Sleep* (co-sc.) 1946; *Land of the Pharoahs* (co-story, co-sc.) 1955.

⁷ Huxley's work in film includes: *Pride and Prejudice* 1940, *Madame Curie* 1943, *Jane Eyre* 1944, *A Woman's Vengeance* 1948, *Prelude to Fame* (story basis only, UK) 1950.

⁸ William's work in film includes: *The Glass Menagerie* 1950, *A Streetcar named Desire* 1951, *The Rose Tattoo* 1955, *Baby Doll* 1956, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* 1958, *Suddenly last Summer* 1959, *The Fugitive Kind* 1960, *Summer and Smoke*, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* 1961, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *Period of Adjustment* 1962, *The Night of the Iguana* 1964, *This property Is Condemned* 1966, *Boom!* (adapted from his play "The Milktrain . . .") 1968, *Last of the Mobile Hot-Shots* 1970.

⁹ Many of Miller's plays have been adapted to film including: *Death of a Salesman*, *All My Sons* and *The Crucible*. The playwright's screen work included the screenplay for *The Misfits* 1961, and Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* 1978.

¹⁰ Greene has written a number of important screenplays, and many of his novels have been adapted to the screen by others. In the 30's he was a film critic for the *Spectator*. His film work includes: (novel/story basis) -- *Orient Express* 1934; *This Gun for Hire*, *Went the Day Well/48 Hours* 1942; *Ministry of Fear* 1944; *Confidential Agent* 1945; *The Man Within / The Smugglers / The Fugitive* (from *The Labyrinthine Ways*) 1947; *The Heart of the Matter* 1953; *The End of the Affair* 1955; *Across the Bridge*, *Shortcut to Hell* (from

who worked for Hollywood. Initially viewing the cinema with high hopes, many of them eventually became bitter about the film-making process. Their pessimism was not unfounded, for the screen adaptations of the time often seriously violated screenplays and the original text of the author. Graham Greene attacked the film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for its "grim determination on Shakespeare's part to earn for once a Universal certificate;" and *Arms and the Man* for its "simple rather adolescent American manner which seems insolubly linked with high cheekbones, fraternities and curious shoes." (Evans 211) He accused Hollywood of compulsively grinding stories through its dream machine:

The film producer can alter anything. He can turn your tragedy of East End Jewry into a musical comedy at Palm Springs if he wishes . . . Even if a script be followed word by word there are those gaps of silence which can be filled with the banal embrace . . . We [writers] have to learn our craft more painfully, more meticulously. (Adamson 105-106, 152)

Even in the hands of a sensitive filmmaker, the complex texture of a novel and its distant cousin, the screenplay, always runs the risk of damage by the very nature of translation from one medium to the other. In trying to capture the "spirit" of a novel, a film version can become crippled by compromises. Films that restrict themselves to the book in "external faithfulness" to plot, character and setting do not always work. Films that adopt "literary styles" where the film image is dependent on, or subordinated to the text often result in little

This Gun for Hire 1957; *The Quiet American* 1958, *Travels with my Aunt* 1972; *England Made Me* 1973. (Screenplays) -- *21 Days / 21 Days Together* (co-sc.) 1937/1940; *Brighton Rock / Young Scarface* (co-sc.) 1947; *The Fallen Idol* (from own story "The Basement Room") 1948; *The Third Man* 1949; *La Mano dello Straniero / The Stranger's Hand* (co-sc. It./UK) 1953; *Saint Joan* 1957; *Our Man in Havana* (from own novel) 1959; *The Comedians* (from own novel) 1967.

more than dull, filmed dialogue. A movie version of a book based on "internal faithfulness," where the "spirit," or essence and meaning is captured, but substantial changes have been made to the plot, setting or character, can be successful. However, too many changes can also lead to problems. Orson Welles' nightmarishly expressionistic version of *Macbeth* (1948)¹¹ was, for example, more of a "recreation" of Shakespeare than it was an adaptation.

Virginia Woolf and others have opposed the idea that the interrelatedness of the cinema and the novel would strengthen the effect of both single art forms, believing instead that it would weaken it. Woolf thought that the alliance between cinema and literature was unnatural and disastrous to both forms, but especially to that of the novel.¹² On the other hand, Alain Resnais felt that adaptations compromised the "art" of the film. He refused to shoot an adaptation of a novel on the grounds that "*to make a film of it is a little like reheating a meal*" (Boyum 14). As already mentioned, Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1961) was among the first full length works that showed the close relationship between film and literature and depicted how the language of the cinema has many parallels found in literature. However, even Bluestone concluded that film and novel were essentially antithetical forms, and that adaptations, even at their very best, will always be lesser works than their sources. Bluestone rejected the idea that one art form could be "reshaped" into another, nor did he believe that adaptation reflected a kind of melding together of the two media. He felt that the

¹¹ Welles' lifelong love affair with Shakespeare is legendary. *Macbeth* was generally dismissed by critics as a failure. The poor soundtrack and several mediocre performances undermined his daring unconventional approach. See Cook pp.407-436.

¹² See Boyum p.6.

conventions shared by both the novel and the cinema drew them together momentarily in the form of the screenplay, but it also polarized them. Ingmar Bergman who also disliked literary adaptations, believed the cinema to be more direct than the novel and that one did not need to depend on the printed word to express emotion.¹³ Consider these two comments made respectively, by George Bluestone and Ingmar Bergman:

Like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point, then diverge. At the intersection, the book and shooting-script are almost indistinguishable. But where the lines diverge, they not only resist conversion; they also lose resemblance to each other. At the farthest remove, novel and film, like all exemplary art, have, within their conventions that make them comprehensible to a given audience, made maximum use of their material. At this remove, what is peculiarly novelistic cannot be converted without destroying an integral part of each. (63)

Film has nothing to do with literature; the character and substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict . . . We should avoid making films out of books. The irrational dimension of a literary work, the germ of its existence, is often untranslatable into visual terms -- and it, in turn, destroys the special, irrational dimensions of the film. (Wagner 29)

The Russian filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky,¹⁴ like Bergman, and Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni, also disliked adaptations. He believed that literature appealed more directly to the intellect, and film appealed more directly to the emotions and the imagination. In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky asserted that great works of literature should never be put to film; instead he thought it preferable to adapt "lesser" works, particularly those which

¹³ For further reading, see Ingmar Bergman's autobiography, *The Magic Lantern*.

¹⁴ Although Tarkovsky disliked films made from literary sources, he did make films based on novels. His third feature film, *Solaris*, is based on the science fiction novel by Stanislaw Lem. The film, under the guise of a science fiction story related a moving parable of love and life. See Cook pp.768-770.

contain something "cinematic" in them already.¹⁵ The relationship between literature and film has traditionally been a tenuous one. Even today, film is still regarded as the "lesser" art form, a kind of bastard art based on the conventions of literature, drama, painting and music. It does have an affinity to all of these, but it has also has something that distinguishes it. Its visual nature has the potential to express a power of immediacy and realism that is unlike any other medium, including painting. In addition, the camera has the capacity to capture on screen a sense of the irrational or otherworldliness. The capacity of film to depict dreams, fantasy and memory is closest to that of actual human experience because we fantasize and dream in images just as we project ideas into the future or recall the past in "pictures." Tarkovsky described the ability of the film medium to depict the irrational in this way:

It is hard to imagine that a concept like artistic image could ever be expressed in a precise thesis, easily formulated and understandable. It is not possible, nor would one wish it to be so. I can only say that the [film] image stretches out into infinity, and leads to the absolute. And even what is known as the "idea" of the image, many dimensional and with many meanings, cannot, in the very nature of things, be put into words. But it does find expression in art. When thought is expressed in an artistic image, it means that an exact form has been found for it, the form that comes nearest to conveying the author's world, to making incarnate his longing for the ideal.
(104)

The filmmaker's task to find the ideal images that will breathe life not only into his film but also to the novel being presented on the screen, is a process that is fraught with technical and artistic challenges. As Bluestone and others have pointed out, film and novel share many

¹⁵ For further reading, see *Andrey Tarkovsky/Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*.

similarities, but they "work" in very different ways. Both depend on character(s) and their interactions, events, conflicts and resolutions to forward the narratives. Both media tell their stories within a set space and time frame, whether it is a day or a lifetime. Dialogue is important to both whether it is spoken by an actor or written on the page. Setting too, is important, but whereas literature depends on words to create a picture, film is more direct. Film presents the physical world in concrete terms and images, the novel's world of ideas is expressed exclusively through words. Because film and novel share similar building blocks, an adaptation, a hybrid of both media, has in theory, the potential to draw out the strengths of both. This is particularly true if a novel's themes and qualities are predisposed for cinematic expression. In general, works that rely to a certain extent on physical action for their development are more adaptable to film because they help to bridge the gap between the two modes of expression. Intellectual and emotional elements of a novel *can* however, also be successfully adapted to film, although attempts to translate purely novelistic traits such as stream of consciousness, something Joseph Strick tried to do in his 1967 version of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, have not always been entirely successful.

Reading fiction is always more of an interior process and film, more of an exterior one. Fiction is able to describe thought, the analysis of thought and abstract ideas better than film, and in the past, critics viewed this aspect of film making as a serious limitation. However, since the French "*New Wave*" movement, a period of radical change in the cinema, the ability of film to portray the interior life of a character has grown in sophistication. Films such as Federico Fellini's *Otto e mezzo* /8 1/2 (1963), Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*/ *The*

Forgotten Ones (1950), Andrey Tarkovsky's *Mirror/Zerkalo* (1974), are all masterpieces of film art that have developed filmic ways of expressing a character's internal thought and emotion. The camera can *penetrate* the inner life of a character, as Robert Bresson demonstrates in *Diary of a Country Priest*, and psychology and thought processes can be traced physically, as they have been in the films of Bergman, Antonioni, Tarkovsky and others. Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood/My name is Ivan* (1962), is as full of visual beauty, as it is a harrowing depiction of an orphan boy who fights behind enemy lines during WW II. Tarkovsky's skill at penetrating a child's inner experience as he is forced to become an adult before he is ready, is both nightmarish and intensely lyrical.

The bulk of motion picture adaptations often consist of clumsy literal translations from one medium to the other without regard for the particular characteristics of either. Despite the justly deserved criticism at times, by both film and literary critics, adaptations cannot be ignored and many good films based on literary sources, have been made. A successful movie version of the novel can extend the pleasure of the writer's work. For example, the movie made of E.M. Forster's book, *A Room with a View* (1986), captures the din and mindless chatter at the *Pensione Bertolini*, and the dark interiors of the heavy curtained rooms at *Windy Corners* as well, or perhaps even better than does the novel. Because of the cinema's visual capacity, Forster's "views" of Florence: the melodrama, the shadows, the Christian imagery, the violets, the blood, Giotto and Michelangelo, Edwardian manners and Italian exuberance, all highly visual elements, have a "natural potential" to be put to film.

Some novels are more "visual" than others in the sense that they lend themselves to

the transformation from page to screen more easily than others. Petrie points out that Dickens' novels, for example, "*have from the beginning over-stepped the bounds of print*" (75) Dickens' works, like Austen's books "sharpen" the reader's "inner" eye through the novels' surface descriptions or dialogue, creating unforgettable characters in unforgettable situations. Austen's novels are not visual in the way that Dickens' are: he provides lengthy description and settings that easily transpose to film. Her books, though they lack Dickens' extended sketches are, however, visual in the sense that the writer's wording and dialogue is so concise, so discreetly biting, keen, and penetrating that individuals reveal themselves with astonishing clarity and invite visual interpretation.

Not all novels that evoke the sense of the visual, however, are easily transposed to the screen. Thomas Hardy's novels, for example, resist adaptation even though they are rich in description and imagery. It is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, for a filmmaker to translate certain literary conventions to film. The poetic panoramas in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for example, are both symbolic *and* actual. In the book, the landscape seems to be an entity that envelops Tess in a dreadful fatalism and an aura of doom. The vistas in Polanski's *Tess* (1979), are depicted as a sentimental celebration of the English countryside: the dancing scenes which take place in the enclosure on the village green, and the lush meadow setting of the dairy farm at Talbothay's are two examples. The film is less brooding, with in fact only two scenes suggesting the oppressive landscape: the conclusion at Stonehenge where Tess awakens from her sleep at dawn and the turnip picking scene in the winter fields. Another central difficulty in adapting Hardy's novels is that parts of the book,

when transferred to the screen, seem overtly melodramatic to modern audiences. Polanski makes his version of the novel more believable to modern sensibilities by toning down the more exaggerated elements. For example, in the novel Angel plays a harp but Polanski has him play a flute. The director also eliminates two of the novel's more theatrical scenes: Angel's sleep-walking episode in the family vault and Tess' act of self-mutilation.

Despite the many similarities between them, the presentation of material on the screen is inherently different from that of the novel. Dramatization, transition, point of view are all governed according to the perimeters and possibilities of the two media, and change to the original text is unavoidable. For example, in film, the objective point of view is the typical position of the camera, but narrated novels usually offer a constantly voiced, and therefore more subjective vantage point. A novel might have a first person narrator, multiple view points or an unreliable narrator such as the one in *Barry Lyndon* or *Moll Flanders*. Modern film makers challenged by this often use other methods such as memories, dreams or flashbacks to give a sense of the individual point-of-view. In film, however, since the camera tends to *be* the narrator it is harder to give the sense of multiple points-of-view, or of untrustworthy and mistaken perceptions, like those of Emma Woodhouse in the Austen novel. Occasionally, a filmmaker uses a "subjective" moving camera which moves along with the character; however this technique has the disadvantage of drawing attention to itself and away from the narrative.

Film has one especially distinct advantage over literature: it gives the viewer a sense of the immediate, one that is closest to actual human experience. The viewer can *see* the

characters and the setting. He is able to *hear* the words whereas reading a novel requires the visualization and the translation of images that the writer presents. Both novels and films manipulate time, and both media use memories, dreams and flashbacks, but here once again, the filmmaker has the advantage. He can cut and edit in such a way that the film resembles, in close proximity, the flashes and chaos of the workings of the human mind. In addition film can give a superior sense of actual time passing, by actually portraying two or three minutes of an individual's time, whereas a novel cannot. The time it requires to read a scene in a novel is not related to the actual time that the action takes in the book. On the other hand, a novel is able to expand time in a way denied to film. In a novel when a writer says that a "battle rages all day," the reader envisions and accepts the writer's inflation of time, but in a film, the filmmaker must *show* the viewer, using multiple scenes, the progression of time that a novel can express in only a few words. Although the scope of a novel, as is "the raging battle" example, is superior to that of film, a film has the matchless ability to give a sense of the panorama and drama of the battle.

A film is limited by a time scheme, approximately two hours, but because a book is unrestricted in length it is easier for fiction to describe, for example, a character's habitual behaviour. A filmmaker cannot afford to allow a character to repeat something time and time again in order to establish the sense of routine in the individual's life. In addition, novels have unlimited time to establish an empathy between the character and the reader. Characters in a novel are more richly developed and ambiguous than in a movie because the writer builds our knowledge of a character over many pages. In fiction, the reader grows to know the

characters well, almost as if he has lived with them. A filmmaker, lacking the novelist's advantage in terms of time, must achieve the viewer's sense of empathy more quickly. He must engage the viewer's interest in the character almost immediately, but where a novel requires a lot of detail to create a "realistic" personality, a director need only give the character a few attributes in order for the viewer to identify with him.

The quality of empathy a reader often feels for an individual in a book is often deeper than that which he feels for a filmic character, although this is not always the case. Actors who play characters from novels bring to the film their own imposing personalities and reputations. A film adaptation can be radically altered with a change in casting, and expectations about a film are created in part about the director and actors in it. Hollywood [and European] film makers continue to exploit the "star system" for exactly this purpose. The filmed version of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), evokes images of Henry Fonda as Tom, Jane Darwell as Ma Joad and John Carradine as Casey. The 1939 version of *Wuthering Heights* brings to mind Olivier as Heathcliff and Merle Oberon as Cathy. Most likely the recent version of *Persuasion* will be remembered for Amanda Root's restrained performance as Anne Elliot and Ciaran Hind's masculine portrayal as Frederick Wentworth, and *Sense and Sensibility*, for Emma Thompson's roles as both Elinor Dashwood and screenwriter.

A filmmaker exerts mastery over his audience in a way that the novelist cannot. A novel activates the reader's imagination, but the reader always remains in control of its creativity. Pages of painstaking detail by the author cannot prevent the reader from having the

final word on characters, places and objects. In a way, the reader casts the characters in the novel with his own real or imagined actors. A filmmaker, employs more control over his audience by clearly defining the characters and shaping the order, the length and the speed of the events taking place. The viewer cannot skip over parts of the film as he can passages in the book, he must experience the narrative at the director's pace. Although the cinema is a verbal medium, it is primarily visual, and often the visual is more economical. What may require several pages in a novel may need no more than moments on the screen. Various branches of the narrative in the novel that are usually painstakingly developed by the writer, can either be shown almost simultaneously through cross-cutting in the film, or the story lines can develop at the same time that other aspects of the narrative, setting for example, are established. Film condenses the novel through omission of characters and incidents, but it also expands it through the ability of the camera to focus attention on small details of setting or character that aid in our understanding of the film, or through the use of lighting, music and camera viewpoint. In *Citizen Kane* (1941), for example, Welles employs depth perspective to create distortion which in turn creates a metaphor for Kane's psychological state. The brief sequence of scenes where Kane and his wife sit at breakfast at the long table require only moments to depict the growing distance between the couple, and create a dismal portrait of the couple's decaying marriage.

Both media use dialogue; however they use it differently. What is acceptable in the novel often sounds unrealistic when said in the film. One of the problems in adapting Austen's novels, for example, is that the language used by the author often sounds too formal when

used in film. At the end of chapter five, in *Sense and Sensibility*, as the Dashwoods prepare to leave Norland forever, Marianne wanders about the house speaking to herself. Marianne represents the "sensibility" of the novel, but even considering this, the following speech, were it spoken aloud on the screen, would sound theatrical and overly sentimental to today's audiences:

Dear, dear Norland! . . . when shall I cease to regret you! When learn to feel a home elsewhere! Oh! Happy house, could you know what I suffer in now viewing you no more! And you, ye well-known trees! But you will continue the same. No leaf will decay because we are removed, nor any branch become motionless, although we can observe you no longer! No, you will continue the same: unconscious of the pleasure or the regret you occasion and insensible of any change in those who walk under your shade! But who will remain to enjoy you?" (25).

Certain figurative devices -- motifs, symbols and allusions -- are shared by both literature and film. Some characteristics of literature such as the "tone" in the language used by the writer, irony for example, and some figures of speech such as similes and metaphors, are often more difficult to transfer to the screen. Film makers have tried to express metaphor, but not always successfully. Charlie Chaplin's use of sheep to represent the crowds entering the subway in *Modern Times* (1936) can be confusing, because it is not always obvious that these people are behaving like sheep. The best film makers do not rely on trying to translate literary conventions to the screen but rather they replace them with combinations of powerful images. The system of impressions used by the filmmaker can be complex, and directors such as Federico Fellini, Luis Buñuel, Andrey Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman and others sometimes use sequences of pictures so richly symbolic that to a viewer unschooled in film

"language," and unable to "read" the language clearly, the images may appear confusing. The graphic nature of movies can overpower even the most vivid pictorial language used by the author in his novel. Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange* (1971) was thought to be extremely violent yet Anthony Burgess' novel contained more violence than the film. The movie's visual brilliance brings to life an alienated, near-nihilistic ultra-violent and utterly cynical world, giving the book's pessimistic vision a chilling sense of surrealistic horror and disturbing immediacy.

Changes in plot and character in adaptations are unavoidable. Adaptations range from the literal, faithful translation, to the "middle" modification where the text is still primarily recognized, to the radical adaptation, where the text is usually used as a jumping off point only. Literary sources for adaptations have ranged from major works by important novelists such as Charles Dickens or Fyodor Dostoyevsky, to "lesser" works by such writers as E.M. Forster, to totally banal books such as Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*. Many highly respected adaptations have been made from less acclaimed novels, such as *Jules et Jim* (1961), a modification of Henri-Pierre Roché's novel and, *Coup de torchon/Clean Slate* (1981), which was based on Jim Thompson's *Pop. 1280*. Scenes may be reordered, characters changed, but if the film is brilliant in its own right the viewer can forego some of the pleasure of the original to find pleasure in the interpretation. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess is a full figured country girl who exhibits a womanly lushness. Polanski's Tess, played by Nastassia Kinski, has a delicate gamine quality, unlike Hardy's womanly version. Despite this difference, Kinski emerges credibly as Tess. Her portrayal of the character brings out the simpleness of

an ordinary country girl and the vulnerability, intelligence, resilience and earthy sensuality that together make Tess so tragic a figure. The visual images of Polanski's Tess make his version memorable, whether it is the scene where Kinski takes the strawberries from Alex with her "peony" mouth, or the one at Talbothay's where she sits unselfconsciously, flushed face in profile, her cheek pressed against the cow she is milking.

Contemporary attitudes always affect the reader's interpretation of literature of the past. No matter how educated, sensitive and informed the reader is about the late 18th and early 19th century, novels such as *Emma* or *Persuasion* will always be read with some kind of mirroring of our own time in order to bridge the gap between the two. The transformation of any work of literature is always more than the filmmaker's attempt to bring the novel "to life;" it reflects the director's artistic vision as well as cultural attitudes and values of the time. Laurence Olivier's version of Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1944), for example, was dedicated to the men of the Royal Air Force who had defended the country in the Battle of Britain. Olivier's film was incorporated as part of British history, a kind of heralding of a "new" Elizabethan Age.¹⁶ In the Olivier version, the events of the Second World War are subtly incorporated into the film, and, "these few," represent the British, who had narrowly escaped the jaws of defeat. The recent adaptations of Austen's novels are equally influenced by "modern sensibilities." Fuller describes *Pride and Prejudice* as "robustly" modernist in its approach, *Persuasion* as "socially realistic" and *Sense and Sensibility* as "classically"

¹⁶ For further reading, see Donald Spoto's *Laurence Olivier: A Biography*.

modernist. (21) All of the film versions of Austen are, to some degree, "modern updates." In the movie *Persuasion*, for example, Amanda Root who plays the character of Anne in the movie, does so with a mute rebelliousness that is strongly reminiscent of a "feminist awakening" similar to that of the heroine in Jane Campion's film, *The Piano*.

The liberties a filmmaker may or may not take when adapting a novel are not necessarily related to the respect he holds for, or scholarly knowledge he has of the novel. In fact, excellent adaptations have been made by directors, such as Ang Lee, who have never even read the original literary work. Lee's appreciation of the codes of behaviour in his native Taiwan, and his ability to portray the sense of repression and "bottled-up" feelings in earlier films such as *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*, likely recommended him to Thompson to direct the film. As mentioned earlier, a filmmaker's decision to adapt a novel in a particular way is influenced by his own cultural background as well as his artistic impulses. For example, John Ford and Nunally Johnson transformed John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), a novel about social injustice, to the nostalgic populism that characterizes Ford's other films. Robert Bresson's adaptation of Georges Bernanos' novel, *A Diary of a Country Priest* (1950), which traces the sufferings of a young priest whose faith is neither understood nor accepted by his parishioners, is retold in Bresson's unmistakably, austere, quietly intense, elliptic style. Some directors use the novel as a springboard for their own work. Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) is not Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, just as *Clueless* is not Austen's *Emma*. Radical adaptations such as these deliberately undercut the novel often exposing the novel's assumptions, substituting them in

some cases for those of the filmmaker. *Apocalypse Now* transplants Conrad's story into the heart of the Vietnam war. The first shot in the film shows palm trees rippling in the tropical heat, an image that reminds the viewer of the setting in Conrad's story. Then in an over-voice, Jim Morrison begins to sing "*This is the end, my friend*" on the soundtrack as flames engulf the trees. Coppola uses the familiar plot of Conrad's work to create his own "classic" masterpiece of the sheer madness of war, where sense can never be made from the senseless.

Just as critics can argue about literature for centuries, there is no definitive adaptation of a novel or play. The complexity of a work often leaves it open to different interpretations. Films that do not reinforce the poetry, the language, or the traditional values of a work have, in the past, been dismissed by literary scholars. Roman Polanski and Akira Kurosawa have both created excellent film versions of *Macbeth* even though their interpretations of the play are different from each other. Polanski uses Shakespeare's poetry in his version. Kurosawa's version, *The Throne of Blood/Kumonosu-jo* (1950), does not use any of Shakespeare's poetry, but it is probably the most respected and well-known, unorthodox rendering of the play, an opinion that both Peter Hall and Peter Brooks share. In his discussion about Sergei Eisenstein's plans to adapt Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, Keith Cohen argues that a successful adaptation *demand*s a rethinking of the material by the filmmaker:

The adaptation must subvert its original, perform a double and paradoxical job of masking and unveiling its source, or else the pleasure it provides will be nothing more than that of seeing words changed into images (Giddings, Selby and Wensley 12).

I would argue that the *aim* of a "good" adaptation is to "consume" the memory of the

novel, rework it and replace that memory with a cinematic representation that still retains something of the original. Similarly, it seems to me, a *successful* adaptation is one that stands on its own merits as film-art. Moderate adaptations can extend the pleasure of the original novel, while extreme adaptations can challenge the reader's preconceptions of the novel. The degree to which an adaptation is accepted by an audience depends on a complex interplay of expectations between the reader and the filmmaker. In deciding how to present a work of literature on the screen, the filmmaker must constantly assess the strengths and weaknesses of both media. Theoretical problems of adaptation require practical solutions. Because both film and novel communicate through their own particular properties, even relatively simple passages in the novel often require a good deal of rethinking on the part of the director. The filmmaker must constantly evaluate and translate the literary narrative through the expression of the "language" of the cinema: colour, music, editing, lighting and sound.

On this subject, for example, Bluestone writes:

On the face of it, a close relationship has existed from the beginning. The reciprocity is clear from almost any point of view: the number of films based on novels; the search for filmic equivalent of literature; the effect of adaptation on reading; box-office receipts for filmed novels; merit awards by and for the Hollywood community . . . That, in brief, has been the history of the fitful relationship between novel and film: overtly compatible, secretly hostile (22).

The relationship between film and literature need not be a tense one, since they have much in common. Both the novel and the cinema "grew up" as mass media. Film shares with the novel (and theatre), a mutual dependence on public acclaim and by extension, commerce.

In the Soviet Union where the state supported the cinema and where cinema was in the service of intellectual, artistic and national prestige, films were still expected to be popular. The success of both novel and film has always been dependent on public sharing. Early English novelists strove hard to please their reading public in much the same way that movie magnates have tried to do. During Charles Dickens' time, his popularity spanned the ocean. Mary Delariviere Manley, author of the "scandalous" *The New Atlantis* and *The Secret History of Queen Zarah*, who was arrested in 1709 for her "licentious" writing was extremely popular, as was her admirer Eliza Haywood who wrote similar "semi-licentious trash" such as *The History of Miss Betty Thoughtless* and *Jenny and Jemmy Jessamy*. At the time, their novels reflected a new form of entertainment, one that externalized social problems just, as the cinema did [and still does], at the turn of the 20th century.¹⁷

Film, which seems to borrow so freely from literature, is often viewed as a "kitsch" art form. Adaptation is sometimes disparaged by considering it as a solely financially motivated exploitation of another art form's recognized success. As has already been pointed out earlier, adaptation in its broadest definition is the act of producing a work of art by borrowing elements from another work of art. The history and theory of adaptation encompasses a vast body of works which include literature. Virtually all of Shakespeare's works were adapted from various sources including *Romeo and Juliet*, which was based on Arthur Brooke's poem "*The Tragickall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*," a translation from the

¹⁷ In *The Novel and the Cinema*, Wagner discusses the history of the novel as an expanding market, which was influenced by a growing female audience on pp. 40-42.

French of Bandello's *Novelle*. *Othello* was taken from Cinthio. *Midsummer Night's Dream* had no single source, but Shakespeare drew, from among other authors, Chaucer, Golding's translation of Ovid, and Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. Andrew Marvell borrowed from Catullus and T.S. Eliot thought nothing of pirating lines from Dante and inserting them into his own work. Joyce transplanted Homer to Dublin and sold, in the United States alone, over forty thousand copies a year.¹⁸ Chaucer plagiarized Deschamps much to the French poet's delight who addressed his "*Balades de moralitez*" to the poet and whom he called the "*grand translateur*."¹⁹ Goethe, accused of giving Mephistopheles one of Shakespeare's songs, replied, "*Why should I exert myself to invent one of my own, when Shakespeare's was just right and said just what was needed.*"²⁰

In *The Novel and the Cinema*, Geoffrey Wagner calls the development of the narrative tradition, "*Gordian knots of romans a clef*." (45) Critics who arrogantly dismiss films derived from literary origins as somehow inferior to the original literature, are the same ones who hypocritically classify "adaptation" in the poetic and narrative tradition as "influences." The intermingling of other works and styles is part of the natural evolution of all the arts, including film. The art of the cinema, which includes the metamorphosis of the novel to the film, and recently of the film to the novel, has become, in the 20th century, a logical extension of the narrative art. Its relationship to the novel is similar to that of epic poetry, of the memoir-novel, of the epistolary novel of the 16th and the 17th centuries, to that

¹⁸ Wagner quotes this statistic in his book which was published in 1975, p.82.

¹⁹ See *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* p. 151

²⁰ See Wagner p.80.

of the long prose fictions of the 18th century through to the form that has remained since the 19th century, although varying in its form, style and subject matter. In the 19th century, when Sir Walter Scott defined the novel as "*a fictitious narrative . . . accommodated to the ordinary train of human events*" (Drabble and Stringer 403), he might well have been speaking of the cinema which has from its origins fascinated the public with its ability to depict human events.²¹ What distinguishes the adaptation of literature to film, from adaptation within the written literary tradition, is the cinema's reliance on technology, a technology which compels us, above all else, to rely on the visual image; it is nevertheless an extension of the very same narrative tradition.

Most talented literary scholars have rarely been equally knowledgeable in the art and the conventions of the film. "Purists," often weighted down by academic creeds, maintain rigid expectations about the novel, and often banish innovative film interpretations to critical oblivion. Yet, the cinema has produced masterpieces, sometimes as "translations" of literature, that are not only works of art in their own right, but they are also penetrating, original and thoughtful analyses of the book. The recent film adaptations of Austen's novels show a level of sophistication that many earlier films often lacked. For example, the 1940 version of *Pride and Prejudice*, often made the mistake of stating the obvious. Midway through the film Lizzy tells Darcy, "*At this moment it's difficult to believe that you're so proud,*" to which the hero replies, "*At this moment it is difficult to believe that you're so*

²¹ Lumière's early film output was very much a replication of everyday trivia such as simple, unstaged recordings of people playing cards or riding bicycles, a view of the Place de l'Opera and his most famous early film, a train arriving at a station.

prejudiced." All three recent film adaptations, *Persuasion*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, successfully reflect the "vision" of the author, as well as that of the director/interpreter.

Chapter I of this thesis comprises a general study of the critical, historical and biographical elements surrounding Jane Austen and her body of work, with particular focus on Austen's first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*. Such background information is valuable to the understanding of the writer, her work and times, especially to the director and screenwriter, who must make informed and astute decisions when interpreting the novel to the screen. The "art" of the screenplay, that is to say, the process of distilling and honing the novel (or play), is the raw material of the film. The screenplay writer must understand the original material as well as the form in which the material will take shape when translating literature to the screen, just as he must understand the audience for whom he is writing. Screenwriting shares with the novel the fundamentals of structure, plot, dialogue, exposition, and character. The purpose, then, of this thesis' initial chapter is to lay the foundation necessary to an understanding of Austen's art. This I shall do by means of an analysis of the novel, through biography, and criticism, leading eventually to an introduction to the first step in the process of transformation of the written page to the screen, that is -- the screenplay.

CHAPTER ONE

Novel

The birth of the English novel took place in the first half of the 18th century in the writings of Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding, but it was with Jane Austen that the novel took on its distinctively "modern" character with the author's realistic treatment of ordinary people involved with the petty details of ordinary situations in everyday life. One of Austen's earliest distinguished admirers, Walter Scott, defined her writing as limited by its lack of grandeur but more truthful than "*grand . . . theatrical [and] misleading*" (Gillie 149) novels such as his were:

That young lady had a talent for describing the involvement and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The Big Bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied me. (Gillie 149)

Austen's accuracy in depicting human nature, and her lucid and subtle criticism of the social mores and environment of her time are filtered through her keen powers of observation. Her repeated motif of a young woman's eventual self-discovery, a knowledge that arises from the experiences of courtship, love and subsequent marriage, centers upon aspects of life that are, of course, recognizable to today's audiences.

The tragicomic tone, the fidelity to accurate representation and the concentration in her novels on the tensions between the heroines and their society, more closely aligns Austen's

writing to the "modern" world than to that of the 18th century. In her six novels, published between 1811 and 1817 -- *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* – she depicts the comedy of manners in England during her time, while simultaneously bringing to light the possibilities afforded to a literature that is centred around the class about which she writes. Sometimes dismissed by modern critics as sentimental and conformist literature which advocated the feminizing of women's cultural life, the traditional domestic novel usually assigned a high role to women in the family, home and community while advocating feminine values such as self-sacrifice, compassion and traditional morality. For example, in 1711 Addison wrote:

As our English women excel those of all Nations in Beauty, they should endeavor to outshine them in all other Accomplishments proper to the Sex, and to distinguish themselves as tender Mothers and faithful Wives . . . Female Virtues are of a Domestick turn. The Family is the Province for Private women to Shine in (Gillie 28).

Austen does not subvert the importance of the woman's role in home and community or the conservative values of her time, but her writing does reflect the 18th century's independent stirrings that were beginning to alarm many moralists and educators. Women, as Addison continues, were expected to be good wives and mothers:

rather than . . . furious Partizans . . . If they must be showing their Zeal for the Publick, let it not be against those who are perhaps of the same Family, or at least of the same Religion or Nation, but against those who are the open, professed Enemies of their Faith, Liberty, and Country (Gillie 28).

Austen's criticism is gentle, but it is nevertheless cutting at times, and *none* of her main female characters are suppressed, passive victims of society. As Barbara Swords points out,

"Austen's heroines are intelligent; they exercise reason; they are held in high esteem by the men they love, who love them, and whom they marry" (76).

Critics who have attacked Austen's resolution at the end of her novels, that is the acceptance of a marriage proposal by the heroine as an outrageous acquiescing to the forces of a patriarchal society, have perhaps not focused enough on how great was Austen's preoccupation with the fate of women in the society of her time. Having few legal and economic rights and often receiving little respect, a "woman's place" in Austen's time was diminished in many ways. The plight of the Dashwoods who find themselves homeless and without economic freedom following the father's death, is a crystalline example of the social mechanics of the time. There is a sense of poignant urgency surrounding the business of providing husbands for eligible daughters in all the novels. It is to Austen's credit that her characters rise above the restrictions and laws of the time, and happy marriages conclude in models such as Marianne and Colonel Brandon's; Elinor and Edward's; Emma and Mr. Knightley's; Anne and Captain Wentworth's and Elizabeth and Darcy's where love, compatibility, mutual respect -- and *equality* -- represent new and modern attitudes about marriage. Austen's penetrating gaze, her detached psychological analysis of her society's standards, her progressive views of marriage, and her caustic humour, are features of her art that are recognizably modern, and lead Marilyn Butler to comment on what one might describe as the constant applicability of her novels. That is to say the themes and concerns she raises, while rooted in and deeply identifiable with the period about which she writes, nevertheless *remain* constant and recognizable to contemporary readers and critics. For

example, Butler writes: *[The writer's] "self-sufficiency" [as a novelist is second only to that of Shakespeare in her imperviousness to the] "shifts of fashion . . . which ensures that she can be studied by the same formal, exclusive literary conventions as a polished poet like Keats" (190).*¹

Critical analysis of Austen's work has its origins in the cultish Janeite and Anti-Janeite movements,² movements that reflect opposition in terms of readership which have persisted since Austen's time until almost the middle of this century. Writer Mark Twain expressed an "animal repugnance" (Grey 240) for her work, and in 1930 D.H. Lawrence expressed a similar extreme anti-Janeist attitude when he described Austen as an "old maid [who was] thoroughly unpleasant, English in the bad, mean, snobbish sense of the word, just

¹ The historian Macaulay recorded a dinner party at which "everybody praised Miss Austen to the skies" (Grey 237). Beginning a public campaign venting what had previously been his own private admiration for the writer, he was the first critic to claim her work was as great as that of Shakespeare. Austen's second greatest patron, G.H. Lewes took up Macaulay's claim, announcing in *Frazer's Magazine* that the writer and Fielding "were 'the greatest novelists in our language' and instructing his reader to mark the 'greatness' and 'marvelous dramatic power' of Jane Austen, an artist no less than a 'prose Shakespeare'" (Grey 237).

² See Brian Southam's chapter in Grey's book, "Janeites and Anti-Janeites." pp.237-243. He describes the opposition between Austen's supporters and opponents. The Janeite camp was made up of a cult of devotees who regarded Austen and her characters as friends and who elevated her work to the level of Shakespeare's. The Janeites claimed that as a writer she "approached nearest to the manner of the great master" (Grey 237). The reviewer for the *Academy* attacked the Janeites and announced that "what 'the external world' wanted was not idolatry but serious criticism" (Grey 239). Shakespearean scholar R.H. Hutton divided "the reading public into those 'few' who 'love' the novels . . . [and] the very considerable number of remarkably able men' over whom 'Miss Austen wields no spell at all' and the anti-Janeites" (Grey 239). The Anti-Janeites, challenged by the "overwhelming claim" (Grey 237) that compared Austen to Shakespeare, sought to destroy this image of Austen as a writer of high culture. Charlotte Brontë's classic anti-Janeite letter to Lewes opposed this claim saying she found in Austen's work a heartless writer who was "shrewd and observant" (Grey 237) but who lacked poetry. She asked, "Can there be a great artist without poetry?" (Grey 237) "The Passions," Brontë writes, "are perfectly unknown to her; even to the Feeling she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition . . . Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet: what she sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life . . . this Miss Austen ignores" (Gillie p.150).

as *Fielding is English in the good generous sense*" (Gillie 151). In contrast, E. M. Forster, in the 1923 review of the Oxford edition of the works, declared himself a hopelessly devoted Janeite, and William Dean Howells observed Austen's popularity to be "*a constantly, almost rapidly, increasing cult, as it must be called, for the readers of Jane Austen are hardly ever less than her adorers: she is a passion and a creed, if not quite a religion*" (Grey 239). Perhaps the most astute analysis of Austen's popularity comes from Henry James. His examination of the subject is uncannily relevant to today's current infatuation by film makers with the writer's novels. In 1905 he accused Janeites of having "*a beguiled infatuation [and] a sentimentalized vision*" (Grey 240). It is a vision, he suggests that has been cleverly fueled by "*the stiff breeze of the commercial [spirit]*" (Grey 240). He accused:

. . . *the body of publisher, editors, illustrators, producers of the pleasant twaddle of magazines; who have found their "dear," our dear, everybody's dear, Jane so infinitely to their material purpose, so amenable to pretty reproduction in every variety of what is called tasteful, and in what seemingly proves to be salable, form* (Grey 240).

Janeitism reappeared in 1913, at the time of the publishing of *Life and Letters*, and again at the centenary of Austen's death in 1917. The movement, having persisted well into the first half of the century, has all but died out with the rise of modern academic criticism. Today, it would seem ridiculously naïve to describe oneself as a Janeite or an anti-Janeite; however the cult lingers on in publications such as *Persuasions*, which is issued by the members of the *Jane Austen Society of North America*. The publication, released on the anniversary of Austen's birthday, December 16, features a regular article entitled "*News from*

St. Nicholas Church, Steventon,” as well as essays and announcements of events such as the “*Jane Austen Study Weekend*” which took place in Bath of 1992, and scholarships such as the Henry G. Burke Grant which awards one or more creative research projects per year that help to bring Austen's name to the public's attention.³

Serious modern criticism of Austen's work did not begin until about 1932 with Rebecca West's preface to a forgotten edition of *Northanger Abbey*. In an entirely new critical evaluation, West describes the novelist as a critic of society, a “*quite conscious . . . femin[ist]*” (Grey 108), whose novel is a critique of “*the institutions of society regarding women, . . . [and it is] the fruit of strong feeling and audacious thought*” (Grey 108). Three years later, Lord David Cecil's lectures at Cambridge “*successfully combin[ed] the roles of Janeite, Howellsian popularist, and thoroughgoing critic, equipped with 'rules,' 'laws,' and the method of analysis to define her as 'one of the supreme novelists of the world' for the 'universal significance' conveyed in the characters and the author's view of life*” (Grey 108).

Mary Lascelles' *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939) -- arguably the first important and full-scale analysis of Austen -- brought to light the understanding that the novelist's art was amenable to methodical examination and the fact that there was an audience for such analyses. This was followed by two substantial theoretical criticisms by Q.D. Leavis in 1942 and 1944.⁴ It was not until Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel* (1957), a work that concluded with Jane Austen,

³ Emma Thomson mentions the interference of *The Jane Austen Society* during the making of *Sense and Sensibility*. The organization telephoned the film company in New York to protest the casting of Hugh Grant as Edward -- “*he was too good-looking apparently*” (Thompson p.244). In 1995, the society had 2,646 members worldwide. It is run by Garnet Bass out of Raleigh, N.C. (Kroll p.66).

⁴See “A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings”, *Scrutiny*, X (1942), and XII (1944).

that critics began to acknowledge Austen's position in the tradition of English narrative prose.

At that time Watt wrote:

In general, the criticism of Jane Austen in the last two decades is incomparably the richest and most illuminating that has appeared; but in demonstrating how the restrictions of her subject matter are the basis for a major literary achievement, recent criticism has perhaps failed to give the nature of Jane Austen's social and moral assumptions an equally exacting analysis. It is surely mistaken to assume that the affirmative elements in her morality and her humour are not as real as the subversive ironies which occasionally accompany them; or even to assume that awareness and insight, so often, and rightly, ascribed either to Jane Austen as narrator or to her major characters, are self-sufficient virtues: for how one sees is surely not more important than what one makes a point of seeing, or not seeing" (Grey 113).

Since Watt's exposition, some of the best criticism written about Austen's work during the 1970's, 1980's and the first half of this decade has come, I believe, from the feminist perspective which is written "*from the perspective of one intelligent woman writing about another supremely intelligent woman*" (Grey 117). Patricia Spack's *Female Imagination* (1976), Juliet McMaster's *Jane Austen in Love* (1978) and Julia Prewitt Brown's *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (1979) -- these works and many others, including a large number of journal articles and film and stage adaptations, all reflect new ways of looking at Austen and indicate important new directions for future criticism.

II

Born on December 16, 1775, in the Hampshire village of Steventon to the Reverend

George Austen and his wife Cassandra (nee Leigh),⁵ Austen was the second daughter and seventh child in a family of eight. Her closest companion was her elder sister Cassandra who like Jane remained a spinster. Even after the death of her sister, Cassandra remained jealously protective of Austen's privacy, censoring old letters, or destroying them altogether. The passing of Jane Austen was an enormous loss to Cassandra; in a letter to niece Fanny Knight at the time of Austen's funeral, she writes: "*I have lost a treasure, such a Sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed, -- she was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow, I had not a thought concealed from her, & it is as if I had lost a part of myself. . .*" (Chapman 513).

Jane Austen's formal education began in about 1782, when she and Cassandra were sent to be tutored by Mrs. Cawley at Oxford and, in 1783 or 1784, the two girls were moved to Abbey School at Reading, where they stayed until about 1787, after which time they were sent home to continue with their education.⁶ The circumstances under which Austen's talents were nurtured and developed could hardly have been more ideal. The Reverend George Austen, a scholar, who had been a fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, encouraged the love of learning in all of his children.⁷ Cassandra Austen, the mother, was a woman of wit, well known for her "impromptu" stories and verses: "*She was a quick-witted woman with plenty of sparkle and spirit in her talk who could write excellent letters either in prose or verse, the latter making no pretense to poetry, but being simply playful common sense in rhyme.*"

⁵ See William Austen-Leigh and Richard Austen-Leigh p.6

⁶ See William Austen-Leigh and Richard Austen-Leigh p.44-45 and 47-49.

⁷ See William Austen-Leigh and Richard Austen-Leigh p.4.

(Austen-Leigh 10) The Austens provided their children with a stimulating environment, where reading, writing and acting were encouraged. The Reverend Austen amassed a collection of books in his library of "some 500 volumes" (Austen-Leigh 54). The Austens' literary interests were varied, comprising not only the classics but also contemporary popular fiction including the Gothic thrillers and romances by popular writers such as Ann Radcliffe, whose supernatural horrors Austen pokes fun at in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen wrote that the family were all "great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so" (Austen-Leigh 55). Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and especially Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* were favourites which Austen read over and over again, so that "all that was ever said or done in the cedar parlour, was familiar to her; and the wedding days of Lady L. and Lady G. were as well remembered as if they had been living friends" (Austen-Leigh 54).

Austen's formative years were spent in an intellectually unrestricted environment in an actively Christian household. Although the Austens resided in a remote country village, their large family circle was lively, affectionate and constantly changing, a fortunate situation that helped to supply the budding writer with fresh news through the experiences of its various members. Mrs. Austen was part of a large, well-connected family whom a network of relatives and friends would often visit, sometimes for months at a time. James and Henry Austen attended Oxford where they edited a literary periodical, *The Loiterer*, one of the many "mock" imitators of *The Spectator* and *The Rambler* (Grey 146), and Jane was audience to

many of their academic discussions.⁸ Henry's residence in London was also a boon to Austen who visited him in the city and attended the musical, theatrical and artistic attractions of the day. The younger brothers Francis and Charles joined the navy and wrote home about their experiences during the Napoleonic Wars.⁹ In addition, the Austen household often included young men who Reverend Austen was preparing for university.

The family circle provided a stimulating context for her writing despite the fact that her early life was rather uneventful. Although Austen was removed from the social and political upheavals of the time,¹⁰ her world, which consisted of the minor landed gentry, the country clergy, the village and its neighbourhood, with occasional visits to Bath or London, formed the societal background upon which she drew for her novels. Settings, characters and subject matter, all were incorporated into her work. In a letter to Anna Austen dated Friday 9 September, 1814, she emphasizes the importance that she places on the local background: *"You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life; -- 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work*

⁸ In *The Jane Austen Handbook*, Brian Southam asserts that Austen learned in part from the brothers' mocking sentimentalism in their Oxford periodical *The Loiterer*: "... from her brothers she must have been familiar with the serious moral arguments leveled against sentimental fiction . . . Here we find material very close to Jane Austen's own burlesques." p.248. See also William Austen-Leigh and Richard Austen-Leigh pp.38-40, 50-51.

⁹ See William Austen-Leigh and Richard Austen-Leigh p.123.

¹⁰ Austen lived in the *Age of Revolution*, and I refer of course to the rebellions in both America and France that resulted in the defeat of the established governments -- monarchies -- in both cases. The revolutions occurring during Austen's time did not reach some of the more isolated areas of England; instead any political agitation tended to occur in London. In addition, the "industrial revolution" occurred in the north and northwest parts of England; Austen's perception of the world is neither urban nor industrial nor "modern;" it is shaped by living in a relatively isolated environment.

on."¹¹

Austen's earliest known writings date from about 1787, and between then and 1795 she wrote a large body of material that has survived in three notebooks, "*mock-grandiosely inscribed by Jane Austen herself*" (Grey 244): *Volume the First*, *Volume the Second*, and *Volume the Third*. Together these manuscripts contain plays, verses, short novels, and other prose. Henry Austen-Leigh, intent on publishing the juvenilia, was thwarted by other family members who thought it would be "*unfair*" to publish such "*nonsense*" and intrude into the privacy of the family, for whom the works were originally meant (Grey 244). At first, the reticence on the part of members of the Austen-Leigh families to publish the notebooks helped to promote, through what one writer described as "*a mass of cozy family adulation*," a "*monstrous figure of sweetness*" (Halperin, *Life* 7-8), a portrait of the writer that was so sterling that her real personality remains elusive to biographers even today. The early writings show the youthful Austen's analytical mind engaged in parodying existing literary forms, especially sentimental fictions.¹² Importantly, the manuscript notebooks trace Austen's artistic development. Abandoning her early burlesque style for a more humane and arguably a more "realistic" portrayal, she continued to refine her writing ability:

¹¹ Quoted from *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and Others* p.401.

¹² Sentimental novels, in the broadest sense, are novels that exploit the reader's capacity for tenderness, sympathy or compassion to a disproportionate degree. Austen's story *Love and Friendship* is a remorseless burlesque in *Volume the Second*. In Grey's book, Brian Southam writes in the section entitled *Juvenilia*: "... the young Jane Austen was ready to joke about deformity, injury, death, drunkenness, childbearing and illegitimacy -- subjects familiar in eighteenth-century literature but out of step with the Victorian sense of proprieties and quite out of character with the image of 'gentle' Jane presented in the *Memoir*, the *Life*, and other testimonials and recollections emanating from the family itself." p.245.

*We watch the transformation of the shapeless "wash-tub" of the eighteenth-century novel into her own elegant and proportioned "vase." Above all, the juvenilia assert the essential truth that Jane Austen "began" by being an ironical critic . . . This critical spirit lies at the foundation of her artistic faculty.*¹³

The record of her early literary development reflects both the young writer's emotional and artistic growth between the ages of 12 and 17. *Lady Susan*, a short novel-in-letters written about 1793-94, is a portrait of a young woman determined in the exercise of asserting her forceful mind and character to the point of social self-destruction. It is a study of the frustration of a "strong" woman's lot in a society that has no place in it for women who exhibit "masculine" traits. Written at seventeen, the story hints at the author's formidable intelligence and spirit. The extent to which the early works, and, in fact, all of the later novels, can be read as self-admonitory allegories remains a subject for critical speculation; however, as both John Halperin and Virginia Woolf have observed, "*the second-rate writings of first rate writers are often most revealing. [Even] At fifteen . . . Jane Austen 'had few illusions about other people and none about herself'*" (Halperin, *Life* 50).

Austen learned, at a young age, to laugh at herself as well at others. Joe Orton remarked, "*laughter is a serious business, comedy a weapon more dangerous than tragedy . . . One does not kill by anger, but by laughter*" (Halperin, *Life* 50). Austen's ability to fine-tune the delicate differences and subtleties in relationships and personalities indicates an acuteness of perception that, as several biographers have pointed out, must not have always

¹³ Brian Southam quotes George Moore and Richard Simpson in Grey's work. p.254.

been easy to live with. Elizabeth Hardwick has remarked:

*there is simply too much knowledge of wickedness, too much skill in the portrayal of contemptible characters, for us to feel unengaged . . . The ability to nail down unpleasant bits of character. . . must inevitably be the fruit of intense introspection . . . I believe the records that say she was taciturn and stiff (Halperin, *Life* 6).*

Halperin points out that the origin of Austen's brand of comedy is found in her earliest writing:

*[When she made fun of]. . . her fellow men and women -- [It was] a sign of detachment as well as humour. Indeed, the darker hues of this early work, its inherent cynicism, are often glossed over; the vision is sharp, sometimes unforgiving, often mocking. Clearly it is a mistake to regard the *Juvenilia* as being separated, by chronology and subject-matter, from the maturer productions. We know the first versions of what were to become *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Northanger Abbey* were written, all of them, in the middle and later 1790s. The *Juvenilia* and the later work may be seen as sharing a community of theme and vision. Indeed, the *Juvenilia* help prepare us for what is to come (Halperin, *Life* 50).*

III

Of all the novels, *Sense and Sensibility* appears to be the earliest in its conception.

It was begun about 1795 as a novel-in-letters named *Elinor and Marianne* after its heroines.

It was a spoof of a novel of sensibility and, as Halperin points out, the word "sensibility" is repeatedly used.¹⁴ The story is built around two heroines who behave in ways that leave little

¹⁴ *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* describes the Novel of Sensibility/Sentiment as one whose object is "to illustrate the alliance of acute sensibility with true virtue. An adherence to strict morality and honour, combined with sympathy and feeling, were the marks of the man or woman of sentiment. The cult may be traced particularly to the work of Marivaux, Richardson, and Henry Fielding . . . The early chapters of J. Austen's *Northanger Abbey* mock the 'refined susceptibilities' of the Novel of Sentiment, and *Sense and Sensibility* was intended to demonstrate the serious consequences of following its standards." pp. 507-508. I refer to "Sensibility" in this context as meaning qualities that were greatly admired in the literature

doubt as to the targets of Austen's ridicule: "*She was all Sensibility and Feeling. We flew into each others (sic) arms and after having exchanged vows of mutual Friendship for the rest of our Lives, instantly unfolded to each other the most inward secrets of our Hearts . . .*" (Halperin, *Life* 41). Everything that happens in the story occurs because a character either has an excess or a shortage of "sensibility." In addition to the *Elinor and Marianne* story, there is a letter, in *Volume the Second, A Collection of Letters* (1791), that is noteworthy chiefly for anticipating names that Austen later used in *Sense and Sensibility*, including a family called Dashwood, "*a hero named Edward, a jilt named Willoughby -- and a Colonel!*" (Halperin, *Life* 43).

In December 1804, Austen's life was disrupted by two life-altering events: the death of her dearest friend Mrs. Anne Lefroy, followed shortly by the illness and death of Reverend Austen in January 1805, a death that was to have serious consequences for the women in the family. Like the heroines in her novels, the Austens' immediate concern following the father's death was, of, course, money -- survival: "*The relatively prosperous Mrs. Austen was suddenly transformed into an impecunious widow with an income of only £210 a year . . . and two grown daughters to support!*" (Halperin, *Life* 145). Eventually in 1809, Jane and her mother and sister were finally settled in Chawton, where, with renewed purpose, she began to revise *Sense and Sensibility*. Already rewritten during the period of 1797-8, *Elinor and*

appearing toward the end of the 18th century, that is, the capacity of the individual for deep emotion and refined sensitiveness, as distinguished from reason and intellect. Marianne, in *Sense and Sensibility* is unusually sensitive to delicate sensation, emotion and appreciation of beauty in all things including music, works of literature and natural settings.

Marianne had become something like the final version of the novel. Minor revisions were made during the period between writing and publication; Halperin draws attention to the inclusion of the "two-penny post, which did not come into being until 1801, and of Scott as a popular poet, not possible before 1805, and use of several names" (Halperin, *Life* 83-84), that Austen may have procured from a 1810 marriage register. Two years after the move to Chawton, Thomas Egerton agreed to publish the manuscript at the author's expense; it was published anonymously in November 1811, followed by a second publishing two years later, once again at the author's expense. On the whole, critical opinion was favourable recognizing the attractiveness inherent in a novel that combined instruction and amusement. In February 1812, a writer for the *Critical Review* enthused:

A genteel, well-written novel is as agreeable a lounge as a genteel comedy, from which amusement and instruction may be derived . . . It is well written; the characters are in genteel life, naturally drawn, and judiciously supported . . . It reflects honour on the writer, who displays much knowledge of character, and very happily blends a great deal of good sense with the lighter matter of the piece (Halperin, *Life* 204).

Sense and Sensibility is, as Marilyn Butler and others have pointed out, the most "unremittingly didactic" (Butler 182) of all of Austen's novels. It compares and contrasts the conduct and beliefs of the two protagonists, Elinor and Marianne, and the plot of the novel advances on the premise that what happens to one girl must happen to the other. Therefore, the parallels between the two sisters, the similarities of their situations, and the sequence of their courtships, bring out interesting contrasts between the two girls and in the way that they cope with their experiences. Elinor is reserved in her judgment about Edward's affection

toward her: *"She felt Edward stood very high in her opinion. She believed the regard to be mutual; but she required greater certainty of it to make Marianne's conviction of their attachment agreeable to him"* (19). Marianne, who always indulges her emotions, finds Elinor's behaviour hard to accept:

Such behaviour as this, so exactly the reverse of her own, appeared no more meritorious to Marianne, than her own seemed faulty to her. The business of self-command she settled very easily; with strong affections it was impossible; with calm ones it could have no merit. That her sister's affections were calm, she dared not deny, though she blushed to acknowledge it; and of the strength of her own, she gave a very striking proof by still loving and respecting that sister in spite of this mortifying conviction (86).

Despite the novel's didacticism, its stiffness in dialogue -- particularly in the early stages -- the narrative, though less sophisticated than her later works, is remarkably plausible and entertaining. The sisters are not simply agents of two opposing points of view, they are also inventive, believable and complex people. Marianne's perception is subjective, intuitive, emotional and deeply prone to romantic illusions. When Willoughby enters the story, he literally sweeps Marianne off her feet; *"His person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story; and in his carrying her into the house with so little formality, there was a rapidity of thought which particularly recommended the action to her"* (37). Elinor tries to warn her that a lasting intimacy cannot be promoted by sheer coincidences in matters of taste and opinion:

"Well, Marianne," said Elinor, as soon as he had left them, "for one morning I think you have done pretty well. You have already ascertained Mr. Willoughby's opinion in almost every matter of importance. You know what he thinks of Cowper and Scott; you are certain of his estimating their beauties as he ought, and you have received every assurance of his admiring

Pope no more than is proper. But how is your acquaintance to be long supported under such extraordinary dispatch of every subject for discourse?" (41).

When Marianne's idealistic view of Willoughby is shattered, her sense of the world is shaken and her physical health and mental stability become threatened. Elinor is characteristically more rational and analytical than her sister. Deeply mistrusting her own desires, Elinor often balances Marianne's fervour with her own sense. Even though she feels deeply, she hides and suppresses her emotions. She senses that Edward is in love with her, but she is suspicious of her feeling, thinking that perhaps the *"affection was all her own"* (112). Struggling against her own intuition she thinks: *"Her mother, sisters, Fanny, all had been conscious of his regard for her at Norland: [surely] it was not an illusion of her own vanity"* (112).

Deeply perceptive and cautious, Elinor is a typical Austen heroine in that she is capable of seeing in ways that other characters are not; she "watches eyes" the way other characters watch outward behaviour. She distinguishes between the world of emotion and the social world. The secret concerning Edward's engagement to Lucy that she is forced to keep is extremely painful, but she refuses to let it blight her life the way Marianne allows Willoughby's treatment of herself to do. Of Marianne and Willoughby, she says: *"I want no proof of their affection . . . but of their engagement I do"* (66). When the sisters travel to London with Mrs. Jennings, Marianne remains self-absorbed, leaving her sister, who has the keener sense of social responsibility, with the chore of responding to the older woman:

To atone for this conduct therefore, Elinor took immediate possession of the

post of civility which she had assigned herself, behaved with the greatest attention to Mrs. Jennings, talked with her, laughed with her, and listened to her whenever she could; and Mrs. Jennings on her side treated them both with all possible kindness (128).

Her own eyes are always open to even the most depressing aspects of social intercourse. The scenes with the Dashwoods and Middletons are filled with shrieking, demanding children. Austen presents the conversations in these scenes, particularly the interminable disputes about children's heights, as the pinnacle of hypocrisy and stupidity. Elinor's sense modifies Marianne's way of seeing without trampling over it, and she eventually learns to soften her own sensibilities. By the end of the story, both characters achieve an equilibrium; both achieve healthier measures of sense and sensibility, two related methods of discernment in understanding the world around them. The final passage of the novel suggests a balance of feeling and intellect. Although it includes social interaction, that same interaction is also balanced by a private, inviolate core, exemplified by the marriages of the two couples:

Between Barton and Delaford there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate; and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands (306).

IV

The novel opens with the dying Henry Dashwood, who urges his son John to look after his stepmother, Mrs. Henry Dashwood, and his three half sisters, Elinor, Marianne, and

Margaret. In part influenced by his selfish wife, who is already independently wealthy, and in part by his own greed, John Dashwood fails to carry out his father's final wish. Henry's wife, cast in the identifiably traditional role of a cruel in-law and "evil stepmother" figure, Fanny Dashwood, fears that Elinor and her brother Edward Ferrars are growing attracted to each other. Determined to prevent any such alliance, she makes life so difficult for her mother-in-law and her daughters that they eventually accept an offer from Sir John Middleton to move to a cottage that he owns at Barton Park in Devonshire. There, Marianne, a proponent of "sensibility," rejects the kind and mature thirty-five year old would-be-suitor, Colonel Brandon. Instead, she falls in love with John Willoughby, a handsome but untrustworthy younger man who is visiting wealthy relatives on a neighbouring estate. While the group of friends is preparing for an outing, Colonel Brandon is called away mysteriously, and shortly afterwards Elinor and Marianne hear a rumour that he has a daughter. In the Colonel's absence, Willoughby is determined to give the young women a bad impression of Brandon, much to Elinor's dismay. Willoughby appears to be interested in Marianne, but he too suddenly leaves for London. Marianne is left feeling greatly distressed, especially since no definite engagement has been agreed upon between them. Not long after, Edward makes a visit to the cottage, but in spite of Elinor's attraction to him he seems only mildly interested in her and he leaves without giving Elinor any hope.

Sir John Middleton invites to his home two vulgar and ignorant young ladies, Miss Lucy Steele and her sister. Elinor is shocked to learn from the selfish and ill-bred Lucy Steele that she and Edward Ferrars have been secretly engaged for four years. Concealing her grief

at the news, she offers to help Lucy in any way she can. Shortly after, Marianne and Elinor are invited to stay in London. Once they arrive in London, Marianne immediately begins to write to Willoughby, informing him of her visit, but she receives no reply. Soon after, Marianne and Elinor, meet Willoughby accidentally at a party, but the young women find him cold and indifferent. The next morning Marianne receives a letter from the young man informing her of his engagement to a rich heiress and apologizing for the "misunderstanding" concerning his intentions. Marianne, still in love with Willoughby, continues to defend him, but Colonel Brandon privately tells Elinor, how Willoughby seduced and abandoned his young ward. Marianne receives the news about Willoughby's behaviour from Elinor with such sorrow that Elinor fears for her health.

During their stay in London, Edward Ferrars' mother discovers the secret engagement. Furious, she cuts Edward off from his inheritance and passes it onto Edward's feckless younger brother, Robert. When Colonel Brandon arranges for Edward to become a curate on his estate in order that he and Lucy can be married, he opens the way for Edward's marriage to Elinor. At Cleveland, midway home to Devonshire, Marianne falls gravely ill. Willoughby hears of her illness, and hopes to see her in order to give her an explanation of his behaviour in hope of making her think better of him; instead, he is intercepted by Elinor. When Marianne recovers her health, Elinor tells her Willoughby's story, and slowly Marianne's passion for him begins to fade. In the meantime, the crafty Lucy Steele has managed to marry Robert Ferrars, a situation that initially brings about a misunderstanding between Elinor and Edward, but which eventually results in Edward's asking Elinor to marry him, a proposal that

she happily accepts. Mrs. Ferrars, having disowned Robert after his marriage to Lucy, retracts her excommunication of Edward and grudgingly consents to his marriage to Elinor. After the wedding the couple move into the parsonage promised Edward by Colonel Brandon. Marianne who is progressively recovering from her love for Willoughby, is eventually won over by Colonel Brandon's patience and kindness and agrees to marry him. After they move into his estate, the two sisters live near each other in peace and contentment for the rest of their lives.

V

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* presents certain difficulties in the adaptation from novel to screenplay. Hollywood has long understood that film facilitates the portrayal of *physical* action rather than *interior* action, by which I mean a character's attempt to understand more fully the world of his inner experience and the ability to express it in as much detail as could be used to portray the objective world. Austen's novel gives a vivid sense of a mind at work, as the consciousness of a character withdraws from conversation and interaction with other characters into reverie. When Elinor returns to the cottage after learning from Lucy of her secret engagement to Edward, she begins to have thoughts that occur in a kind of overheard speech, as if she is speaking to herself:

However small Elinor's general dependence on Lucy's veracity might be, it was impossible for her on serious reflection to suspect it in the present case, where no temptation could be answerable to the folly of inventing a falsehood of such a description . . . Her resentment of such behaviour, her indignation at having been its dupe, for a short time made her feel only for herself; but other ideas, other considerations soon arose. Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? Was his engagement to Lucy an engagement of the heart? (111).

A good deal of the novel's complexity comes from Austen's language, particularly in the ironic detachment of the narrator from the characters as he or she reveals personalities through dialogue and the third-person narrative. Recognizing the vital importance of the tone in the language of the novel to the story *and* to the film adaptation, Lindsay Doran, the producer, searched for a screenwriter:

*who was equally strong in the areas of satire and romance (not an easy combination . . . since satirists are often too bitter to be romantic, and romantics are often too sentimental to be satiric); and a writer who was not only familiar with Jane Austen's language but who could **think** in that language almost as naturally as he or she could think in the language of the twentieth century (Thompson 11).*

Austen's language is often complex, but she also writes in a dramatic and playful manner that invites *physical* interpretation. The scenes between Lucy Steele and Elinor quiver with tension in the emotionally draining cat and mouse game that Lucy plays with Elinor: "*The manner in which Miss Steele had spoken of Edward increased her curiosity; for it struck her [Elinor] as being ill-natured. And suggested the suspicion of that lady's knowing, or fancying herself to know, something to his disadvantage*" (103). At intervals during their conversation, Lucy "eyes" Elinor "*attentively*" (104), fixes "*her eyes upon Elinor*" (105) and

looks down as she speaks "*amiably bashful, with only one side glance at her companion to observe its effect on her*" (105). When the older Dashwood sister first learns of the engagement, she looks "*earnestly at Lucy, hoping to discover something in her countenance . . . but Lucy's countenance suffered no change*" (108).

Finally, Elinor's "*indignation*" makes her feel "*for a short time . . . only for herself*" (111), but when she thinks of Edward's traits, his "*integrity, his delicacy, and well-informed mind*" (112), she cannot help but see him as glaringly unsuitable for the "*artful and selfish*" (112) Lucy, whom she sees as wanting the very same "*delicacy . . . rectitude, and integrity of mind*" (127). No friendship can exist between the two women, not only due to Edward's engagement to Lucy, but also because they have nothing in common to share with each other. As time passes, Elinor becomes conscious of playing right into Lucy's hands: "*She felt such conversations to be an indulgence which Lucy did not deserve, and which were dangerous to herself*" (151). When Lucy arrives in London, full of sly enthusiasm, the heart-broken Elinor is required to exercise all of her self-restraint in order to prevent herself from adding to Lucy's triumph: "*Elinor perfectly understood her, and was forced to use all her self-command to make it appear that she did not*" (217-8).

The intense verbal "action" of scenes such as this invites dramatization. The screenwriter transforms such an episode into a blueprint for physical expression which in turn, the director interprets. This scene, adapted in Lee's film, is portrayed as a tense, hushed conversation between two young women, the one, watching the eyes of the other for clues to feelings, in a claustrophobic setting where there is always the danger of being overheard,

intercepted, or of drawing attention to oneself by such behaviour. The 1940 film version *Pride and Prejudice*, in an unfortunate attempt to cinematize Austen's refined verbal wit, employed slapstick in the scene where Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth. While the scene in the novel contains humour, Melville Cooper plays his role in the film with such exaggerated foppishness that Austen's sophisticated comedy becomes, in the hands of the director Robert Leonard, pure farce. Adapting the tone of irony in the language of a literary work such as Austen's is a decidedly difficult task for the screenwriter, and Emma Thompson, who wrote the screenplay for *Sense and Sensibility*, revised, altered and reinvented for a period of five years before she felt the work was ready.

Doran recognized qualities in the novel that, in her opinion, would translate into a satisfying film: "*Sense and Sensibility* seemed to have them all: wonderful characters, a strong love story (actually, *three strong love stories*), surprising plot twists, good jokes, relevant themes, and a heart-stopping ending" (Thompson 11). The "surface" itself of Austen's novel, that is an emphasis on the customs of the late 18th century British gentry, is inherently picturesque. As a novelistic comedy of manners, *Sense and Sensibility* emphasizes the social mores of its period and the elaborate manners of the time. The emphasis on outward courtesy and decorum was viewed as a reflection of one's morals, and one's outward behaviour was likely to be scrutinized constantly. Such behaviour as entering a room properly, or knowing the appropriate way of riding a horse, of speaking, dancing and painting were all accomplishments that people of Austen's social class were expected to do effortlessly; in turn, all of these details have the potential to translate well to the visual nature of the screen.

The novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, reveals how men who had country homes interested themselves in hunting, in horses and in newspapers, while the women, who waited for them, had to occupy themselves with visiting neighbours, dancing, embroidering samplers, drawing and music. The art of conversation, based on knowledge of literature, poetry and history was increasingly nurtured as a suitable accomplishment for ladies; Margaret is told by her mother to confine her conversation to the weather if she has nothing "appropriate" to talk about. Evening entertainment typically included piano playing, singing and card games. Though Austen's novel is decidedly short on explicit visual images, *Sense and Sensibility* nevertheless lends itself easily to adaptation because the film maker can both exploit and augment features of the novel that are latently picturesque -- an engaging plot [about love]; a gallery of interesting characters with idiosyncratic habits, manners and styles of dress; a combination of both indoor and outdoor settings; beautiful architecture; and a shift from the English countryside to London -- using the visual capabilities of the medium without damaging the essential nature of the novel.

The adaptation of Austen's novels has had a long history: translation into other languages; simplifications; abridgments; continuations; as well as film and theatrical dramatizations. There have been at least three theatrical versions of *Sense and Sensibility*: Jane Kendall's (Chicago, 1948) version; Antony Jonquil's *Sense and Sensibility: A Play in Three Acts* (London, 1949); and Mildred Blakesley's *The Dashwoods; A Play in three Acts* (New York, 1974); not to say that there have been at least fourteen versions of *Pride and*

Prejudice and three of *Emma*.¹⁵ On one occasion, after having watched two film adaptations of Austen in one day, as well as having reread a novel within a twenty-four hour period, it became strikingly clear to me just how stubbornly similar the problems of adaptation are in *all* of the novels that the film maker and the stage director must confront. These include: faithfulness to Austen's actual words; words give the adaptation a sense of the original but of course no version can begin to encompass large portions of the dialogue of the novel in a period of about two hours; the need to simplify the plot in order to launch into the story promptly; the need to reduce the number of characters, either through elimination, or through doubling up -- where two characters are combined in one. Essentially, the simpler the screen story, the better the viewer will understand it, so the director and screenwriter pare away as much as is possible, while still maintaining the recognizable core of the novel.

The importance of the *Picturesque* to Austen's time and, I believe, to the film version of the novel is a matter worth mentioning here. It is difficult, if not impossible to watch any of the recent adaptations, without becoming aware of the background, especially the country homes and the perfect English landscape, which is as hazy and as unreal as a studio backdrop. During the writer's period, Turner and Constable were the great English painters, the greatest British architect at the time was Robert Adam, and English domestic architecture was enjoying its Golden Age (Watkins 8). The environment that Austen depicts in her novels is a portrait that links together the country house and its landscaped setting in a harmonious

¹⁵ See Andrew Wright's article, "*Jane Austen Adapted*" pp. 421-453.

melding of the classical and nature, a harmony that the film also achieves.

Just as Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* thoroughly revised the hitherto valourized poetic form so, too, Constable turned away from the pictorial conventions of the 18th century landscape painters. Working extensively in the open air, he represented in paint the atmospheric effects of changing light in the open air, the movement of clouds across the sky, and his excitement at this phenomenon stemmed from his love of the country. Turner revolutionized landscape painting in his attention to the luminosity and atmosphere which became increasingly Romantic¹⁶ in its dramatic subject matter. Both Turner and Constable's idealization of the Picturesque landscape were part of a larger trend which came into fashion in the late 18th century, in the appreciation and creation of beauty. I mention Turner, Constable and the Picturesque movement specifically because they are not only important in their impact on Austen (many of her characters are familiar with Gilpin),¹⁷ but also in the way the landscape is treated in the film adaptation, an aspect that I develop further in the next chapter of this study. Austen was an great admirer of landscape, both painted and natural. Henry Austen writes: "*At a very early age she was enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque;*

¹⁶ I refer to Romanticism as the late 18th and early 19th century's movement which explored the values of intuition and instinct. Romanticism represents an attitude of mind, rather than stylistic traits and it involves the expression of ideas that tend to have verbal rather than visual origins. Because Romanticism searches for the transcendental and the infinite, of forces exceeding the boundaries of reason, it must be vague -- suggestive rather than concrete, in the manner of painting and sculpture for instance. Music and literature lend themselves more easily to Romantic expression, but artists like Turner, Blake, Delacroix and Géricault, are Romantics in the way they revolted against conservatism, moderation and insisted on the primacy of the imagination in artistic expression. For additional reading, see H.W. Janson's *History of Art. Third Edition*.

¹⁷ William Gilpin is remembered for his theoretical principles set out in *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1792). His writing did much to "form the taste in landscape, art, and the literary treatment of nature in the later 18th century and which some have seen as heralds of Romanticism." See Drabble and Stringer p.226.

and she seldom changed her opinions either on books or me." (SS 33). Writers on the movement of the Picturesque, such as Gilpin, had a considerable impact on the sensibilities and the vocabulary of writers of the 18/19th century like Austen. The Picturesque "as defined by Price, was a new aesthetic category, to be added to Burke's recently established categories of the Sublime and the Beautiful" (Drabble and Stringer 440). Austen's biographer, Jenkins, reinforces the influence the Picturesque movement had during Austen's time:

[T]he cult of the picturesque in England reached its most ardent phase in the latter part of the eighteenth century. It was natural that the Rule of Taste should extend itself to landscape no less than to architecture . . . When Thompson's poem, "The Seasons," with its detailed descriptions of landscape in the varied changes of the year, became known to the public, he was hailed as the Claude [Lorraine] of poets . . . This appreciation of picturesque beauty, celebrated in poetry and paint, greatly influenced landscape gardening . . . Gilpin said: "England exceeds most countries in the Variety of its picturesque beauty," for the following reasons: "the prevalence of hedgerows, the predominance of oaks, the frequency of parks, its vaporous atmosphere, and the large number of its Gothic ruins; as the perpetrator of which, said the History, Henry VIII had been of great use to the English landscape" (47-49).

Marianne's address to Norland which begins with "Dear, dear Norland" is a kind of naïve Wordsworthian acknowledgment of the primal power of the wild landscape. Marianne has an intuitive wish to merge with nature, reflecting the Romantic¹⁸ notion of the natural/spiritual correspondence of Man and Nature, an aspect that the film exploits. She

¹⁸ I use the capitalized Romanticism to indicate the great literary movement of the late 18th and early 19th century. Marianne is also "romantic" in the sense that she is given to thoughts of sentimental love, especially when she falls in love with Willoughby.

despises Edward Ferrars for his inability to appreciate and to become "animated" by the poetical works of Cowper.¹⁹ Elinor sees Marianne's desire for harmony with nature as self-indulgent. She tells her: "*It is not every one . . . who has your passion for dead leaves*" (88). Elinor's mockery of Marianne's Romanticism is gentle; Elinor's own vision lies somewhere between Cowper's and Wordsworth's. When Fanny Dashwood tells Elinor her plans to renovate the landscape, Elinor's reaction reflects the late 18th century's preference for the unaltered scheme of nature.

The purpose of this chapter has been to lay the foundation for the understanding of Austen and her novel, for exploring the book's latent pictorial possibilities that a film maker can exploit, and the introduction of influences such as the Picturesque and Romanticism. The adaptation reveals and emphasizes these very influences, and I return to them in the following chapter where I discuss and analyze both the screenplay and film. When a film script, like *Sense and Sensibility* comes alive on the screen and is experienced by the viewer, the relationship between the audience and the screen is a much more "*collaborative process*" (Klein and Parker 6) than the dialectic between reader and novel. The director and the screenwriter must understand the basic laws of dramaturgy, but apply them to the cinematic form. The viewer agrees to freely suspend his disbelief about reality for about two hours and the director's skill at being able to manipulate his spectator's emotion, and the audience's

¹⁹ William Cowper's poems and letters are valued for their tranquillity and wit. Although he predates the Romantic movement of the late 18th century, "*his sympathetic feelings for nature . . . and his use of blank verse links that of James Thompson with that of Wordsworth.*" His two most famous works, *The Task* and "*The Castaway*" deal with man's isolation and helplessness. See Drabble and Stringer p.132. Cowper was one of Austen's two favourite "moral" writers. The other was Johnson.

willingness to supply the emotion and interpret the celluloid narrative, ultimately "complete" the film.

Writing a screenplay, the "blueprint" for a film, is a process that requires a rethinking of the novel, and an acute understanding of how the nature of dramaturgy is different from other literature. The making of a film requires that the screenplay take into account the plot of the novel and the selecting and ordering of about twenty-six to about thirty-six scenes, on average, for a two hour film. How much the viewer must know, and when, are all considerations that the screenwriter takes into account. Characters must be considered in such a way that best brings them to life within the context of the story. Conflict, crisis and climax must be clear; they drive the story in one direction or another. The nature of the dialogue must be considered; its limitation and values set the tone of the film. In the chapter that now follows, *Screenplay and Film*, I have attempted a close reading of the novel, screenplay and the visual texture of the film in order to understand how the film retells the novel through scenes, settings and dialogue.

CHAPTER TWO

Sense and Sensibility: Novel, Screenplay and Film

[Film communicates] through its own particular formal and signifying properties. Camera position, camera movement, framing, lighting, sound, and editing are, perhaps, the primary means by which a director may reproduce shape, and thus express and evaluate the significance of the narrative . . . A film of a novel, far from being a mechanical copy of the source, is a transposition or translation from one set of conventions for representing the world to another (Klein 3).

The central texts referred to in this chapter include the Austen novel, Emma Thompson's *The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay & Diaries: Bringing Jane Austen's Novel to Film* and of course, the visual text: the adapted cinematic version. As the conclusion of Chapter I, *Novel*, established, the screenplay is a blueprint for the film. The adaptation of a novel to a screenplay is an onerous task, one that is best performed by a scenarist who understands the original literary source and the form to which the material must be translated. A screenwriter must first and foremost keep in mind what the audience will *see*, and what the audience sees at the cinema will necessarily result from a higher level of production and attendant impact than that applicable when considering what he sees, for example, on the television screen.¹ He must envision the whole of the work as a completed entity which

¹ Film adaptation differs from television adaptation because the cinema screen is a high resolution medium, while television, has a lower degree of resolution, hence television's dependence on the close-up. A television image blown up to the size of a screen would render the image blurred and indefinite. Pictorial representation on the

considers all the aspects of pictorial balance that the frame of the screen will encompass: the size of the images, the placement of objects and their relationship to other objects or characters in one or multiple scenes, as well as the connections between, and the ordering of images. A screenwriter must constantly keep in mind how sequences of pictures produce and intensify feeling: several shocking episodes, placed one after the other for example, decrease in their shock value, while a horrifying scene placed after a placid one increases the impact. The peculiar fluidity of the camera, that is, its ability to capture a sense of immediate reality and to penetrate facial expression, increases the information a viewer receives on a level that is superior to dialogue alone; conversation or discussion can give only a superficial explanation of a character's feelings. Thompson's screenplay shows an acute awareness of the patterns of pictorial representation, the employment of which eliminates those parts of the novel which, when brought to the screen, might otherwise appear superfluous.

Because the central aim of a scenarist is to create a script that will "look good" on the screen, significant sacrifices must be made in the original material in order to achieve such a goal. In addition to this, the screenplay is as vulnerable to alteration as is the novel when adapted to the script. The screenwriter's draft is always reworked to some degree when

television screen need not be as complete in the same way as do images on a large screen where details of the setting, costume and the character's appearance are magnified and consequently submitted to the close scrutiny of the viewer. Just as the novel is subject to the reader's imagination and reading pace, the television adaptation is subject to the watching habits of its audience. A film watched on the screen has more of a "captive" audience than does a version of it on television; the television viewer can "tune in" when he wants [through video recording], or skip parts of what he is watching. Television miniseries such as *Pride and Prejudice* are popular because they break up a long narrative into manageable investments in terms of concentration and time for the spectator; they also allow the screenwriter and the filmmaker to include more of the novel's characters and scenes, something that a two hour time frame just cannot accommodate.

transformed to the screen by the filmmaker. Thompson describes the painful process of subjecting her finished script to the scrutiny of the core personnel of the film: Lindsay Doran (producer), Ang Lee (director), Tony Clarkson (locations manager) and Laurie Borg (co-producer). Writing that had taken her a painstaking five years to complete, was now laid open to modification through "*adding subtracting, bargaining, [and] negotiating*" (208).

Doran had long nurtured the desire to make a film of Austen's first novel, feeling that it had "*more sheer entertainment value than the other books, and it had the advantage of having two central female characters instead of the usual one*" (13). On a chance encounter with Thompson on the set of *Dead Again* (1991), she discovered their mutual passion for the writer. Following her meeting with the actress, she happened to watch a comedy series Thompson had written and performed for *BBC* in 1988. Aspects of the sketches strongly impressed Doran, but she was especially appreciative of the actress' ability to write, particularly her economy of language and her understanding of, and fondness for, the historic social subtleties of British culture.² Convinced that Thompson was the right person for the task, she then persuaded the actress to try her hand at writing the script:

² In one sketch, a disgruntled Maid Marian "*shown at the point in [her relationship with Robin] . . . when the joys of living in the woods was wearing a bit thin*" (Thompson 13) offers a feminine perspective on Robin Hood's policy of giving to the rich and stealing from the poor. In another, Thompson spoofed the sexual ignorance of Victorian brides as a nervous mother tries to explain to her daughter what the mouse-like creature was that had crawled out of the husband's trousers on their wedding night. Doran felt Thompson was "*funny in the same way that Jane Austen was funny, even though the subject matter was far more bawdy than what Jane Austen chose to write about.*" See Thompson p.13.

Emma's ability to write in period language seemed effortless . . . I knew that Emma had never written a screenplay before, but there was enough sense of story-telling even in those two- and three-minute sketches to indicate that writing a full - length script wouldn't be too difficult a leap (Thompson 13).

Doran considered Thompson's background and experience as an actress a boon because not only could Thompson *"think in Jane Austen's language, but she understood the rhythms of good scene writing and [she would know] how to convey a sense of setting"* (14). Over the next five years Thompson would write and rewrite her drafts, reducing her copious 400 page manuscript into a tightly-written dramalogue for a two hour, fifteen minute film. Realizing that the language in this early novel was more *"complex"* and *"arcane"* than Austen's later novels, she reduced and simplified any examples of it that seemed abstruse, modernizing it, but so that it would retain the *"elegance and wit of the original"* (252).

Reviews of the film tend to be unbalanced in the moderate attention they give to Ang Lee's reputation as a filmmaker, and the concentration given to Thompson for her roles in the production of the film; it is impossible, however, to deny the effect that Thompson had in shaping the central vision of the film, in her function as both the screenwriter and as one of the film's main characters. When Lee first agreed to the directing of the film, he envisioned having sole creative control of it; however, he became quickly disillusioned: *"In Taiwan the director holds complete sway. He speaks and everyone obeys. Here, actors always ask questions and make suggestions"* (220). Deeply offended at the active participation that Thompson and the others assumed in the making of the film, he recalled his initial experience working with Western actors:

On the first couple of days . . . I really had a problem, especially with the stars, who had the attitude that they were going to carry the movie. This is really opposite to Taiwan, where you make movies that will carry the actors. But after a while, we started not so much to negotiate, but to appreciate what each was doing and find a common ground that was best for the movie (Fuller 24).

When asked about Thompson's roles as both scenarist and actress and the effect that this unconventional combination had on the creation of the film, Lee replied:

Emma's two roles contradicted each other: usually you don't allow the writer on the set because they get upset . . . In terms of dealing with her as a writer . . . I had to put her ego aside if we wanted to make the film work . . . she appreciated what I wanted to do. [However] I learned a lot from her performance and her interpretations of the text (Fuller 24).

Lee was selected to direct the film after a devotee of his from *Mirage*, Geoff Stier, convinced Doran and others to watch Lee's earlier films. It wasn't until *Eat Drink Man Woman* that Lee's potential as a director for the film became apparent. The elegant, restrained, bittersweet, Taiwanese film contained strong elements that were reminiscent of the ironic and romantic tone in *Sense and Sensibility*. In an uncanny parallel to the plot in Austen's novel, the heart of the film pivots upon a widowed father who must find husbands for his daughters; at the same time it centres upon the lives and the personalities of two of the sisters whose counterparts are found in Elinor and Marianne. In one scene he has the more emotionally demonstrative sister accuse her more restrained sibling of being unfeeling. In a moment of uncharacteristic anger the controlled sister asks explosively, "What do you know of my heart?" words that correspond almost exactly to Elinor's speech to Marianne when Marianne accuses her of the same thing halfway through the film. After having read

Thompson's initial screenplay, Lee not only appreciated its humour but he also recognized the "universality" of the story and of its characters. He spoke of the meaning that the title of Austen's book held for him: "*two elements that represent the core of life itself, like Yin and Yang, or Eat, Drink, Man, Woman.*" (15) Once Lee agreed to direct the film, he told Doran, "*I want this film to break people's hearts so badly they'll still be recovering from it two months later*" (15). Beginning the filmmaking process by reducing and simplifying Thompson's screenplay, Lee whittled away at the longer speeches made by the characters until it became the version that is now the film.

Retaining the essential events of the story, Thompson modified Austen's characters sometimes giving them specific identities that would make a heavier impact in the film. Her best characterization is that of Margaret Dashwood, whom the novel presents as a, "*good-humoured well-disposed girl; . . . [who] had imbibed a good deal of Marianne's romance, without having much of her sense, [though] she did not at thirteen bid fair to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life*" (9). Margaret Dashwood is an unimportant and almost absent figure in the novel; however, Thompson transforms this shadow sister into one of the most charming and pivotal characters in the film.³ Emilie François, the twelve year old

³ Thompson greatly expands the characterization of Margaret, but the root element of the character is found in the novel. For example, the novel's character manifests the same precociousness that the film Margaret does; after Willoughby's rescue of Marianne she dubs Willoughby, with "*more elegance than precision . . . Marianne's preserver.*" In the film when Marianne and the others are hoping for Willoughby to arrive, Margaret who has been posted outside runs into the house screaming "*Marianne's preserver!*" at the top of her lungs. In the novel, both Elinor and Margaret observe Marianne and Willoughby the night that he cuts a lock of her hair, but Margaret, thinking that she has been the only one to see this reports the event to Elinor the next day with great dramatic flair.

"*Oh! Elinor,' she cried, 'I am sure she will be married to Mr. Willoughby very soon.'* 'You have said so,' replied Elinor, '*almost everyday since they first met on High-Church Down; and they had not known each other a week,*

who plays Margaret Dashwood has an exuberance and spontaneity that informs every scene in which she appears. In one incident, Edward is reading aloud a poem while Marianne is shown growing increasingly frustrated and impatient with Edward's calm delivery. Suddenly Marianne jumps up and takes the book from him, and begins to read "*the stanza with passionate brio:*" (50)

No, Edward! Listen:

*No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone;
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.⁴*

Can you not feel his despair? (50).

Margaret, who is shown in the background asleep, leaning against Mrs. Dashwood, is suddenly startled awake. Recognizing the source of her disturbed slumber to be Marianne, she resumes her nap, revealing at once the typicality of Marianne's outburst and her own

I believe, before you were certain that Marianne wore his picture round her neck; but it turned out to be the miniature of our great uncle.' 'But indeed this is quite another thing. I am sure they will be married very soon, for he has got a lock of her hair.' 'Take care, Margaret. It may be only the hair of some great uncle of his'" (51). Thompson retains the basic incident and dialogue from the novel when Margaret, who is being teased by Mrs. Jennings to reveal the identity of Elinor's young man, turns sagaciously to Elinor and says, "I must not tell, may I, Elinor?" (51).

⁴ In the film, Edward reads the last stanza from Cowper's "*The Castaway*," one of his best-known works. For Cowper, the travel narratives of explorers were "*almost tantamount to prophetic books, revealing God's intentions for England . . . or sometimes for Cowper himself*" (Priestman 36). Cowper's poem is based on a story of a castaway that Lord Anson tells in his 1748 *Voyages Round the World* (*The Norton Anthology of Poetry* p.257). The poem not only reinforces the travel/sea pirate theme that is part of Margaret's characterization, but it also foreshadows the destructive nature of Marianne and Willoughby's "stormy" relationship.

unflappable, resilient and carefree nature.

Fuller describes Margaret as the embodiment of Elinor's and Marianne's secrets. She is a tomboyish, ringleted Puck who "*reminds us what fools mortals are*" (Fuller 22). Both "*concealer and revealer*" (22), Margaret "*militates*" against her sisters' "*circumspection*" (22), blurting out Elinor's secret affection for Edward to Mrs. Jennings and Sir John Middleton. Hiding in the treehouse, and under tables from the noxious Fanny and John indicates Margaret's aloofness from and resistance to the social constraints of politeness that burden, even torture other characters. Her fascination with maps, and rivers, and seas reflects her search for truth and wisdom in an attempt to break the boundaries and social inscriptions of her time. Rivers and seas represent for her a combination of untamable wildness, wisdom, and adventure. The idea of travel, then, becomes a place where her youthful imagination can grow. She quivers with fascination when she finds out that Colonel Brandon has been to what he describes as the "East Indies." Sensing what it is that she wants to hear from him, he tells her mysteriously, "*The air is full of spices*" (Thompson 72). When Elinor tells Edward: "*Margaret has always wanted to travel*" (45), he expands on Margaret's adventurous spirit: "*She is heading an expedition to China shortly. I am to go as her servant but only on the understanding that I will be very badly treated*" (48). Despite her youth, Margaret's desire to travel and to submit others to *her* will (she tells Edward his duties will be "*sword-fighting, administering rum and swabbing*") (48), indicates, to a certain extent, a reaction against the social containment of women in traditional roles. Youthful she may be, yet her behaviour, her recognizable, albeit developing rebellion also indicates a growing awareness of what it means

to be a female at that time. Margaret's telescope, an instrument of vision, represents the



multiplication and the magnification of wisdom acquired from such rebellion. Clairvoyant-like, she is able to look beyond the perimeters of societal conventions and other characters' external behaviour. When the overly zealous Sir John Middleton and Mrs. Jennings rush over to greet the Dashwoods when they first arrive at Barton Cottage, the new family is left feeling overwhelmed. When they leave, Mrs. Dashwood says weakly "*What generosity*" (67). Elinor adds dryly "*Indeed. I am surprised they did not offer us their clothing*" (67). Margaret defends them, "*I like them*" (67). Later in the film when she is scolded for revealing Elinor's affection for Edward to Mrs. Jennings, she champions the older woman once again. Elinor, Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood are all appalled at Margaret's relish for the boorish and boisterous "*cock-a-hoop*"(70) game that Sir. John and Mrs. Jennings play during dinner.

Margaret, fascinated with Mrs. Jennings gregariousness, as if she were "*some particularly thrilling form of wildlife*" (70), is able to discern beneath the woman's vulgar, intrusive and gossipy veneer, genuine kindness and sympathy. She says: "*I like her! She talks about things. We never talk about things.*"

As a result of Thompson's characterization, Margaret constitutes a fusion of qualities that seem both overtly modern and traditional. The most powerful symbol of Thompson's youngest heroine is the treehouse. Her domination of the treehouse provides an ironic counterbalance for the real disinheritance suffered by her mother and sisters. Margaret's treehouses form one of the several visual links that unify the film. The beginning of the film has Margaret refusing to come down from the treehouse when she hears that Fanny and John Dashwood are coming to live at Norland, and the end of the film has Margaret climbing excitedly into her "new" treehouse to watch Edward propose to Elinor, an event which she gleefully announces to Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne. The style of the treehouse was more "*palatial*" (217) than Thompson originally anticipated. The physical likeness of the first structure to that of a classic, elegant rustic Cottage, complete with thatched roof, and the latter, to a more primitive version,⁵ parallels the Dashwoods' dispossession and downward

⁵Reeds, grasses and bulrushes are a leitmotif in the film. The second treehouse is made from the reeds. Rushes are sometimes represented as physical and fruitful love. In *As You Like It*, Rosalind tells Orlando she hopes that he is not a man in love, "*in which cage of rushes I am sure you are not a prisoner*" (III,2, 349-350). At the picnic at the pond near Barton Park, in a Hardy - like sequence, Marianne is shown with a flushed face, in the middle of a patch of bulrushes, breaking them impatiently. Colonel Brandon suddenly materializes at her side and wordlessly offers her a knife which Marianne takes with a look of odd nervousness in her expression. After the picnic, there follow two inter-connected scenes to this one. The first shows Sir John and Brandon cleaning guns. Angrily, Brandon tells Sir John that Marianne would no more love him than she would care for Sir John. The next shows Brandon is striding along the pond's edge in hunting gear. A dog trots behind holding a duck in his mouth while Brandon holds a gun and a few reeds, which represent his attachment to Marianne, a link back to the reed-cutting

movement in social status. When Elinor tries to coax Margaret out of the treehouse at the beginning of the film she not only reveals their awful plight, but she also exposes the greed-driven conduct of John and Fanny. Thompson is a master of creating small scenes, and in the following example, using a simplified and modernized version of Austen's dialogue, she is able to capture the writer's knife-edged humour as well as introducing a predominant social concern in Austen's novel: female disinheritance. Frustrated with Margaret's stubbornness as she hides in her treehouse, Elinor is about to leave when a young, angry disembodied voice asks:

*Why are they [Fanny and John] coming to live at Norland? They **already** have a house in London.*

ELINOR

Because houses go from father to son, dearest – not from father to daughter. It is the law.

(Silence. ELINOR tries another tack.)

ELINOR

scene.

If you come inside, we could play with your atlas.

MARGARET (V/O)

*It's not my atlas any more. It's **their** atlas (34).*

There is a sense throughout the film that her childish rebelliousness and omniscience is nurtured and valued by other characters despite the inconvenience it causes at times. At the beginning of the film, as Elinor searches for the youngster she comes across Marianne and voices her concern: *"Have you seen Margaret? I am worried about her. She has taken to hiding in the oddest places"* (37). Suddenly looking very mutinous, Marianne replies: *"Fortunate girl. At least she can escape Fanny, which is more than any one of us is able"* (37). In another episode, near the end of the film, Edward arrives to propose to Elinor. Earlier in the narrative Margaret has been warned by Mrs. Dashwood to restrict her embarrassing candid remarks to the weather. Keeping the mother's chastisement in mind, and sensing the tension and awkwardness of the occasion and the way everyone is searching for an appropriate remark, Margaret decides to try her hand at the art of polite conversation: *"We have been enjoying very fine weather"* (196). At Margaret's "outburst," Marianne gives her a penetrating look of incredulity, and she is immediately arrested from continuing in a way that is "unnatural" to her. Margaret's character in the film is cautionary, watchful and instinctive. The sword-fighting scene with Edward shows her to be the embodiment of healthy, exuberant female energy. Even Mrs. Dashwood, who has a deep-seated fear for the fates of her daughters perceives that Margaret's intractable spirit makes her different from her

sisters.⁶

Thompson's screenplay opens with a short scene which is not in the film; but because this sequence was meant to preface the rest of the film, it indicates the importance of Margaret, in part, for setting the tone for the rest of the film. Mrs. Dashwood struggles to hide her fear and grief as she watches her husband die; hoping to lighten some of the wretchedness that he is feeling for their future she tries to console him saying: "*Margaret will go out to sea and become a pirate so we need not concern ourselves with her*" (29). Later in the film Edward and Elinor share with each other their mutual sense of powerlessness; for Edward it is the freedom to choose a profession, and for Elinor it is the ability to earn a living. Edward's humorous suggestion that perhaps, "*Piracy is our only option*" (50), echoes Margaret's tenacity, but it also suggests a darker side to the child. Embraced within the comment about piracy is Margaret's intuitive understanding of the desperate measures that she perceives may be required to change a society that oppresses its women through property, lack of opportunity, marriage and family, a society of which she too recognizes she is part.

Margaret is one of Thompson's finest characterizations, and the most fundamental challenge that she faced in adapting Austen's novel to the screen centered upon the recreation of believable and appealing individuals. Of all the characters in the novel, Thompson found Colonel Brandon to be the most difficult to adapt. In the novel he is described as a "*silent and*

⁶ The novel closes with the observation that Margaret is now next in line for a husband: ". . . fortunately for Sir John and Mrs. Jennings, when Marianne was taken from them, Margaret had reached an age highly suitable for dancing and not very ineligible for being supposed to have a lover" (306). The film is more ambiguous about Margaret's readiness for courtship. While she expresses delight in her sisters' romances, she seems much younger and more tomboyishly free-spirited than the novel's character.

grave" (30), older bachelor "on the wrong side of five and thirty" (30). Instead of playing up his age and unattractiveness with details such as his flannel waistcoats and rheumatism, Thompson gave him "manhood [which makes him] a really solid person, who not only takes care of himself but takes care of others" (Fuller 24).⁷ Alan Rickman who plays the character in the film wanted Brandon to be more of a romantic figure; however Lee wanted him to internalize those feelings allowing them to emote through his eyes and demeanor. Simplifying and reducing his acting style from "the English style -- the big speech style" (Fuller 24), Rickman's performance centres upon his private tragic past, a past that consequently makes him, Lee felt, a more acceptable lover for Marianne. The disclosure of Brandon's past is one of the most carefully wrought scenes in the film. Elinor senses the tension before Brandon speaks; unable to remain still and calm, he finds it difficult to begin. He walks across the room into a section that is dark blood-red in colour, indicating the passionate nature of what he is about to divulge. As he begins to speak, he is barely able to conceal his rising distress, and Elinor cannot disguise her own shocked reaction at what he tells her. Thompson describes the process of making the scene in this way:

⁷ Austen writes that "face was not handsome, [but] his countenance was sensible, and his address was particularly gentlemanlike" (30). Mrs. Jennings immediately thinks that Brandon and Marianne would make a suitable match, for "he was rich and she was handsome" (32). Marianne thinks of Brandon as a man too "infirm" (33), to have any kind of deep feeling. Reacting to her silly assumption Elinor says, "Infirmity! . . . Do you call Colonel Brandon infirm? I can easily suppose that his age may appear much greater to you than to my mother, but you can hardly deceive yourself as to his having the use of his limbs!" [Marianne speaks:] "'Did you not hear him complain of rheumatism? And is it not the commonest infirmity of declining life?' 'My dearest child,' said her mother, laughing, 'at this rate you must be in continual terror of my decay; and it must seem to you a miracle that my life has been extended to the advanced age of forty'" (33).

[I] Talked about the long Brandon confession scene with Alan. The trick is to break up the bulk of the information with character and to make it a scene about -- as Alan puts it -- a man thawing out after having been in a fridge for twenty years. The movement of blood and warmth back into unaccustomed veins is extremely painful. The scene has existed in many forms -- flashbacks, stylised imagery -- until I realised it was emotionally more interesting to let Brandon tell the story himself and find it difficult (251).

Rickman plays his part with elegance and military bearing as a man unrequited in love who feels he is too old and even-tempered to attract the higher spirited Marianne. The scenes with Brandon in the screenplay are written in such a way that his visits to Marianne are especially ill-timed and unfortunate because he always seems to arrive when Marianne is waiting for Willoughby. He faces Marianne's looks of unconcealed disappointment with reserve, politeness and soft yearning eyes which suggest much more in his character than he is able to show. Both Lee and Thompson were moved by Alan Rickman's performance of the character, "[He is] Sad, vulnerable [with a] weighty presence. Brandon is, I suppose, the real hero of this piece but he has to grow on Marianne as he grows on the audience" (Thompson 269). Rickman's dignified and restrained portrayal of Brandon contrasts with what, for Austen's rheumatically Colonel, must always remain unconvincing to the reader. That is, he persuades the viewer that Marianne's shift of attention has *really* occurred. Consider the following passage from the novel:

. . . her regard and her society restored his mind to animation and his spirits to cheerfulness; and that Marianne found her happiness in forming his was equally the persuasion and delight of each observing friend. Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband as it had once been to Willoughby (305).

The final scene of Marianne's illness, shows Brandon standing at the bedroom door watching

Mrs. Dashwood reunite with her daughter. Unwilling to be an intruder on this scene of intimacy, he steps back shutting the door behind him. Marianne sees and softly calls: "*Colonel Brandon . . . thank-you*" (186). The next scene shows Brandon and Marianne sitting close together in the garden of Barton Cottage. The passing of time is indicated in the spring-like atmosphere. In this sequence, Marianne, pale, calm and convalescent listens intently to Brandon as he reads to her. The scene evokes the intimacy that is growing between the two; we see her face in profile, older and somehow different, looking out over the pond. The poem Brandon reads captures the nature of their painful past *and* the couple's hopeful future:

*Nor is the earth the lesse, or loseth aught.
For whatsoever from one place doth fall, Is with the tide unto another brought . . .
For there is nothing lost, but may be found, if sought . . .* (187).

In the diaries Thompson writes about the visual appeal of a man carrying a woman; "*Male strength . . . The image of the man carrying the woman is horribly effective*" (250). The two "carrying" scenes in the film, the first with Willoughby and the second with Brandon, deliberately create a visual and emotional counterpoint to each other. Greg Wise who plays the flamboyant seducer and the prime amorous interest of the film is, as Thompson points out, "*The only male who springs out in three dimensions (a precursor to [Austen's] other charm merchants, Frank Churchill in *Emma*, Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* and Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*)*" (269). The initial entry of Willoughby on a black charger as he rides through great billowing clouds of fog and drizzle to rescue Marianne is a brilliantly evoked, tongue-in-cheek sequence that captures the very essence of Willoughby and Marianne's romantic relationship. Lee chose Wise for the role despite his inexperience as an



actor because he most resembled his vision of Willoughby; an *"athletic Byron, but not dangerous in that James Dean way"* (Fuller 24). His smooth and smarmy courtship of Marianne, his gift of wildflowers; the reading of Shakespeare's sonnets from his own pocket-sized version; the wild rides through the village in his carriage, are also so romantically clichéd that it is impossible not to laugh at times. It is not until the scene on the meadow near Barton Cottage that his charm and playfulness indicate something more rash and dangerous in his personality. When Willoughby waddles about the garden parodying Mrs. Jennings, the viewer begins to sense in him a streak of cruelty, and in one sequence, Willoughby, after being asked by Elinor about his obvious dislike for Brandon looks momentarily alarmed. Sweeping



Marianne to her feet, he begins to spin her around the garden while speaking the following deeply ironic passage:

[I dislike Brandon] Because he has threatened me with rain when I wanted it fine, he has found fault with the balance of my curricle and I cannot persuade him to buy my mare. If it will be of any satisfaction to you, however, to be told I believe his character to be in all respects irreproachable, I am ready to confess it. And in return for an acknowledgment that must give me some pain [he begins to slow down as his passion begins to runs down] you cannot deny me the privilege [he slows down even more] of disliking him as much as I adore [he stops; Marianne, Margaret and Mrs. Dashwood are all completely swept up in the moment, looking up into the wild expression on Willoughby's face] -- this cottage!

(113).⁸

This scene, which is in its own way visually memorable,⁹ is a marked contrast to those that follow where Willoughby is shown in an entirely different light. In the heartbreaking scene at the ball Willoughby ignores Marianne showing himself to be weak and cowardly. One of the last shots in the film, the camera pulls back from the wedding celebration that is making its way from the church into the surrounding countryside. On the far edge of the frame, Willoughby is sitting on his horse overlooking the village and secretly watching the festivities. After watching a while longer, he draws back his horse and moves off in the opposite direction. It is a simple and brilliant visual evocation of the essence of Austen's closing passage on this character, a passage that for all of its surface description and apparent lightheartedness contains a recognizable element of punishment on the author's part:

⁸ This speech contrasts with the one that Brandon later makes in the film when he tells Elinor about Willoughby and Beth. Brandon, who has every reason to despise the man, remains scrupulously fair in his judgment of him: "I have described Mr. Willoughby as the worst of libertines -- but I have since learned from Mrs. Allen that he did mean to propose that day. Therefore I cannot deny that his intentions towards Marianne were honourable, and I feel certain he would have married her . . ." (155).

⁹ The picnic at the pond was meant to be a visually beautiful creation. The first set was far too extravagant: "Exquisite. [but It look[ed] like it [was] being given by the Rothchilds" Asking the set designer to tone down the setting, Thompson had them take away "pies and cakes and fruits and all the glory. 'Cheese. Bread, apples and beer,' I say. 'They're poor'" (234).

Willoughby could not hear of her marriage without a pang; and his punishment was soon afterwards complete in the voluntary forgiveness of Mrs. Smith, who, by stating his marriage with a woman of character as the source of her clemency, gave him reason for believing that had he behaved with honour towards Marianne, he might at once have been happy and rich. That his repentance of misconduct, which thus brought its own punishment, was sincere, need not be doubted; nor that he long thought of Colonel Brandon with envy and of Marianne with regret. But that he was forever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or contradicted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended on; for he did neither. He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was not always out of humour, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity.

For Marianne, however, in spite of his incivility in surviving her loss -- he always retained that decided regard which interested him in everything that befell her, and made her his secret standard of perfection in woman; and many a rising beauty would be slighted by him in after-days as bearing no comparison with Mrs. Brandon (305).

Hugh Grant who plays Edward Ferrars in the film has, I think, one of the most difficult roles to play. Edward has been dubbed by some critics as perhaps being one of the dullest suitors in literary history. Lee points out that even though Edward is basically a feeble and sheepish character, the film still needed "*somebody who could come in for 15 minutes, leave for 80 pages, come back, steal the last scene, and break your heart*" (Fuller 24). The director envisioned Edward as someone who could use his humour to "*rebel against society, almost in a heroic way*" (Fuller 24) in the style of Cary Grant. In the screenplay, Thompson pokes fun at Edward's shyness; however to prevent him from being a completely ineffectual character she blends his bashfulness with humour. In the scene where Elinor is saying goodbye to her horse, Edward enters the stable decisively after looking at her for a long moment. Needing to confess his engagement to Lucy, he begins the admission with

what appears to be a silly foray into his academic past, until he is interrupted by the powerful Fanny:

Miss Dashwood -- Elinor. I must speak with you.

(The use of her Christian name -- and in such a loving tone -- stops ELINOR'S breath altogether.)

EDWARD

There is something of great importance I need . . . to tell you --

(He comes closer still. The HORSE breathes between them. ELINOR is on fire with anticipation but EDWARD looks troubled and has less the air of a suitor than he might.)

EDWARD

-- about -- about my education.

ELINOR (after a beat)

Your education?

EDWARD

Yes. It was less . . . successful than it might have been.

(EDWARD laughs nervously. ELINOR is completely bewildered.)

EDWARD

It was conducted in Plymouth -- oddly enough.

ELINOR

Indeed?

EDWARD

Yes. Do you know it?

ELINOR

Plymouth?

EDWARD

Yes.

ELINOR

No.

EDWARD

Oh -- well -- I spent four years there -- at a school run by a -- a Mr. Pratt.

ELINOR

Mr. Pratt?

Hugh Grant's apologetic, embarrassed, stoop-shouldered performance stands out from that of the rest of the cast, and although the later scenes with Edward in the film are often amusing, as he bumbles and stutters, it is difficult to understand Elinor's attraction to him. Early on in the film, however, Thompson -- aware of the problems in the presentation of Edward -- has him appear in several short scenes that give the novel's character added force. Edward's behaviour toward the Dashwoods suggests both an attitude of respect toward the family while at the same time shame and deep embarrassment for Fanny's contemptuousness. Thompson and Lee immediately set up the viewer's sympathy for Edward through his

alignment with the Dashwood family. In an early scene, Edward refuses Margaret's room, an incident which is followed by several other invented scenes, including, the silly conversation about the source of the Nile that takes place between Edward and Elinor in the library while Margaret hides under a table; Edward teaching Margaret the principles of sword-fighting; and the episode where Elinor is shown listening sadly to Marianne playing her father's favourite melody on the piano, while Edward who has been watching her admiringly suddenly approaches her. Realizing that she has been crying, he offers her his handkerchief.¹⁰ In another sequence, which takes place in the grand staircase hung with large family portraits, the setting adds to the oppressive nature of Fanny's personality as she speaks with Edward. Attempting to undermine Edward's feeling for the Dashwoods, she criticizes Margaret's behaviour, saying: "*They are exceedingly spoilt, I find. Miss Margaret spends all her time up trees and under furniture and I have barely had a civil word from Marianne.*" Edward is presented as stuttering and bashful in most of the film; however, in this scene which takes place in isolation from the other characters, Edward shows himself to be unafraid in expressing his sympathy for the Dashwoods to his sister: "*My dear Fanny, they have just lost their father -- their lives will never be the same again.*" Fanny, wishing to counteract his response and wanting to understate their tragic circumstances, emphasizes what she sees as

¹⁰ The handkerchief is one of the film's motifs. It becomes the symbol of Elinor's affection and loss of Edward. In one melancholy scene, she is filmed sitting alone in her room, holding the cloth in her hands. In another, Lucy uses a different handkerchief as a cruel weapon. After confiding the secret of her engagement to Elinor, Lucy is "overcome" with tears and cunningly produces a handkerchief that bears Edward's initials. Lucy uses it in such a fashion that forces the other woman to see the initials, an act that exposes the nature of Lucy's "demure martyrdom," while also deeply wounding Elinor. Lucy's "act" turns out to be powerful enough to convince Fanny to invite her to stay with her in London and to seduce Robert Ferrars.



the sisters' social ineptitude, replying coldly: "*That is no excuse*" (41).

From the outset the film exposes Fanny Dashwood's ruthlessness and greed. Henry Dashwood's dying words to John, "*Help them . . .*" (31) are repeated in a sound bridge when, in a voiceover, Fanny repeats shrilly, "*Help them?*" (31). The scene opens with John and Fanny in their townhouse's dressing room. John stands in his mourning clothes in front of a mirror, while Fanny sits at another. Neither looks grief-stricken. The doubling of their images in the mirror reflects their vanity and untrustworthy natures. Fanny, with her black, tight curls

plastered against her face, and curled up lace collar resembles a female vulture.¹¹ John Dashwood watches his wife's every expression. Portrayed as a weak man, he is susceptible to his own greed as well as his wife's influence:

[He was] "not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold-hearted and rather selfish is to be ill-disposed: but he was, in general, well-respected; for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge of his ordinary duties. Had he married a more amiable woman, he might have been made still more respectable than he was: he might even have been made amiable himself: for he was very young when he married and very fond of his wife. But Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself: more narrow-minded and selfish (7).

Following the opening scene in the dressing room, the camera cuts to Fanny and John sitting in their carriage conversing. The camera then cuts back to another incident where the couple is shown waiting for the ostlers to make the final adjustment to their carriage. The landlord of the establishment hovers close by waiting for a tip. John withdraws some coins from a leather pouch and Fanny, who eyes the coins stingily, removes one. The man takes the meagre coin and shakes his head from side to side. Closely adapted from the novel, Thompson's simple and cleverly written dialogue is broken up with short scenes that suggest the couple's cold-hearted selfishness. When John tells Fanny that he intends to give the Dashwoods three

¹¹ Birds and feathers are a minor motif in the film. Mr. Dashwood calls Fanny and John vultures, an image that is played up by the filmmaker with Fanny's appearance. In one seemingly insignificant, but deliberate, scene Mrs. Jennings, Marianne, Lucy and Elinor enter the hallway of the older woman's home in London. In the background, Lucy approaches the parrot; it snaps back at her. Later in the film in a parallel scene to this one, Lucy, who has somehow managed to talk her way into staying with Fanny and John sits with Fanny at a table holding the lapdog. As the two women discuss Lucy's marriage prospects, Fanny makes a feather decoration. When Lucy leans over and whispers the secret of her engagement to Fanny, the camera immediately cuts to the outside of the house. After a brief moment of silence, the camera cuts back to the interior of the house where Fanny and Lucy are engaged in what resembles a birdfight; they are shrieking and struggling together while feathers fly around them.

thousand pounds, Fanny becomes chillingly still, and John, nervous. He explains:

The interest will provide them with a little extra income. Such a gift will certainly discharge my promise to my father.

FANNY slowly turns back to the mirror.

FANNY

Oh, without question! More than amply . . .

JOHN

One had rather, on such occasions, do too much than too little.

A pause as FANNY turns and looks at him again.

JOHN

Of course, he did not stipulate a particular sum . . .

[the scene is intercut with the crying scene of Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor comforting her]

JOHN

Fifteen hundred then. What say you to fifteen hundred?

FANNY

What brother on earth would do half so much for his real sisters - let alone half-blood?

[The scene is intercut with Marianne playing the mournful tune on the pianoforte]

JOHN

A hundred pounds a year to their mother while she lives. Would that be more advisable? It is better than parting with the fifteen hundred at once.

FANNY

But if she lives longer than fifteen years we would be completely taken in. People always live forever when there is an annuity to be paid them.

[The scene is intercut by the one of Elinor and Margaret at the treehouse]

JOHN

Twenty pounds now and then will amply discharge my promise, you are quite right.

FANNY

Indeed. Although to say the truth, I am convinced within myself that your father had no idea of your giving them the money.

JOHN

They will have five hundred a year amongst them as it is ----

FANNY

-- and what in earth can four women want for more than that? Their housekeeping will be nothing at all -- they will have no carriage, no horses, hardly any servants and will keep no company. Only conceive how comfortable they will be!

[the scene in intercut with Elinor addressing the servants. The conversation concludes as John and Fanny arrive at Norland Park, as they are about to get out of their carriage.]

FANNY speaks:

They will be much more able to give you something.

JOHN

So -- we are agreed. No money -- but the occasional gift of game and fish in season will be very welcome.

FANNY

Your father would be proud of you.

Kate Winslet, who plays Marianne was not as accomplished an actress as the rest of the cast. To modern audiences, Marianne's spontaneity, directness and inability to hold in any kind of emotion, even if it is cruel, has a natural appeal; however, her openness is portrayed in the film as a great social transgression. When she attends the great ball and spots Willoughby across the room, the room literally becomes soundless with shock as she cries out to Willoughby. Lee has her call out at the same time as the music stops, so that the room is at least momentarily enveloped in relative silence. As everyone turns to look at the girl, she rushes toward Willoughby, her face luminous with expectation. When Willoughby's stiff silence answers her cry, "*Good God, Willoughby! Will you not shake hands with me,*" (142), the viewer senses her lone rebellion against powerful social forces that surround her, a rebellion that almost kills her when she becomes ill.¹² While the screenplay retains most of the novel's central characters, others are entirely omitted or only referred to, like Mrs. Ferrars,

¹² The great ballroom scene is one of the most powerful scenes in the entire film. Lee was passionate about doing this scene just right. The carriage gridlock scene, when Mrs. Jennings, Elinor, Lucy and Marianne first arrive and must pick their way through mud and horse dung, is the biggest carriage and horse scene done in the UK in twenty years (Thompson 277). A "*monumental effort,*" (258) it called for one hundred extras, each one in a different evening costume from "*soldiers and lawyers to fops and dowagers*" (258). Lee envisioned the scene as full of *movement and class*. Occurring in many different rooms, each one reflects the class of its guests. When Marianne, Elinor, Lucy and Mrs. Palmer first arrive, they enter the first room which is crammed with guests who are enjoying themselves talking loudly. From this room, Mrs. Palmer spots Fanny Dashwood, who stands in the next room conducting a conversation with an *acquaintance*. Dragging Marianne, Elinor and Lucy over to her, Fanny treats them politely but it is obvious that she is embarrassed by them. The next room, where the main action occurs: Elinor dances with Robert and Willoughby and Marianne approaches Willoughby, is a wonderfully overcrowded creation with huge paintings, musicians and dancers. Willoughby's party is in yet another room. More elite than the rest, some of its guests sit at small tables or stand quietly talking, creating a "*portrait of wealth*" that becomes "*crushingly clear*" to Marianne. Central to this group is a coldly elegant and sophisticated woman who slowly turns around and looks at Marianne with "*curiosity and condescension*" (144). As the heartbroken Marianne leaves the room, the woman says haughtily, "*wearing their country fashions I see,*" a line that was not part of the original screenplay.



Lady Middleton and her brood of obnoxious, spoiled children, and¹³ the older Steele sister, Anne.¹⁴ The biggest obstacle that Thompson and Lee had to overcome in characterization was the presentation of Elinor who differs in age from her novelistic counterpart. In Austen's story Marianne is seventeen and Kate Winslet is, at the age of nineteen, only slightly older than Austen's heroine. The novel's Elinor is nineteen years old and although the screenwriter increased her age to be about twenty-five for the film, Thompson, who plays the character in the film looks much older. As a result the "screen" Elinor as performed by the actress is a blend of older sister and mother figure, a departure from the novel in the *nature* of the relationship that the sisters share. In the book, part of the friction between the girls is created not only because of their difference in perceptions, an aspect of the novel that the film portrays well, but also because of a sense of rivalry that is a natural consequence of the conflict that often occurs in siblings who are similar to each other in temperament, in ideals,

¹³ In the film version, Sir John is a widower. In the novel however, Sir John is married and his family consists of four unruly, spoiled children upon which his wife, Lady Middleton, dotes. Austen's description of the meetings where the Steele sisters and the Middleton children are present is exceptionally cutting. Not only does she attack Lady Middleton's blind maternal devotion, but more importantly she attacks the Steele sisters' hypocrisy in trying to ingratiate themselves with Lady Middleton whom they consider their social superior through the children: *With her children they were in continual raptures, extolling their beauty, courting their notice, and humouring all their whims; and such of their time as could be spared from the importunate demands which this politeness made on it was spent in admiration of whatever her ladyship was doing, if she happened to be doing anything* (98).

Lady Middleton is utterly oblivious to the Steele sisters' pretension; these scenes expose the Steele sisters' cunning and prepare the way for the encounter between the wily Lucy and Elinor. Twice in the film, Ang Lee wryly substitutes the children of the novel with dogs. Sir John's family in the novel is represented by the pack of yapping hounds that accompany Mrs. Jennings and himself. Fanny Dashwood's precocious, spoiled four year old son, the future inheritor of the Dashwood estate also has a canine replacement in the film; Fanny's lapdog.

¹⁴ In the novel Anne is about thirty years old and Lucy is about twenty three or four years old. Anne is Margaret Dashwood's counterpart in the sense that she often blurts out things that she should not [or so it seems]; it is she who introduces their acquaintance with Edward Ferrars at the Middletons. Lucy usually amends Anne's assertions, a ploy that not only allows others to see her as the more "polite" sister, but also her "modest" denials allow her to manipulate and tantalize others' emotions.

and in age.

Chapter four begins with Marianne telling Elinor: "*What a pity it is, Elinor that Edward should have no taste for drawing*" (18). The conversation between the sisters is charged with fluctuating emotion: candour, indignation, rejoicing, betrayal and astonishment.¹⁵ Austen writes that "*Marianne's abilities were in many respects quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever, but eager in everything . . . generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent*" (8). Elinor displays the authority and sense of responsibility that often characterizes the eldest child of the family, a position that is often grudgingly accepted by the others:

[her] advice was so effectual [that it] possessed a strength of understanding and coolness of judgment which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counselor of her mother, and enabled her to counteract, to the advantage of them all . . . She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them (8).¹⁶

¹⁵The bedroom scenes used in the film with Marianne and Elinor are important in the way they (re)emphasize the bond between the sisters; these sequences show the "progress" in each of the sisters' emotional development while at the same time they further the storyline. At first Marianne's sarcastic comments are cruel, reflecting a hotter and fierier nature. Imitating Elinor's words as if they were blasphemous, she leaves her room at the beginning of the film saying, "*I do not attempt to deny that I think highly of him -- greatly esteem him! Like him!*" (55). Elinor's use of irony mirrors a "colder" wit, that of the intellect. She says to Marianne "*. . . your behaviour [to Edward] . . . in all other respects is perfectly cordial so I assume that you like him in spite of his deficiencies.*" Marianne [trying very hard]: "*I think him everything that is amiable and worthy.*" Elinor [dryly]: "*Praise indeed!*" (54). Their first night at Barton Cottage, Marianne is discomfited by Elinor's cold feet, a physical manifestation of her cooler nature.

¹⁶ It is clear in the novel that Elinor is her father's favourite child, just as Marianne is the mother's. At the beginning of the novel Elinor sees the excess of Marianne's sensibilities with alarm, but Mrs. Dashwood values, even cherishes it: "*They encouraged each other . . . in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again*" (8). Marianne is described as Mrs. Dashwood's "*beloved child*" (268). It is not until the end of the novel that Mrs. Dashwood recognizes in Elinor her depth of feeling and begins to value the sacrifice behind her terrible composure:

She now found that she had erred in relying on Elinor's representation of herself . . . She found she had been misled by the careful, the considerate attention of her daughter . . . She feared that under this persuasion she had been unjust, inattentive, nay, almost unkind to Elinor; that Marianne's affliction, because more acknowledged, more immediately before her, had too

Lee, acutely aware of the difference in age between Austen's heroine and Thompson in her role as the character, worked with Thompson at trying to minimize the obvious gap: "*Emma was too old to play Elinor. The biggest job was to reduce her age. I did everything I could to relax her -- gave her exercises . . . She also worked on her voice; she was not allowed to go below a certain register*" (Fuller 24). Thompson was also concerned, and it was not until midway through the making of the film that she began to accept the inevitable discrepancy: "*I seem finally to have stopped worrying about Elinor, and age. She seems now to be perfectly normal - about twenty-five, a witty control freak*" (Thompson). To compensate for this age difference in Elinor, other actors were cast accordingly. Gemma Jones who plays Mrs. Dashwood looks more like a grandmother; she is not, as the novel tells us, a woman just short of forty. In Austen's book, Sir John Middleton is described as a handsome man of forty and Mrs. Jennings is in her forties. Robert Hardy and Elizabeth Spriggs, who play Sir John Middleton and Mrs. Jennings respectively, are both much older than their novelistic counterparts. Their exuberant performance as a pair of generous,

much engrossed her tenderness and led her away to forget that in Elinor she might have a daughter suffering almost as much, certainly with less self-provocation and greater fortitude (286).

Lee aligns Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood in the film visually. Mrs. Dashwood remains quiet when Marianne has an outburst or her remonstrations are excessively tolerant. Marianne asks her mother: "*Can he love her? . . . to love is to burn -- to be on fire, all made of passion, of adoration, of sacrifice! Like Juliet, or Guinevere or Heloise --*" (52). Mrs. Dashwood replies mildly, "*They made rather pathetic ends, dear*" (52). In the scene in the film following Willoughby's visit, Elinor criticizes Marianne for her behaviour with him. When Marianne accuses her of having shallow feelings, Elinor enters the house, leaving Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne standing close together. The mother says "*Elinor is not like you or I, dear. She does not like to be swayed by her emotions*" (102).



eccentric, Dickensian-like gossips¹⁷ who, beneath their jovial exteriors and their prying into

¹⁷ Sir John Middleton's marriage to Lady Middleton is a sad foil to the future happier marriage of Brandon and Marianne. Like Brandon, Sir John is much older than his wife. Completely unsuitable for each other, Sir John fills his empty life with visitors and hunting, and his wife, with children and home: *[It was necessary to the happiness of both . . . Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured her children, and these were their only resources . . . Continual engagements at home and abroad, however, supplied all the deficiencies of nature and education, supported the good spirits of Sir John, and gave exercise to the good breeding of his wife]* (29). -- Elizabeth Spriggs portrayal of Mrs. Jennings is superb. Austen describes Mrs. Jennings as "a good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, *seemed* [my emphasis] very happy and rather vulgar . . . a widow of ample jointure. She had only two daughters, both of whom she had lived to see respectively married, and she had now therefore nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world" (32). Her quickness "in the discovery of attachments" (32), suggests a dangerous lack of judgment on her part that most likely contributed to the unhappy marriages of both daughters. Her joviality and interest in others' lives, like Sir John's disguises an emptiness in her life. In the novel there is a conversation between Elinor and Charlotte in which Elinor asks the woman, "Did not Colonel Brandon know of Sir John's proposal to your mother before it was made?" (96). This question suggests that Mrs. Jennings and Sir John Middleton have had a personal attachment in the past, an aspect of the film that Thompson and Lee also hint at in the *nature* of their peculiar companionship; it has a closer resemblance to that of a long married couple than that of a son-in-law and mother-in-law. Refraining from taking this single allusion in the novel and conferring upon it a fictional supposition, I will suggest instead that Thompson's screenplay and Lee's presentation of the couple strongly reinforces a sense of the pair's past history of familiarity with one other. In the film, at the outdoor luncheon at Barton Park Mrs. Jennings lowers her voice and whispers to Elinor the tragic story of Brandon and Eliza. She concludes her narration with an uncompleted reference to Sir John Middleton: "I believe he would have done himself a harm if

the affairs of the hearts, conduct the very serious business of marriage, is so persuasive that the age discrepancy becomes completely irrelevant when watching the adaptation.

II

The diaries reveal Thompson's conscious identification with Austen. Like Jane and Cassandra Austen, the screenwriter/actress also lost her father when she was a young adult at the age of twenty-three. Henry Dashwood in Thompson's script dies at the age of fifty-two, the same age as Thompson's father when he died. Just as her own father's lengthy illness and premature death had a powerful effect on Thompson, so Henry Dashwood's death leaves his wife and daughters in social and economic danger. It is appropriate that the film should open with Henry Dashwood's dying plea to his son to take care of his stepmother and stepsisters. This opening scene, taken together with the final one of Marianne and Brandon's wedding-day, thematically brackets the film. Jointly, these two sequences encapsulate a crystallized version of the novel. The father's death and his consequential absence from the lives of the women, provides a structure to the rest of the story as his now poor, marginalized widow and daughters *must* find a way to survive. Mrs. Dashwood's search for husbands for

not for John . . ."(77). In scenes where they are together, Thompson has the one character complete the other's dialogue as if they are each one half of a single character. When Sir John says, "*We will send game and fruit as a matter of course --*" Mrs. Jennings adds, "*-- fruit and game --.*" (Sir John): "*-- and the carriage is at your beck and call --*" (Mrs. Jennings): "*-- call -- and here is Marianne!*" (Sir John): "*Where did you disappear to?*" (Mrs. Jennings-): "*I declare you are the loveliest girl I ever set my eyes on! Cannot you get them married, Mrs. Dashwood? You must not leave it too long!*" (Sir John): "*But, alas, there are no smart young men hereabouts to woo them --*" (Mrs. Jennings): "*-- not a beau for miles!*" (66).

her daughters becomes even more critical and urgent than it was before the father's passing. Thompson writes in her diaries, "*behind Mrs Dashwood's . . . romantic vision[s] is a harder-edged reality -- she must get her daughters married for their financial and social security*" (217). Therefore the film's conclusion presents Marianne's wedding as a triumphal celebration. Just as Elinor's marriage to Edward ensures the financial security *and* emotional happiness of that daughter, Marianne's marriage to Brandon provides Mrs. Dashwood solace in the knowledge that the younger daughter is also provided for. Never anything other than concerned with her daughters' well-being, Mrs. Dashwood does not allow her preoccupation with economic security to override a consideration of their personal happiness.

Critics have pointed out that *Sense and Sensibility* is Austen's most scathing look at the oppression of women through property, marriage, family and society, even though her other novels are similarly critical. For example, the most disadvantaged Austen heroine, Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, is dependent on her uncle Sir Thomas Bertram through marriage, and the opening paragraph of that novel is a caustic summary of the social attitudes which have formed Fanny's background. In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot allows herself to be convinced to refuse Frederick's initial offer of marriage, even though that decision threatens her with lifelong unhappiness. Gillie states that, "*[Austen] is perpetually concerned to show that mere worldliness is as foolish as mere romanticism, and [her characters must learn] to disentangle from personal relations the mere worldliness which obscures and distorts them*" (122). He points out that the greatest irony of all in *Sense and Sensibility* is that it is "*the 'sensible' sister, Elinor, who marries dangerously by bringing her 'sensible' lover Edward*

*Ferrars into disfavour (albeit temporary) with his worldly mother, whereas her romantic sister ends by marrying safely after near ruin by her romantic lover" (122). **The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries** reveal both Thompson's acute interpretation of the themes of marriage, love and money that are such an integral part of Austen's writing and the screenwriter's ironic observations concerning the subtle social expectations that have remained little changed since the novelist's time:*

***Sense and Sensibility** is about love and money. Perhaps its main question is, can love survive without money? A pithy question. Romantic codes teach us that love conquers all. Elinor disagrees. You need a decent wage, a competence. Some people need more. Some people need more money than love. Most people would rather have love with a comfortable amount of money. It's a difficult thing to accept. It cries out against all our cherished ideals. But interesting that our 'western' romantic symbols cost a great deal. Roses, diamonds . . . (255).*

One scene has Fanny Dashwood standing in a window overlooking the garden. We follow her point of view as she watches Edward walking in the garden with Elinor. Mrs. Dashwood enters the room, pauses momentarily, and joins Fanny at the window. Fanny pretends that she has not been looking down at the lovers. Mrs. Dashwood smiles sweetly, expressing her appreciative approval of Edward, and Fanny, quickly thinking, slowly begins to crush Mrs. Dashwood's hopes, telling her of Mrs. Ferrars' "great expectations" for Edward:

MRS. DASHWOOD

Of course. But I hope she desires them to marry for love, first and foremost? I have always felt that, contrary to common wisdom, true affection is by far the most valuable dowry.



FANNY

Love is all very well, but unfortunately we cannot always rely on the heart to lead us in the most suitable directions.

(FANNY lowers her voice confidingly.)

FANNY

You see, my dear Mrs. Dashwood, Edward is entirely the kind of compassionate person upon whom penniless women can prey -- and having entered into any kind of understanding, he would never go back on his word. He is quite simply incapable of doing so. But it would lead to his ruin. I worry for him so, Mrs. Dashwood. My mother has always made it perfectly plain that she will withdraw all financial support from Edward, should he choose to plant

his affections in less . . . exalted ground than he deserves (57).

Following Henry Dashwood's death Elinor assumes the traditionally male role as head of the family. Assuming charge of practical concerns, she decides the manner in which the £500 will be spent and where they will live. Surrounded by a dreamy mother and a romantic sister she is the stabilizing force for the entire family.¹⁸ In a scene at the beginning of the film, Mrs. Dashwood, still dressed in mourning rushes agitatedly about, putting knick-knacks into a suitcase while Elinor stands by looking at her helplessly:

To be reduced to the condition of visitor in my own home! It is not to be borne, Elinor! . . . John and Fanny will descend from London at any moment, followed no doubt by cartloads of relatives ready to turn us out of our rooms one by one -- do you expect me to be here to welcome them? Vultures! (32).

When she collapses into a chair and begins to weep loudly, Elinor comforts her mother saying. *"I shall start making enquiries for a new house at once. Until then we must try to bear their coming"* (32). It is Elinor who tries to coax Margaret out of the treehouse, and it is she also, who meets with the large, gloomy contingent of servants who staff Norland Park to inform them of the changes that have taken place. Her powerlessness to earn her own living, or to help support her family seems all the more piercing because she is so intelligent and capable. Lee and Thompson bring out this injustice in several ways. In one example, as

¹⁸ Shots of Elinor show her balancing the budget, cutting back on beef, untying knotted ribbons and smoothing quarrels. -- One of the best examples of Elinor's difficult position in the family occurs in the scene following Marianne and Willoughby's last meeting at the cottage. Returning from Church, the Dashwoods find Marianne sobbing in the parlour. Willoughby cannot look anyone in the eye and after a few vague words he rushes out of the cottage. Marianne runs upstairs to her room, slams the door shut and begins to cry. Shortly after Mrs. Dashwood does the same thing. Elinor wearily follows the mother upstairs only to find a wet-eyed Margaret standing outside Marianne's door holding a cup of tea. Elinor takes the cup from Margaret, and the girl runs into her room in tears. The sound of crying is heard coming from behind all three closed doors while Elinor stands in the hallway looking completely helpless. She sits down on the stairs and begins to drink the tea.

Edward grows in his affection for and intimacy with Elinor, he confides to her his sense of impotence against his mother's iron will in choosing an occupation for him. After a moment of silence, Elinor says to Edward:

You talk of feeling idle and useless -- imagine how that is compounded when one has no choice and no hope whatsoever of any occupation.

EDWARD nods and smiles at the irony of it.

EDWARD

Our circumstances are therefore precisely the same.

ELINOR

Except that you will inherit your fortune.

He looks at her slightly shocked but enjoying her boldness.

ELINOR (cont.)

We cannot even earn ours.

The film relays Austen's social motifs of money and marriage through Elinor's self-

deprecating irony, the sympathy that various characters, especially Edward, Brandon, Mrs. Jennings and Sir John Middleton express in their behaviour towards the family. The most angry and outspoken critic of the social mechanism of the time is embodied in the youngest sister, Margaret. Furthermore just as Margaret's healthy rebellion indicates a social need for the expression of female energy, so Marianne's romanticism and Elinor's rationality represent emotional choices in an oppressive patriarchy.¹⁹

The film not only embodies Austen's social theme, but also it visually captures the dialectic between Elinor's calm rationality and the romantic sensibility as espoused by Marianne. Fuller suggests that *"Thompson was clearly less interested in exacting verisimilitude than in period evocation . . . and more interested in the tension between people who can't speak their feelings, or speak them too much, than in surface detail"* (21). The film quickly establishes the opposition between the sisters in the scene where Elinor asks Marianne to stop playing her dirge because it is upsetting their mother. Unflustered, Marianne stops, turns the pages of a music book and begins to play another equally mournful tune. As previously mentioned this same opposition manifests itself in the contrasting tone of the two sisters' language, Marianne's romantic outbursts and cruel sarcasm toward Elinor, and Elinor's wry, calmer observations. In addition, Lee also developed a *visual* style of filming that reflects not only the sisters' difference in perception, but also their convergence and

¹⁹ Mary Musgrove's whiny hypochondria in *Persuasion*; Lady Middleton's doting motherhood in her marriage of *"frightful solitude"* (115); Charlotte Palmer's inappropriate "laughter" in a loveless marriage, all reflect unsuitable emotional choices unconsciously made by women whose situations are socially limited and not just mere personality or behaviour traits.

transformation:

It's the first time I'd worked with an actress that way. I'd shoot Emma gradually turning from her back, to profile, to close shot; Kate's was the opposite, from front shot, to profile, to back. This was to show the transformations in their characters. Elinor gets more romantic; Marianne becomes more reasonable. They gradually change position through the course of the film (Fuller 24).

Arguably the most important scene in the whole film concerning the transformation about which he speaks occurs when Marianne is ill. The set was specifically designed and built for this scene. Lee called the climax of the episode, filmed from a high angle, his "most cinematic" (Fuller 24). In this sequence, Elinor recognizes her "soulmate" (24) in Marianne.



Her eyes red from crying, she watches as Dr. Harris take Marianne's pulse. The room is very

quiet and Elinor looks at the doctor fearfully. There is a shot of Marianne looking very pale and still. Dr. Harris tells Elinor that he is going to bring back more laudanum. After he leaves the room, Elinor sits watching Marianne as she moves about uncomfortably, sick with fever. Rising, Elinor walks over to Marianne and begins to speak in a very controlled and practical way: "*Marianne, Marianne, please try --*" (183). Suddenly she begins to break down, and pleads with Marianne, her voice is full of anguish: "*Marianne, please try -- I cannot -- I cannot do without you. Oh, please, I have tried to bear everything else -- I will try -- but please, dearest, beloved Marianne, [the camera moves into a close-up of Elinor's face; she looks directly into the camera speaking] do not leave me alone*" (184) (my emphasis). Falling to her knees she begins to kiss her sister's hand.

Lee told Thompson to imagine that "*if Marianne dies, she'll die, too . . . show pure fear and remove every other emotion*" (Fuller 24). Because of the high degree of emotion that the actors were required to maintain, this scene was one of the most difficult to shoot. Thompson writes: *Difficult to sustain this tense mood. Kate's drained by playing illness. Very great build-up to 'do not leave me alone.' I shall be glad when it's over . . . I pace and contemplate Elinor's rigidity and how to play this version of her loss of control . . . Dr. Harris bleeding her adds about three hours to the day. Ang has got excited about the shot. Elinor carries a bowl of her sister's blood into the darkness*" (274-275). Marianne's bloodletting is a brilliant addition to the novel; it is a visual expression of Marianne's release of passion, and it ties together an earlier sequence in the film where Brandon, in the dark blood red room, tells Elinor about his past. The shift in the visual style of the characters'



presentation becomes more evident after the extreme close-up of Elinor's face at Marianne's sickbed. Showing a surrendering of her previously rigidly adhered-to emotional restraint, she begins to sob, a reaction that she repeats when she finds out that Edward is not married. At the end of the film, Marianne, in contrast to the way she has been previously filmed, is shown in either profile or in a quarter shot as she sits listening to Brandon read. Looking out over the pond, and away from the camera, she appears more serious and thoughtful, a visual indicator of the shift that has taken place inside the young woman. Following this scene, the dialogue of the screenplay in the next shot reinforces this conversion; Marianne acknowledges to Elinor that she has brought the illness upon herself, *and* she expresses regret for her unfair treatment of Elinor. The two young women are shown together, Marianne walking slowly

leaning on Elinor's arm. The mood between them is loving. Marianne stops and indicates *the* spot, and says: "*There I fell, and there I first saw Willoughby*" (188). Later in their conversation when Elinor asks Marianne "*Do you compare your conduct with his?*" (189). Marianne replies "*No. I compare it with what it ought to have been. I compare it with yours*" (189).

Lee not only employs camera technique to create a sense of the sisters' transformation, but he also uses other stylistic methods such as the repeated use of pictorial framing, by which I mean the use of windows, doorways, paintings as well as landscape shots²⁰ that have elements of the picturesque to express characters' feelings. One of the film's most pronounced visual motifs is the frequent use of frames and borders. In fact, after rewatching the film several times it seems that the entire film is made up of a series of frame shots. Scenes often contain paintings, some of which are extravagant. In the episode where Fanny and Edward

²⁰ The presentation of landscape and atmosphere is one of the strengths of the film. Lee was highly conscious of the way a view looked on camera. He avoided the *too* romantic [swans], and insisted on "*sheep in every exterior shot and dogs in every interior shot*" (228). His outdoor shots are deliberately framed recalling the style of the "picturesque." His film evokes a beautiful, idealized sheep-studded English countryside. As Marianne and Elinor discuss propriety, they walk through a gate to a field -- their figures are arranged as if they were part of a 18th century landscape painting: "*Lee's exteriors evoke Constable . . . If Elinor's landscapes are Constable, Marianne's tend to be more toward Turner*" (Lyons 41). Weather is another important element in all of the outdoor shots and various scenes were proposed for different weather conditions. Marianne is associated with rain and mist. When her fever finally breaks, there follows is a beautifully still, outdoor shot of the garden indicating the improvement in her health and outlook. Lee's interior shots were just as important as those filmed outdoors. Ang Lee had Vermeer in mind when shooting many of the interiors (Lyons 41). He wanted "*the camera to watch the room, sense the change in it that a man, that sex, had brought. For Ang, the house is as important a character as the women*" (237). Thompson's book identifies all of the locales used in the film: Barton Cottage is on the Flete Estate at Holbeton in south Devon; Norland Park is Saltram House which is located at Plympton, near Plymouth Hoe; Barton Park is Trafalgar House near Salisbury. The ball scene is staged at Wilton House, a 16th century mansion also in Wiltshire, near Salisbury, the Palmers' home at Cleveland is represented by Montacute House, near Yeovil in Somerset. The home is characterized by the twisted hedge in the scene with Marianne. Deformed by frost, it has maintained its distinctive shape ever since.

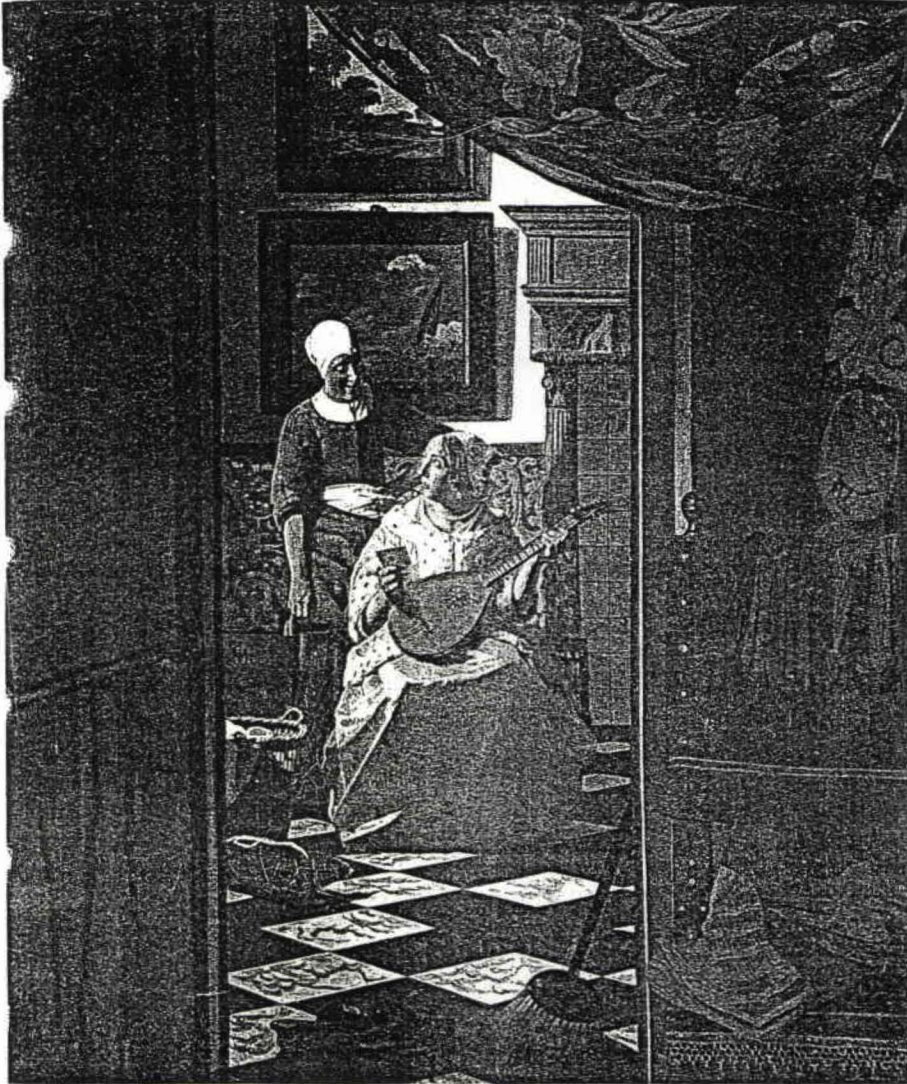
speaking privately in the hallway at Norland Park, the walls seem weighted down by the pictures. Lee chose the room used in the ballroom scene for its magnificent paintings. Moreover, Brandon first sees Marianne when she is singing her "softly sleeping" song against an enormous mural. When she rises from her bench, Lee has her stand in such a way that the cupid in the painting looks out from behind the girl toward Brandon. This image of the cupid visually indicates Marianne's effect on Brandon; at the same time, the song that she has just finished singing suggests her unreadiness to love him. When Edward visits Elinor in London following his disinheritance, she informs him of Brandon's offer. Behind Edward hangs a painting of a dark haired woman posed seductively and wearing a red dress, an implicit reference to Lucy's sly manipulation.

Closed doors and windows in the film represent entrapment, unrequited love and repression; open doors connote hope, vigilance and wounds. When Marianne is ill, Brandon moves about like a trapped animal in the hallway which is lined with closed doors. Characters are often shown forlornly looking away from their company, in the direction of a window. On a number of occasions, Marianne too stares out of windows, evoking the classical image of the lover waiting for the beloved.²¹ The window also represents for her an escape, even a kind

²¹ Windows are often the place at which the woman contacts her lover. Juliet waits for Romeo there. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia sings:

*To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose and donned his clo'es
And dupp'd the chamber door,
Let in the maid, that out the maid
Never departed more.*

Hamlet, IV, v (48-51).

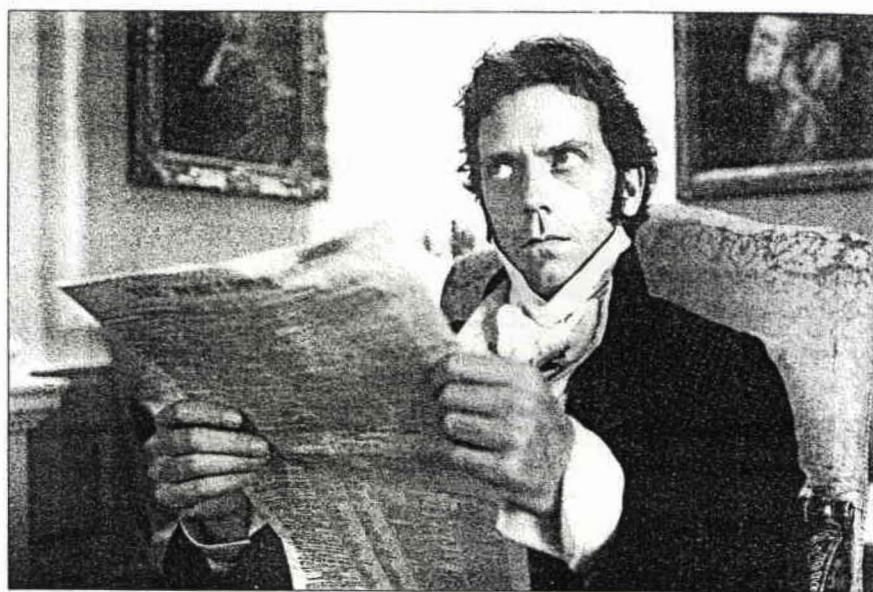


of invitation to death in the Biblical sense.²² Several shots in the film are deliberate references to 17th century Flemish paintings of domestic scenes. In one episode Elinor and Mrs.

²² *"For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces"* (Jeremiah: 9,21).

Dashwood sit at the table in a room at Barton Cottage; Elinor begins to sew, head bent over her work, while the camera draws back through the door until the composition is bordered by the door-frame itself, creating in the process a frame for the scene. When Marianne presents her mother with Sir John Middleton's invitation to stay at the Cottage, the arrangement of the two women filmed through a doorway is a conscious visual allusion to Jan Vermeer's painting, *The Letter* (1666).

Lee manipulates shots of doorways and windows not only to create a frame for compositions but also to create a sense of double vision, by which I mean the way in which one character secretly watches another who is sometimes already watching someone.



Marianne, as already mentioned is often seen looking through windows while Elinor silently watches her. When Brandon stands in the doorway, seeing and hearing Marianne for the first

time, Elinor watches him in turn. In one flowing sequence near the beginning of the film, Fanny, quietly observed by Mrs. Dashwood, is already watching Edward and Elinor from a window. In yet another example, Elinor, at her writing desk, is shown watching Edward through the window while he, aware of her gaze and watching *her* also, sword-fights with Margaret. In another scene, Elinor looks through a doorway and sees Willoughby in the act of cutting off a lock of Marianne's hair which he kisses and puts in his pocket-book. As if transfixed by the strangely intimate and erotic moment, she watches until she forces herself to look away. In yet another example, Mrs. Dashwood looks out of a window with an expression of entrapment on her face. She turns for a moment and watches as Elinor and Marianne struggle with Margaret while they wash her hair. After a moment she turns back to the window, and looks out desolately again.

Austen's first novel illustrates the virtue of subordinating one's own feelings to one's duty to others, and of questioning the social mores and mechanism of her day, something that the film does well. Lee, however, goes beyond the principal themes of the novel to depict a society that is both intensely private while at the same time being expected to be highly sociable, and in which family, love and friendship are valued. He and Thompson capture the spirit of Austen's novel, presenting their interpretation in a straightforward, unpretentious and classical fashion. Lee's style suits Austen's novel; she hated frivolity. Skilled in his direction of actors, Lee brings out the more humane aspects in the novel's characters. Elinor is portrayed as solid and steady, without being overly noble -- her performance is restrained and effortless. Each scene in the film is fashioned as a unit that interlocks with others in order for

the entirety to move smoothly and plausibly to its conclusion. While film and literature have their own properties, the adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* is not merely an extension or a dilution of the literary work on which it is based.



Appendix

Ang Lee, the director of *Sense and Sensibility* was born, raised, and educated in Taiwan. After studying theatre at N.Y.U. he decided to switch to the study of film. He quotes Billy Wilder, Ingmar Bergman, and Yasujiro Ozu as the three filmmakers to whom he is most attracted, and by whom he is most influenced. Family is a common theme in the three feature films that he directed prior to his work on *Sense and Sensibility*: *Pushing Hands*, 1992, *The Wedding Banquet*, 1993, and *Eat Drink Man Woman*, 1994.

In *Pushing Hands*, actor Sihung Lung, plays a Tai-Chi master who flees the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution on mainland China to live with his son and Caucasian daughter-in-law in a New York suburb. Discovering that he cannot co-exist with his daughter-in-law, he moves out to live on his own. The film is an unsentimental portrayal of the difficulties experienced between generations, and of the resulting tensions to which they must reconcile themselves. Lee shows this through his, “mastery of visual dynamics and their psychic pressures” (Lyons 40).

Lung plays a patriarch in *The Wedding Banquet*. In this film, his character -- a military veteran -- again relocates in New York where he finds the new Chinese generation living in what he considers to be a non-traditional fashion. As in the previous film, interior spaces become “clear sites of moral struggle” (40). Donald Lyons writes: “Lee’s best

moments are the painful, one-or two-shot scenes of revelation” (40). Thus we can see the emerging interest which manifests itself in Lee’s treatment of subjects such as cultural ironies, rituals, etiquette, all of which may be found within *Sense and Sensibility*. Lee’s genius lies in his ability to appreciate the subtle tensions that lie at the heart of the ritual of family, and the tradition of Chinese society, tensions that Lyons describes as sources both of “nourishment” and “imprisonment” (40).

In the third film, *Eat Drink Man Woman*, Lung once again plays a patriarchal role as the father of three young women. A Taiwanese master chef, his ritual weekend meals (the cooking of which Lee portrays as creations of art), are simultaneously occasions of “nourishment” -- in an obvious physical sense -- and “imprisonment” -- psychologically and emotionally. It is in Lee’s acute appreciation of the tenuous relationship between the sisters, of their inherent “sense” and “sensibility,” that we begin to appreciate precisely what Doran found attractive in him and his work.

Arguably, Ang Lee is primarily a filmmaker of society and family. However, his success with the adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* clearly shows that the tensions with which he is concerned to reveal, are far from being culturally specific. Indeed, it is his very Asian background, his rich sense of ritual, that allows him to bridge the gap between his own sensibilities and the manners of Austen’s society.

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