Jane Austen's
Sense and Sensibility

Adapted by Jessica Swale

Directed by
Nisi Sturgis

Know-the-Show Audience Guide

researched and written by
the Education Department of

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

In this Guide

This production of *Sense and Sensibility* is generously sponsored in part by:

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Jane Austen

About the Author

Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775 in Hampshire, England to Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen. She had a relatively happy childhood surrounded by her seven siblings and the numerous boys who lodged with the family while under the tutelage of her father, who ran a small boarding school out of his parsonage. Jane and her older sister Cassandra were inseparable for most of her life. Though primarily educated at home, Jane received a much broader education from her father than most young women of the period. She and her sister had full access to their father's extensive library, and they participated in lively discussions of literature and current events with their parents, brothers, and Reverend Austen's students. Jane enjoyed many pastimes common to rural England in the period, and the Austen children frequently wrote and performed charades and plays at home to amuse themselves, many of which were crafted by Jane herself.

Starting at a very early age, Jane was encouraged by her parents to write. Though prolific as a young writer, she was also quite shy - she frequently penned her works on scraps of paper that could be slipped under the desktop blotter if anyone entered the room. She wrote her first novel, the satirical *Love and Friendship*, at fourteen. Around this time she also wrote *A History of England by a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant Historian* and several other amusing juvenilia. The beginnings of some of her more popular works can be found in unpublished novels written in her late teens and early twenties; most notably *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions,* manuscripts which evolved into *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, respectively. Her father was supportive of Jane's endeavors, buying her writing paper and even attempting to find her a publisher.

A sketch of Jane Austen by her sister, Cassandra Austen c. 1810

In 1801, Reverend Austen unexpectedly retired. He sold off everything and moved his wife and two unmarried daughters to the bustling resort town of Bath. Jane and Cassandra, then 25 and 28, were considered "old maids" abd had no real means of support outside of their family. Jane did not enjoy city life and it was during this period that she gradually stopped writing. Reverend Austen died four years after his retirement, and Jane, Cassandra, and their mother found thmeselves fully dependent on the Austen sons for charity and shelter. It was during this time that Jane fell in love. Unfortunately, the young man died before their relationship could grow. Later she accepted a proposal of marriage from Harris Bigg-Wither, a wealthy landowner and brother of a close friend. The next morning, however, she changed her mind and ultimately rejected the proposal.

In 1809, Jane, along with her mother and sister, found a permanent home in her beloevd Hampshire countryside on the Chawton estate of her brother, Edward. Though she never married, Jane enjoyed an active social life among the community and finally returned to writing.

During the next seven years, she revised *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. They were published in 1811 and 1813 respectively, under the pseudonym "By a Lady". Her intense productivity continued with *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), and *Persuasion*, which was published along with *Northanger Abbey* in 1818, a year after her death. She began a work entitled *Sanditon* in 1816, but it was never completed.

Although Jane Austen never had children of her own, she was very fond of her many nieces and nephews. They, in turn, never tired of descending on Chawton to visit their high-spirited, favorite aunt. Each enjoyed a lively written correspondence with their Aunt Jane, sending her their writing which she would read and critique. When her nephew James Edward was 16, he was "let in on the family secret," that his aunt was the same "lady" who had written *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice.* James Edward, who would become her first biographer, sent Jane a poem expressing the profound honor he felt being the nephew of such an ingenious writer.

Many modern physicians and scholars believe that Jane contracted Addison's Disease in 1815, although others suggest that her symptoms reflect a type of lymphoma, such as Hodgkin's Disease. Whatever the cause, she experienced intermittent but increasing pain and weakness. In the spring of 1817, she and her sister moved to rented rooms in Winchester to be closer to Jane's physician. In the early hours of July 18, 1817, Jane Austen passed away in her sister's arms. She was just 41 years old. "I have lost a treasure, such a sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed," Cassandra wrote to their niece Fanny after the funeral at Winchester Cathedral. "She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow…it is as if I have lost a part of myself."

The Conduct of Women

A popular form of "self-help" literature in Jane Austen's day was the "conduct book" for young women. These guides, mainly written by men, were intended to provide guidance to women on their education, manners, and behavior, "the ultimate goal being to attract, marry, and please men," according to Veronica Webb Leahy. Generally, these writers agreed that women should be "meek, submissive, grateful, gentle, delicate, modest, feminine, ignorant (of anything important) and virtuous," as Bertha McKenzie writes. This contrasts starkly with Austen's own life and the behavior of her heroines, who, as Leahy notes, "learn from direct experience and…demonstrate that they are rational beings." We know that the young Austen had meaningful access to her father's library, and that he was supportive of his daughter's intellectual development and accomplishments.

Jessica Swale

About the Adapter

Jessica Swale is a London-based adapter, playwright, theatre director, and screenwriter. Originally from Berkshire, England; Swale trained as a theatremaker through study with Exeter University and the Central School of Speech and Drama.

Swale has developed theatrical adaptations for a number of literary texts in addition to Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. This list includes *The Secret Garden, Far from the Madding Crowd, The Jungle Book,* and *Stig of the Dump.* Swale also crafted the script for an unproduced Fox Searchlight film adaptation of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. In regards to how she picks stories to write/adapt, Swale explains:

I often write about the female experience, not only because (funnily enough) it's my own experience, but because there are so many women's stories that have been ignored historically, so there's heaps of material crying out to be mined. I often about underdogs and tend to revisit themes of family, love and freedom of expression. With jokes.

This lens is evident both in her credits as an adapter (such as Swale's choice to adapt and direct *Sense and Sensibility)* and in her work as a playwright. *Blue Stockings* (Evening Standard Most Promising Playwright nomination, GCSE drama syllabus), Swale's debut original theatrical piece, follows four young female undergraduates in 1896 Britain fighting not only to be taken seriously as students but also for the right to earn a degree like their male peers. *Nell Gwynn* (2016 Olivier Award for Best New Comedy) depicts the rise of one of the first English women to take to the theatrical stage.

Swale's screenplays include *Summerland* (2020 release, writer and director)*, Leading Lady Parts,* and *Horrible Histories: The Movie.* Swale is also a decorated theatrical director and an Associate Artist for International NGO Youth Bridge Global.

Jessica Swale

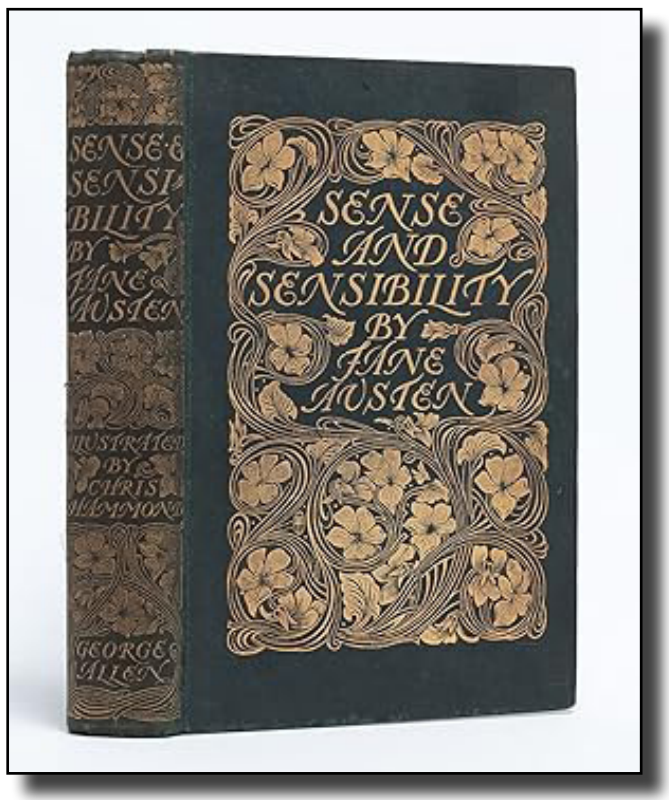
"What [Swale] achieves in her pages is masterful. True to her source material, Swale embraces the search for soul-mates of Elinor and her sister Marianne with big open arms, but she retains romantic love as a part of life, an important part but just a part; as a way to grow and generate familial love and community. It isn't a marriage plot, it's a love story."

- Jessica Bedford, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival

Sense & Sensibility

A Synopsis

Warning, Spoilers Ahead!



The wealthy Mr. Henry Dashwood dies, leaving behind a sizeable fortune and country estate. The widowed Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters - Elinor, the eldest; Marianne; and Margaret, the youngest - are, as women, barred from inheriting the estate. Instead, the estate and fortune pass to John, Henry's son from a previous marriage. Despite his initial intentions to provide for his stepfamily, John is persuaded by his wife, Fanny, to give the Dashwoods only a paltry inheritance and one month to vacate the house. The Dashwoods are left with next to nothing.

As Mrs. Dashwood frantically writes letters to appeal for help, pragmatic Elinor finds a kindred spirit in Fanny's humble and thoughtful brother, Mr. Edward Ferrars. When the Dashwoods' prayers are answered by Sir John Middleton, a cousin with a modest cottage on the outskirts of his estate, Elinor and Edward resolve to keep in touch. Fanny, however, disapproves of the attachment and reveals that Edward's inheritance relies upon the quality of his match.

The Dashwoods are warmly welcomed to Barton Cottage by Sir John and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings, who immediately endeavor to introduce Elinor and Marianne to eligible bachelors. The girls meet Colonel Brandon, a friend of Sir John's, who is immediately smitten with Marianne. As Elinor waits to hear from Mr. Ferrars, Colonel Brandon attempts to get to know Marianne. However, excitable Marianne has idealized notions of love and is uninterested in the quiet and mature Colonel. The Colonel's cause is further challenged when, in a walk conveniently timed to miss a visit with the Colonel, Marianne twists her ankle. She is rescued and carried back to Barton Cottage by Mr. John Willoughby, a "young hero" primed to inherit an estate from his aunt. Marianne is enamoured with Willoughby and the pair quickly become inseparable - so inseparable that they get caught visiting Willoughby's future house unchaperoned. Their clear attachment leads Barton Park to believe that Marianne and Willoughby are in or moving towards an engagement. However, when an announcement seems imminent, Willoughby shocks everyone by leaving for London on urgent business. Marianne is left distraught.

After much wallowing at Barton Cottage, Mr. Edward Ferrars finally pays the Dashwoods a visit. However, while he is clearly moved by seeing Elinor again, he does not stay. Elinor is confused, but not for long: Lucy Steele, Mrs. Jennings' relative, urgently descends on Barton Park to befriend Elinor. Lucy reveals to Elinor (unprompted) that she has been engaged to Mr. Ferrars for four years, and swears her to

secrecy due to Lucy's lower status. Elinor sees Lucy's penchant for manipulation and finally understands Edward's plight. Mrs. Jennings invites Elinor, Marianne, and Lucy to join her in London for the winter. While Elinor is reluctant to spend a season with Lucy, Marianne persuades her to agree so that they can track down Willoughby.

In London, Marianne waits to hear from Willoughby and Elinor gently informs the Colonel of Marianne's presumed engagement. After weeks of silence, Marianne receives a letter from Willoughby and hopes to see him at a ball that evening. Unfortunately, she does see Willoughby at the ball - with another woman. In the fallout, Elinor and Marianne learn that Willoughby is engaged to an heiress. Marianne is crushed and her reputation is disgraced, particularly as society learns that Marianne and Willoughby were never formally engaged, and Willoughby postures as though everything was in Marianne's head. Upon hearing the news, the Colonel reveals Willoughby's true nature in the hopes of comforting Marianne. Colonel Brandon's ward, the daughter of his late, long-lost childhood love, was taken advantage of and subsequently left by Willoughby. Accordingly, the Colonel was concerned about the attachment between Marianne and Willoughby from the beginning, and even dueled him for her honor.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Dashwood sisters (Photo by Sydney Fucito).

John and Fanny visit the Dashwoods in London, and Lucy is eager to impress them.However, Lucy misinterprets Fanny's contempt for Elinor and Marianne as genuine affection towards her. Emboldened, Lucy invites herself to tea with Fanny and reveals her engagement to Edward. The Ferrars family are horrified: Edward is disinherited in favor of his brother, society is abuzz, and after four years, the engagement is finally set to proceed as Edward is committed to doing the right thing, even at great personal cost.The Colonel does his best to help by offering Edward a modest role as the parson at his estate. Elinor relays this generous offer to Edward, who gratefully accepts. He attempts to reveal his feelings for Elinor, but Elinor forecloses the topic and urges Edward to find and thank the Colonel.

Mrs. Jennings' daughter offers to host Elinor and Marianne at Cleveland, her country estate, and the Colonel helps them move. Citing a need for the country air, Marianne goes for a walk. However, once Elinor and the Colonel learn that the house at Cleveland is only a short distance from Willoughby's Allenham estate, they grown concerned. Their concern only multiplies as Marianne fails to return and the weather turns dangerous. Unable to wait any longer, the Colonel goes out in search of Marianne. Surely enough, she has gone to Allenham to grieve her relationship with Willoughby. The Colonel returns to Cleveland with a soaked, shivering, and weak Marianne in his arms.

The local doctor advises that Marianne needs to rest, for fear of a worse infection taking hold. Elinor and the Colonel take turns tending to Marianne. However, she fails to improve, and soon after turns gravely ill. The doctor prepares Elinor and the Colonel for the worst, and urges them to send for Mrs. Dashwood as the illness will likely move quickly if it worsens. The Colonel volunteers to go to Mrs. Dashwood himself, and leaves for Barton Cottage at once. Marianne miraculously turns the corner in the overnight and her fever breaks, putting her out of immediate danger.

The Colonel is projected to with Margaret and Mrs. Dashwood by morning. Elinor leaves the house to greet them, but is intercepted by Willoughby, who demands confirmation that Marianne will improve. Elinor is shocked by his distress as he recounts his overnight journey from London and his enduring love for Marianne. He reveals that, while he initially only courted Marianne to flatter himself, he quickly developed feelings for her and intended to propose. However, once his wealthy aunt learned of what he did to the Colonel's young ward, he was disinherited. He pivoted to make as wealthy a match as he could. He asks for Elinor's forgiveness and Marianne's consideration should his situation with his wife change. Elinor refuses due to his poor treatment of Marianne, his abuse of the Colonel's ward, and his disdain for his wife. He leaves, dejected. Elinor then spots Marianne off to the side, who reveals that she overheard their entire conversation.

Mrs. Dashwood and Margaret later arrive and rush to Marianne. The Colonel attempts to leave and grant them privacy, but is stopped by Marianne who musters her remaining strength to express her gratitude. The Colonel is overcome with emotion.

Winter and spring pass, and Elinor and Marianne return to Barton Cottage for the summer. The Colonel visits regularly, and is at the cottage when Thomas, a servant, reveals that he saw Lucy Steele and "Mr. Ferrars" together, who confirmed their marriage. Elinor is characteristically stoic and resigned.

The next day, Mrs. Dashwood, Margaret, Elinor, Marianne, and the Colonel are visited by Mr. Edward Ferrars. The visit and resulting conversation is uncomfortable, until Mrs. Dashwood concedes and wishes Edward joy. He is confused, and realizes that there has been a miscommunication. It is not he, but his brother, Mr. Robert Ferrars, who has married Lucy Steele. Following Edward's disinheritance, Lucy's affections moved to Robert.

Upon this realization, all of Elinor's suppressed emotions surface into an explosive burst of tears. Colonel Brandon and the remaining Dashwoods hurry out of the room, leaving Elinor and Edward alone. No longer bound by honor to maintain his arrangement with Lucy, Edward confesses his feelings to Elinor and asks her to marry him. Elinor joyfully accepts.

Elinor and Edward reunite with the family, who celebrate both their happy news and another announcement - Marianne had accepted the Colonel's marriage proposal earlier that morning. The Dashwoods, Jennings', and Middletons rejoice as both pairs are married in a double-ceremony.

Who's Who in the Play

Elinor Dashwood - The eldest Dashwood sister, pragmatic and reserved. 19 years old.

Marianne Dashwood- The middle Dashwood sister, imaginative and passionate. 16 1/2 years old.

Margaret Dashwood - The youngest Dashwood sister, an unfiltered aspiring naturalist. 13 years old.

Mrs. Dashwood - Mother to Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret, and stepmother to John Dashwood. The late Henry Dashwood's second wife. Shares Marianne's temperament.

Mr. John Dashwood - Henry Dashwood's eldest son and heir. Stepbrother to Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret. Married to Fanny Dashwood.

Fanny Dashwood - Mr. Dashwood's wife, obsessed with wealth and status.

Edward Ferrars- Fanny's brother and the eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars. Principled and down-to-earth.

Colonel Brandon - A friend of Sir John Middleton: taciturn, dependable, and devoted. Mid 30s.

Willoughby - A young bachelor based nearby in Devonshire. Charistmatic, dashing, and impulsive.

Mrs. Jennings - Sir John's mother-in-law. Meddlesome, but warm and well-intentioned.

Mrs. Palmer - Mrs. Jennings' daughter, married to Mr. Palmer

Mr. Palmer- Mrs. Charlotte Palmer's husband

Miss Grey - An heiress; smart and stylish.

Sir John Middleton- Mrs. Dashwood's cousin, kind and generous. Owner of the Barton Park estate.

Lucy Steele - A distant relative of Mrs. Jennings. Charming and clever.

Thomas - The Dashwood girls' trusted servant.

Scenic model by Brittany Vasta

"Sensibility" in the Regency Era

Today, we typically associate the word "sensibility" with the idea of being "sensible" - one's ability to experience and express level-headed reason. A person who is "sensible" is understood to be logical, pragmatic, rational, mature, and wise.

However, at the time when Jane Austen was writing, "sensible" had a different connotation. Instead of meaning having logical, good sense, being "sensible" referred to having access to emotional sensitivity and reactivity. A person who is "sensible" is, in Jane Austen's world, sensitive and sentimental (Shaffer). Therefore, "sense" (or prudence) finds itself at odds with "sensibility" (or passion). This perceived binary of "sense" and "sensibility" was a passionate debate in Jane Austen's world.

> *"Since women were considered especially susceptible to becoming disabled through sensibility, since they were considered easily led by anything that affected the emotions, novels that played on the emotions were considered dangerous in part because they could debilitate women or train them to want from life what they were unlikely to get: heightened passion, heroic action, worship from lovers. Consider, as you read, the extent to which novels - novels of sensibility, especially - are presented as dangerous in this novel. Who follows them? What's the effect of their doing so?"*
>
> *-Professor Julie Shaffer, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh*

On one hand, Austen's lifetime was characterized by Rationalism and the Enlightenment. These movements exalted humanity's capacity for reason as its primary virtue. Emotions were mostly understood to be animalistic "appetites," that distracted from higher purposes. Philosophers of the Enlightenment often cited the rapid scientific progress of the 18th century as evidence for their perspective: as the intellect drove increased understanding of the natural world, individuals were granted greater sovereignty over their own lives (we understand this perspective today to have excluded all except white men). The American and French revolutions found their roots in this ideology.

However, as the 18th century drew to a close, the zeitgeist moved away from order and reason to look inward. Romanticism celebrated the individual and the subjective - particularly, the role of the senses, personality, and emotions in making meaning. Many leading Romantic thinkers and poets can be found on Marianne's bookshelf, such as Blake and Keats. Other notable Romantic writers include Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and Mary & Percy Shelley.

Factions of the Romantic movement made up "The Cult of Sensibility," in which sensitivity was believed to be the height of good manners. This "Cult of Sensibility" arose from breakthroughs in the relationship between the nervous system and the brain - it was believed that more "finely-tuned" nerves led to greater sympathy and thus, more moral behavior. Someone like Willoughby, for example, would be considered a prime example of finely-tuned, "sensible" masculinity - genteel, expressive, well-read, and sensitive. However, as Marianne and Elinor learn, "sensibility" can easily be a facade.

Under this model, "sensibility" was often weaponized against women. Due to their generally smaller frames, women were believed to have much more delicate (and sensible) nervous systems than men. Thus, society viewed women as weak and in need of guidance, as they were easily overcome by emotions and seemingly unable to make wise decisions. While Marianne and Willoughby exhibit similar traits, only one is shamed by "proper" society.

Marriage & Money in Austen's Society

For "genteel" (or so aspiring) families, marriage was a practical decision relating to property and finances. It was paramount that property be kept in the family from generation to generation.

In this view of marriage as a familial "alliance", each party was expected to bring a relatively equal amount of property to the altar. While women could not legally enter into contracts, a father was expected to bestow cash, if not land, on his daughter. Generally, this property became the husband's, except in the case of pre-nuptial "settlements" which tied a portion of a woman's dowry to her and her children. She still did not have legal control over this property, but her husband could not sell or give it away, either.

Women whose families could not afford much of a dowry often had to wait years to be able to marry. In the meantime, they would usually be supported by their fathers. The only suitable job for an unmarried "gentlewoman" was to be a governess, a live-in nanny/tutor in a wealthy house. The life of a governess, however, was a lonely one with poor pay. Jane Austen was extremely fortunate to live in relative comfort throughout her life thanks to financial support from her brothers.

The pressure on young women of the gentility to marry quickly and "well" was often intense. However, if a woman was even *perceived* to be "husband-hunting", she would be condemned by society. Accordingly, and because women were generally thought incapable of sound decision-making, fathers (and to an extent, mothers) were expected to negotiate their daughters' betrothals.

Young gentlemen also found their options restricted by economic pressures. Under the system of primogeniture, all property owned by the family would be inherited by the eldest surviving son to prevent landed estates from being carved up by each generation. Younger sons might inherit some money, but generally had to find a profession in order to support themselves. This is why we see many military officers and clergymen in the novels of the 18th-19th centuries: these were considered the only respectable jobs for gentlemen.

Landed families might legally ensure the preservation of their estate by "entailing" it. An entailed estate, as Natalie Tyler explains, was one legally "tied up so that its inhabitants…would not have rights to sell, mortgage or dispose of it any other way than the entailment dictated." The most common kind of entailment, "in the line male", dictated that the estate must pass intact to the nearest male heir upon the owner's death.

Despite these economic pressures, the view of marriage as a financial decision existed in competition with a view of marriage as a spiritual union of individuals based on affection or at least compatibility between the partners. Jane Austen's lifetime was broadly characterized by the "Romanticism" movement, which elevated the individual, their thoughts, and their emotions. Our contemporary view of marriage as a "love match" finds its roots in "Romanticism".

In a society where the idea of women as property was pervasive, Austen takes the radical position that, to quote *Pride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet, her heroines are "rational creatures" who can negotiate the economic and emotional pitfalls of courtship for themselves, and who can justly command the respect of the men they choose to marry.

The "Real" Jane Austen: Rebel or Reactionary?

In *The Friendly Jane Austen*, Natalie Tyler playfully defines "four essential types of passionate reader" of Jane Austen: the "Jane-ites", the "Gentle Jane" school, the "Ironic Jane" school, and the "Subversive Jane" school. "The real" Jane Austen has become the subject of intense scholarly and popular debate, as, like Shakespeare, we know little about what she "really" believed.

Nevertheless, critical discussion around Jane Austen continues, bolstered by scholarship that has reversed early but persistent misconceptions about her work.

In Tyler's account, the Janeites regard Austen as literary "comfort food", a collection of skillful romantic fairy tales for grown-ups set in an idealized English countryside. The novels are to be appreciated for their craftsmanship, and the pleasure they bring, but are not particularly "deep".

The "Gentle Jane" faction tends to be politically and socially conservative, and admires Austen for what they see as her devotion to civility and Christian values; to these writers, Jane Austen is a traditionalist and a profound critic of modernity in literature and life.

In the 20th century, pictures of "Ironic Jane" and "Subversive Jane" began to appear, in part as scholars gained more access to her youthful writings (the Juvenilia) first published 1922 -1951. Austen's talent for irony is clear from these works - subtle, sharp, and piercingly accurate, the voice of "Ironic Jane" is perhaps softened in the novels for public consumption, but her own family knew how bitingly funny "Aunt Jane" could be. To those who espouse "Ironic Jane", this is her key quality as she sets out to skewer social posturing and expose most people's foolishness.

As women gained access to academic positions, the view of "Subversive Jane" came into focus. In this lens, Jane Austen worked within the strictures of her society to load her novels with hidden commentary on the plight of women, "very real transgressive and subversive messages." The "comfort food" quality that the Janeites so admire is, for the Subversives, the clever sugar-coating of a very bitter pill.

As Tyler suggests, there is a degree of truth and a certain limitation to all of these views. If Austen seems like comfort food, it is perhaps because she began writing to amuse herself, her brothers, and her sister; and only became a published author later in life. It is also clear that she is exceedingly subtle, and without substantial context, we may miss a good deal of her sharper social commentary. The most contentious question is that of Jane Austen's "traditionalism." For many years, Anthony Trollope's assessment of Austen was typical:

"What she did, she did perfectly. Her work, as far as it goes, is faultless. She wrote of the times in which she lived, of the class of people with which she associated, …throughout all her works, and they are not many, a sweet lesson of homely household womanly virtue is ever being taught."

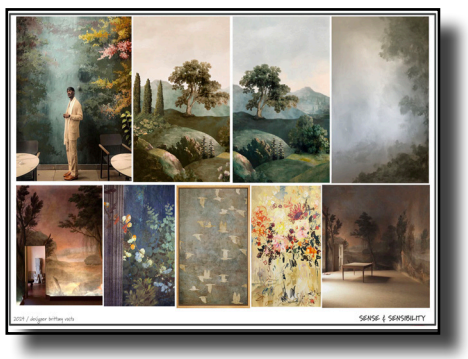
This air of condescension throughout Trollope's supposed praise demonstrates a need for corrective criticism from the Ironic and Subversive schools. Jane Austen as the demure "authoress," the paragon of "sweet homely womanly virtue," is incompatible with, as George Saintsbury describes, her demonstrated "insatiable and ruthless delight in roasting and cutting up a fool" apparent in both her mature, published works and comic teenage stories.

As a writer, Jane Austen is often separated from her contemporaries in the Romantic movement. As David G. Riede of Ohio State notes, "it is safe to say that Austen was not a Romantic writer, that in fact, her emphasis on reason, propriety and decorum makes her closer in spirit to the late eighteenth-century Age of Reason." Yet, to define Austen as a staunch defender of pre-modern traditions is to miss her nuance. Her last completed novel, *Persuasion*, possesses a melancholy and psychological lens, as well as reference to the Romantics.

In fact, by creating a narrative style in which omniscent narration is integrated with inner consciousness, Austen went far beyond her contemporaries in "modernizing" the English novel. Subversive or not, Austen's invention of female protagonists who are rational decision-makers and who drive the action of their stories changed British literature.

In This Production

Scenic inspiration and set model by Brittany Vasta, Scenic Designer, and selected costume inspirations Sophie Schneider, Costume Designer, for the 2024 Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey production of *Sense and Sensibility,* directed by Nisi Sturgis.



Commentary & Criticism

On Austen's Novel:
"A few months after its publication, Sense and Sensibility was reviewed favorably in The Critical Review, which praised the novel for its "naturally drawn" characters and its realistic plot: 'The incidents are probable, and highly pleasing and interesting.' In keeping with the critical attitude of the era, the reviewer also highlighted the novel's value as an instructional tool that offers an 'excellent' and useful moral."

– "Sense and Sensibility", ***Jane Austen Society of North America***

On Swale's Adaptation:
"The novels of Jane Austen are certainly known for featuring dry wit and humor, but they've never been considered reliable sources of knee-slapping comedy. Don't tell that to Jessica Swale, whose joke-heavy adaptation of Austen's "Sense and Sensibility" is currently in the capable hands of American Players Theatre. While Swale's adaptation hits all the stops of Austen's plot, it leans into its comic elements like Falstaff on a bender. At times, it feels like Sense, Sensibility and a Laugh Track."

– Aaron R. Conklin, ***Madison Magazine***

"Swale's adaptation is satisfying in its exploration of Margaret's personality; although she is the younger sister, she is not seen as lesser or inferior, but perhaps the opposite."

-Tilly Nevin, The Oxford Culture Review

"Swale's script certainly stands of its own accord, apart from any predecessors: a Margaret-tinted outlook on the novel that offsets melodrama with broad caricatures and a spirited warmth for the Devonshire the Dashwoods are deposited into... Swale's script doesn't ignore the melodrama at play here, nor does she downplay the humour within the source material."

-Louise Jones, Exeunt Magazine

"Swale's adaptation makes changes for a more modern audience, a new format, and time constraints. Following Elinor more closely than Marianne, *Sense and Sensibility* is often told through subtleties and silent longing, and the novel's quiet and constraint often clash with the nature of onstage performance... Edward Ferrars—though he does not embody the shy, awkward, and distinctively bland character in the original, [has a] warm, bold, and charming characterization...better fitted to the theatrical format and allows the audience to immediately understand Elinor's attraction."

-Mina Reinckens, Broad Street Review

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Dashwood sisters (Photo by Sydney Fucito).

Interesting Links & Sources

An Independent Website Dedicated to Jane Austen

www.janeausten.org

Adapter Jessica Swale's Website

www.jessicaswale.co.uk

Read Jane Austen's "Juvenilia"

www.pemberly.com/janeinfo.juviscrp.html

JASNA - The Jane Austen Society of North America

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Map of Locations in *Sense & Sensibility*
- Jane Austen Society of North America
- Sense and Sensibility Audiobook - Spotify