

# SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Jane Austen

## Overview

In her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Jane Austen confronts us with a pair of sisters, Marianne ('sensitivity') and Elinor ('sense') whose marital searches and complex interrelations are the triggers of the book. Marianne is the lady of sensibility—emotion, vivacity, impulsiveness, empathy--while Elinor, her sister, is the 'sensible' lady, prudent, careful in what she says, analytic in the care she gives to interpreting situations and making decisions. Marianne, having suffered the ups and downs of romance, eventually discovers the wisdom of Elinor's prudence, and marries the steady Colonel Brandon, while Elinor marries the Edward fate had earlier withheld from her.

## Story

Like Dickens, Jane Austen regularly places her characters in their social economic settings, taking those as launching pads for the development of her characters. In the present case, Mrs. Dashwood's husband having died, and left his money to the son of his first marriage, Mrs. Dashwood the second, and her three daughters, are left pretty much on their own, and must go to live with relations.

Elinor, one of the daughters having to leave the old home, has to leave her good friend, Edward Ferrars, of whom she has become quite fond. However both she and her sister Marianne, in their new home at Barton Park, find plenty of young men to take interest in, and the play-out of those interests becomes a directing theme of the following novel. For a time all goes well on the growingly romantic front, with Elinor, always reserved, playing hard to get with the anyway shy Colonel Brandon, and Marianne, the far more flamboyant sister, flirting openly and finally disastrously with the romantic Willoughby, dear to her from the start, when he gallantly takes her in his arms, after her fall from a horse, and a resultant twisted ankle.

Romantic disappointment lies just around the corner for the two young women. Willoughby suddenly leaves the society and inexplicably disappears, 'on business,' leaving Marianne distraught, while Elinor has to hear, from her old friend Lucie, that she has been engaged for a year to Edward. This first volume of the novel has built the plateau for more complex adventures, of the two now wiser and sadder sisters.

The second Volume leads us to London, where Marianne learns, through her sister Elinor, that Willoughby—a well-known playboy and debaucher—has gone broke and is courting a wealthy heiress. Step by step we see the two young women of early on, facing the realities of interpersonal social life, in a culture where the mating game and the economy collide harshly.

In the final volume the fortunes of both Marianne and Elinor swerve dramatically. Marianne, fallen seriously ill, is visited by a penitent Willoughby, who has gone his own self-centered way, and with whom she could never have been happy. We are not surprised when it is the shy but faithful Colonel Brandon, who finally wins Marianne's hand. It is no less a surprise that in the end Elinor and Edward find themselves back together again, after a number of classic misunderstandings—remember the Roman playwrights or Shakespeare's comedies—and settle into marriage. Many years and trials after their initial departure for Barton Park, the two women find their satisfaction in two mainline quiet gentlemen. It is fitting, as it happens, that the four of them settle together in the estate of Delaford, and that they remain in close contact with the women's mother and their own younger sister.

Jane Austen makes her points, doesn't she, and without too much hoopla? While Marianne, the sensibility of the title, opens her social life with flirtation and pizzazz she hits rocky paths and readjusts

her life goals. Elinor, Miss Sense, who has always been careful but sociable and ready for marriage, finds her true love, the modest Edward, from whom rumor and confusion had for a long time kept her separate. The polar different psychologies, of the two women, blend sufficiently that by the end of the story they can live together almost in sisterhood, as they had from the outset.

## Themes

**Intertwining.** The intertwining of sense and sensibility is perfectly exemplified by the romantic lives of the two Dashwood sisters. Austen handles what might have been a mechanical polarity with the utmost deftness, shading each woman delicately, so that sense and sensibility act as trends, not fixed traits.

**Vulnerability.** Profoundly close to one another, sisters of a single close family are vulnerable prey for rapacious menfolk. Marianne's misfortunes in love are evidence of this vulnerable condition.

## Characters

**Marianne** is the 'lively and flirtatious' Dashwood daughter. Charming the young men in the balls held at Barton Park, she is a perfect target for the elegant but narcissistic Willoughby. She starts to wisen up, when Willoughby walks out on her without explanation, but it is only through general social buzz, and Willoughby's own confession, that she realizes how bad her initial judgment was, and corrects it.

**Elinor** is the sensible Dashwood sister, and is accordingly attracted, from the outset, to the subtle and unassertive Edward, who is often in the Dashwood home. It seems an appropriate destiny for Elinor, given her care and reticence, that she must wait till the end of the novel before she and Edward can truly find one another.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

### **MARIANNE** (emotional)

**Character** Mrs. Dashwood, eager to guarantee security for her two daughters, recommends that Marianne, her younger, should look favorably on the young gentleman, Edward, who has come to live with the family. Marianne thinks of Edward who had offered up the previous night's reading session, and she responds from her very fixed opinion of the young man. She doesn't stop and weigh matters.. Marianne reacts passionately against her mother's suggestion. 'Edward is very amiable,' she says, but then immediately she pours forth her reservations—that he is not very handsome, that he is spiritless, 'he has no real taste'; he reads poetry like a zombie, she adds, referring to his lifeless rendition of the passionate poetry of Cowper, when he read to the family the previous evening. Marianne reacts quickly and impatiently, to the suggestion she may have a future with Edward.

**Parallels** Both Medea and Phèdre come to mind, when we search in Greek literature for forerunners to the deception in love of Marianne. Medea is the perfect embodiment of the woman deceived by a shallow and self-interested male—Willoughby and Jason have something in common. In one version of the tragedy of Phaedra, she confesses her love for Hippolytus to her nurse, who gossips the news to Theseus, who arranges the bloody death of Hippolytus, which was absolutely the last thing Phedra wanted; she was mortally deceived. One might choose, from subtle modern literary treatments of the deceived woman, O'Henry's story, "The Last Leaf," 1907, in which a woman's life is saved by the deception a painter and a painting exercise on her. Or, another parallel, the case of Rosamond (and her lover Lydgate) in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*(1871). Rosamond is deceived both by Lydgate's classiness and class, and by her own vulnerability to these external attractions.

## Illustrative moments

**Discerning** Upon request, Marianne—discovered to be musical--agrees to sing for the after-dinner party held by Lady Middleton. She performs. Sir John is boisterously enthusiastic—he likes her—and the remaining guests, except Colonel Brandon, express delight. 'Colonel Brandon alone, of all the party, heard her without being in raptures.' Marianne was delighted by the Colonel's reserve, which she

contrasted with the 'horrible insensibility of the others.' She admires the Colonel for his refusal to fake musical delight; 'she was reasonable enough to allow that a man of five and thirty might well have outlived all acuteness of feeling and every exquisite power of enjoyment.' His 'advanced state of life' justified his reserve, which in itself she admired.

**Charmed** Marianne and her younger sister Margaret set off for a walk across the Downs; a rainstorm sets in, and the girls race back down the hills toward home. The ground is wet, and Marianne slips in the mud, turning her ankle; just as she falls a handsome young country gentleman, Mr. Willoughby, comes climbing up the hill to their aid. He is handsome and dressed like the perfect sportsman. He takes Marianne in his arms and carries her home; she is charmed by his looks and his behavior. Marianne is a natural for such a picture book romantic encounter, and from that time on, until their unfortunate separation, not too long after, she thinks of Willoughby night and day, and their romantic passion surges. To herself she becomes a figure out of romance.

**Distracted** Willoughby leaves Marianne, for an undisclosed emergency, just as the lovers' ardor seems most intense. Marianne is crushed, and withdraws from family life as completely as possible, sulking and withdrawn. In her effort to cheer up her sister, Elinor induces Marianne to walk with her in the country. Marianne is unable to free herself from her delusional depression, and makes a perceptual error that shows how deeply distracted she is. Seeing 'a man on horseback riding toward them,' Marianne 'rapturously exclaimed, 'it is he, it is indeed:--I know it is!'. In her mind Marianne can see only Willoughby, and is deeply distraught when she realizes it is Edward who is dismounting and coming toward them.

**Hypersensitive** Elinor and Marianne, who has been a nervous wreck since the departure of Willoughby, go with Mrs. Jennings in London, to spend the winter. Marianne busies herself, as far as she can, with writing letters to Willoughby—letters to which she gets no response. One day, with the best of intentions, Mrs. Jennings brings Marianne a letter, 'something that I am sure will do you good.' 'In one moment her (Marianne's) imagination placed before her a letter from Willoughby, full of tenderness and contrition.' 'The work of one moment was destroyed by the next,' for the letter was from her mother. The tears 'streamed from her eyes with passionate violence.'

### Discussion questions

What are the stages by which life readies Marianne for a marriage to Colonel Brandon, whom she had at the beginning of the novel thought unacceptably old?

Does Marianne, in her first romantic meetings with Willoughby, behave like what we might call a teen ager? Is she giddy? What are her tastes? Is she in any sense like a consumer of pop culture?

By the book's end, do you still feel that Marianne and Elinor are opposites? Has the gap between them narrowed?

**ELINOR** (Rational)

**Character** *Sense and Sensibility* opens on a dilemma facing Mrs. Dashwood, the mother of Elinor and Marianne. The father of Mrs. Dashwood's husband has just passed away, and in his will and the ensuing negotiations insufficient provision—as Mrs. Dashwood sees it—has been made for her three daughters. Mrs. Dashwood is infuriated. However it is Elinor, in a role she is ready to play, who urges caution and carefulness on her mother, and induces her to moderate her anger and cancel her impetuous desire to flee. 'Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counselor of her mother...' Elinor is eminently sensible.

**Parallels** From ancient times one thinks of models like Andromache (Homer's *Iliad*); Ismene (Sophocles' *Antigone*); Ruth (*Old Testament*); Monica (Saint Augustine's mother); The patient Griselda (Boccaccio, *Decameron*): all of them models of intelligent endurance, sometimes saintly, sometimes simply secular and stable. In Renaissance, and more recent, literature one might think of Sonya (in *Crime and Punishment*) or Cordelia (*King Lear*), and yet none of these parallels is a complete fit. Core traits—integrity, good sense, intuitiveness link the above female characters. Yet Elinor is not only the sum of such traits, but is also fully engaged in life; she is good sense at work in the affairs of the world.

## Illustrative moments

**Realistic** Marianne and Willoughby appear to be deeply in love, early in the tale, and yet as it turns out they are only infatuated with one another. Elinor and her mother return from a walk to find a disturbed Willoughby waiting in the parlor to say good bye, and Marianne upstairs crying. Elinor's senses go straight to the truth, and assume a romantic break-up. She defies her mother's more optimistic reading, that Willoughby's protectress, a dominating older lady, has urgent need of him. Elinor notes that 'suspicion of something unpleasant is the inevitable consequence of such an alteration as we have just witnessed in him (Willoughby).' When asked whether she thinks Willoughby was just playing around with Marianne, Elinor replies: 'I want no proof of their affection, but of their engagement I do.' One can hardly imagine a crisper formulation of what before long we know will be obvious.

**Empathetic** Edward, Elinor's suitor, has returned from a walk in the hills, which he has found delightful, but when asked by Marianne why he is unable to find the words to describe his experience, he apologizes, saying that he lacks the necessary gift. When her sister Marianne criticizes Edward about his statement, Elinor intervenes. 'I suspect,' she says, 'that to avoid one kind of affectation Edward here falls into another.' She goes on to explain that because most people tend to ooh and aah about nature, without knowing what they are saying, Edward refuses to adopt such trite and socially required exaggerations, and 'affects greater indifference and less discrimination in viewing them (the beauties of nature) than he himself possesses.'

**Self-commanding** Midway through the novel, Edward parts from Elinor and the whole Dashwood family is pained—as they had been, for Marianne, when Willoughby left. The parting 'left an uncomfortable impression on Elinor's feelings especially, which required some trouble and time to subdue.'

She was, however, *determined* to subdue her feelings—not just to cope with them—'to prevent herself from appearing to suffer more than what all her family suffered on his going away.' As the days pass, she shows that by sticking to routine, and maintaining balance in her small family society, Elinor was able, if not to 'lessen her grief' to 'keep it from increasing,' and to see to it that 'her mother and sisters were spared much solicitude on her account.' Her actions were both 'moral' and self-controlling.

**Self-analytical** When Edward broke with Elinor, and left her, Elinor used mind games to cope with her own loss. She acted to retain the freedom of her mind, so that rather than being inwardly chained by the obsession of loss—especially of a loss which she was not in a position to understand—she could assure that 'the past and the future, on a subject so interesting (Edward's departure), must be before her, must force her attention, and engross her memory, her reflection, and her fancy.' Elinor's reflection takes her into waters where her mind sorts through its own history: she found 'every day afforded her leisure enough to think of Edward, and of Edward's behavior, in every possible variety—with tenderness, pity, approbation, censure and doubt...her mind was inevitably at liberty.'

## Discussion questions

Sensible can mean several things: just plain ordinary, with good sense; reasonable, as of good judgment; practical. Which particular tweak seems to you to fit Elinor?

The 'mind games' Elinor adopts, in order to overcome the pain of Edward's leaving her, resemble those of meditative or other spiritual reflective practices. Does Jane Austen seem to you to be attuned to such self-awareness in her characters?

Why does Elinor seem so insightful into the relation of Willoughby to Marianne? Does she use reason? Does she intuit the nature of Willoughby? Is she an 'intellectual'?

**EDWARD** (introvert)

**Character** Edward presents himself as retiring, lacking self-confidence, understated, idle, non-committal, lacking artistic sense. (Elinor Dashwood, who is soft on Edward from the start, insinuates that Edward is putting on more than a little of this character profile, out of laziness and desire to take it easy.) He is in no sense a bad guy, but rather wishes to keep out of the fray of life, and in that soft sense is anti-

social, not in the intellectually sharp edged sense of an Alcestis (in Moliere's *The Misanthropist*, or of Hippolytus, in Euripides' *Phaedra*, who is appalled by female sexuality). It is totally in character, for Edward, to refuse to admit to any artistic sensitivity, and to depreciate his own efforts to give an account, to Elinor, of a walk he has just taken, in the beauties of nature.

**Parallels** We first meet Edward as a quite innocent resident in the Dashwood household, though by the end of the novel, after he has married Elinor, he is a mature householder. In his shy but subtle earlier stages, with Marianne and Elinor, Edward can make us think of a great number of young men starting out to find themselves: Telemachus, the young son of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, Hamlet, in Shakespeare's play, open minded and worried, and challenged by a heavy fate that awaits him on his life way; Oliver Twist, born in the workhouse, but setting out to discover what the new industrial city of London can make of him; Fred Vinci in Eliot's *Middlemarch*, 1872, charming but far too eager to have things fall into his lap; Henry Fleming, who starts out eager to fight but loses his nerves in battle, in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, 1894..

### Illustrative moments

**Retiring** Edward enters the narrative on a downer note. Though he moves in with Mrs. Dashwood—who both likes him and sees him as a marriage prospect for her daughter, Elinor—he lacks confidence in dealing with his half-sisters, Marianne and Elinor. 'He had no particular graces of person or address. He was too diffident to do justice to himself.' Upon further acquaintance, it seems, Edward was to grow more open and easy to like—Elinor falls for him and eventually marries him—but we see him through many a stage of melancholy, and of stubborn-honorable refusal to renege on his youthful engagement.

**Understated** On a later occasion, Edward leaves the women at home, so that he can go into the village to see to his horses. Upon returning from that walk, and having praised the beauties of the nature he passed through, Edward rejects Marianne's request that he should explain in more detail what he enjoyed on the walk. 'You must not inquire too far, Marianne—remember I have no knowledge in the picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold...I call it a very fine country.'

**Idle** Mrs. Dashwood, who is partial to Edward, suggests that he would be happier if he had an occupation. (This is long before Edward has been granted a parsonage by Colonel Brandon.) Edward replies that he agrees, and has looked around. He alludes to the various career options he has had to disregard—the law, the navy, the army—out of lack of talent or interest. 'I was therefore entered at Oxford and have been properly idle ever since.' He refuses to take seriously Mrs. Dashwood's point, that as Edward is leaving their society at that point, it would be advantageous to his friends to know where he going and what he plans to do.

**Direct** Marianne expostulates to Edward on the beauties of Barton Valley, to which the Dashwoods have moved. 'Look at those hills! Did you ever see their equals? To the left is Barton Park, amongst those woods and plantations. And there beneath that farthest hill, which rises with such grandeur, is our cottage.' Edward replies: 'It is a beautiful country...but these bottoms must be dirty in winter. 'When Marianne shrinks before such an insensitive response, and asks how he can speak of dirt, in view of such beauty, Edward replies, smiling: 'Because...among the rest of the objects before me, I see a very dirty lane.'

### Discussion question

Is anti-social the right descriptor for Edward? After all, he does marry Elinor in the end. Is there something essentially in common between the held-back quality of Edward's personality and that of Elinor?

Does Edward's laid-back manner reflect his patrician background? Is he affected? Or is he direct?

Does Edward have a problem with women? Is that the root of his difficulty in expressing himself vigorously around Marianne and Elinor?

## WILLOUGHBY

(unconscientious)

**Character** From the time he rescues Marianne from a fall in the mud, Willoughby is dramatic, charming, manly, a true gallant. In the course of the novel, long after Marianne has fallen hopelessly in love with him, Willoughby makes it evident why he up and walked out on Marianne in the midst of their romance. He is a philanderer, with multiple female interests, and little stability. In the course of time, however, he comes to realize he has made a bad marriage, and makes clear that he has always loved Marianne, a confession in which there seems to be some truth. In the end, though badly married, the hedonist Willoughby makes do, and quite well, with the life of a country gentleman.

**Parallels** Wherever there are cads, parallels to Willoughby crop up in literature. Jane Austen herself outdoes Willoughby in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), where the cynical gossip George Wickham lies and deceives the girls. James Steerforth, in Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850), turns out to be careless with women and generally badly intentioned. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, by Oscar Wilde, luxuriates in depicting the developing hedonism of Dorian, who deceives many of the fair sex. Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun also Rises* (1926) highlights the sexual behaviors of a woman cad, Brett Ashley, who leaves men panting for her as she drives away.

### Illustrative moments

**Gallant** Marianne too hastily descends the muddy hill on her way home from walking with Margaret, and slips, spraining her ankle. Willoughby is just ascending the hill, handsome and rugged with his two pointers and his gun. At once he renders his services, picks her up in his arms, and 'quitted not his hold til he had ...carried her down the hill,' and seated her in a chair in her house, to the astonishment (and fascination) of her mother and older sister. The situation to which Willoughby so swiftly responded was right up his alley, allowing him to display his manly and romantic skills. He complied perfectly, like a character in a romance novel—which he was.

**Attractive** Willoughby is a delight to Marianne, whose ankle is sprained and who must remain at home for a while. Willoughby visits her daily. He and Marianne are on the same page when it comes to current books and even passages in books; they share the same tastes in music, and love to dance. Nor does Marianne misjudge this lively mid twenty-year old, though her judgment of him is not deep. 'Willoughby was a young man of good abilities, quick imagination, lively spirits, and open, affectionate manners. He was exactly formed to engage Marianne's heart...' If Willoughby had any prominent fault, and Elinor suspected this one, it was that he was too outspoken and frank; but that 'fault' he shared with Marianne, who admired it in him because it was hers.

**Charming** Marianne—and indeed the whole Dashwood family-- delights in the regular visits of Willoughby. Still obliged to favor her ankle, Marianne finds that Willoughby does everything possible to make her recovery pleasant. The two of them trade tastes in music and dance fashions, and find that 'their taste was strikingly alike.' 'Willoughby, on his side, gave every proof of his pleasure in their acquaintance...' 'His society became gradually her most exquisite enjoyment.' He was, in short, a regular house guest, and knew exactly how to ingratiate himself with the entire family.

**Philandering** Upon arriving in London, still perplexed by Willoughby's sudden abandonment of her, Marianne began to inundate Willoughby with letters. Yet she receives no response to these letters, and grows desperate for news of her former lover. Then one day Marianne and her sister go to a party and find Willoughby, standing a short distance from them. At first he pretends not to recognize Marianne, and greets her coldly, then, when she asks if he has not received her letters, 'his complexion and all his embarrassment returned...and he turned hastily away with a slight bow and joined his friend.' His philandering nature has caught up with him.

### Discussion questions

Is it fair to Willoughby to call him simply a philanderer? How does he—or does he?—deepen in the course of the novel, and how does he grow in compassion for others? Track two or three specific turning points, where you see Willoughby starting to prove himself more than a philanderer.

Willoughby seems pretty content with his life, at the end of the novel. What is his secret for contentment? He has been socially criticized as irresponsible, he has lost in the competition for his true love, Marianne, he has settled for a woman he doesn't love, but still he is content. What kind of guy is he?

Has Willoughby a genuine affection for Marianne, when he and she are young mutually self-absorbed admirers in Marianne's home?

### **COLONEL BRANDON** (conscientious)

**Character** Colonel Brandon is by nature honest and reserved, and yet it is his sudden infatuation with Marianne Dashwood that draws him out into society. Fascinated with Marianne—who is thinking only of Willoughby—Brandon seems lost in his search for a mate; and only slowly reveals himself as romantically unhappy, and complexly still involved with a cousin whom he had loved—and who resembled Marianne—and who had gone south on him, leaving with a child to care for. The grave and saddened Colonel comes on a lucky conclusion, by ultimately marrying the Marianne who had earlier been flighty and dismissive of him. His honesty and reliability prove compelling to Marianne, as she matures.

**Parallels** Colonel Brandon, reserved and honest, wounded by his past, comes on quiet, but by the end of the novel, after having impacted the lives of all the characters with his generosity and long sightedness, emerges as the husband of the very Marianne, his junior, who had at the novel's opening found him unmarriageably old. Both his honesty and his staunchness ally him with a figure like Colonel Pargiter in Virginia Woolf's *The Years*, 1937, or even with the old Professor, *Uncle Vanya*, 1897, in Chekhov's play of the same name. There is a bit of Shakespeare's Polonius in Brandon, venial but chugging along on wise saws. Sophocles' Creon (in *Antigone*, 441 B.C.) shares with Brandon an avuncular grumpiness, grounded in accumulated wounds, and a well earned honesty about the human condition.

### **Illustrative moments**

**Reserved** At the get acquainted party for the Dashwoods, Marianne is asked to sing for the group after dinner. Her performance was 'highly applauded,' by all but Colonel Brandon. He was the only person who heard her 'without being in raptures.' He paid Marianne the respect of reserved attention, unlike the guests who applauded perfunctorily, or the boisterous Sir John who was loud in his admiration.' The Colonel's 'pleasure in music...was estimable when contrasted against the horrible insensitivity of the others.' We are not yet aware of that personal sadness, which adds to the Colonel's 'gravity,' but we sense that his honest readiness to 'pay her only the compliment of attention' has its roots in his private life.

**Serious** During the frequent social evenings, that bring the Dashwoods together with Sir John and the Colonel, Marianne and Willoughby talk incessantly together, leaving Elinor in conversation with Colonel Brandon. The Colonel, who is smitten with Marianne, asks Elinor about her sister's opposition to 'second attachments.' Elinor replies, in essence, that Marianne believes in love at first sight and forever—she is a young romantic. We are not yet aware of the Colonel's hidden concern, his own previous love affair with his father's ward, and its disastrous outcome. The colonel is surrounded by a mysterious sadness, which adds to his gravity.

**Responsible** The Middletons, Brandon, the Dashwoods and Willoughby plan an outing to Whitwell, which is interrupted by an unexpected letter which arrives in the post for Colonel Brandon. 'While they were at breakfast the letters were brought in. ..there was one for Colonel Brandon—he took it, looked at the direction, changed color, and immediately left the room.' Nothing could persuade him to change his immediate decision, to leave at once on an urgent matter of business. The group will soon learn, after the Colonel leaves, that the matter of business concerns Brandon's 'natural daughter,' but of that the Colonel will say nothing. He leaves in a rush, clouded (still) in mystery.

**Emotional** As Marianne is recovering from a serious illness—brought on by her misery at hearing of Willoughby's marriage—she receives a visit from Colonel Brandon—to whom she wishes to express her gratitude for having brought her mother to her. On seeing her his 'emotion was such as, in Elinor's conjecture, must arise from something more than his affection for Marianne.' The narrator helps us

appreciate that Brandon is deeply saddened by the resemblance between Marianne and Eliza, Brandon's former love, from whom his father had separated him, and who had died in lamentable circumstances.

### **Discussion questions**

Does the eventual marriage, between Marianne and Brandon, seem convincing to you? Does it surprise you to learn that Marianne, at the time of her marriage, is only nineteen years old? Is her maturing convincing, or too quick?

What enables Brandon eventually to disengage himself from his earlier love and loss? Does Austen walk us through the changes of development in Brandon?

How does Brandon act during Marianne's illness? Is he in character, as a distraught lover?

Is Brandon the most admirable character in this novel?

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