

# LUCY STEELE, THE MISTRESS OF SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, IN JANE AUSTEN'S *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*<sup>1</sup>

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ตีความนวนิยายเรื่อง *เซนส์ แอนด์ เซนสิบิลิตี* (ค.ศ. 1811) ของเจน ออสเตนในบริบทของการโต้เถียงเกี่ยวกับ “sense” (เซนส์) และ “sensibility” (เซนสิบิลิตี) ในช่วงปลายศตวรรษที่ 18 ซึ่งเป็นช่วงเวลา “sense” ถูกตั้งคำถามเพราะ “sense” อาจนำไปสู่การหลอกลวงและหลอกล่อผู้อื่นเพื่อประโยชน์ของตน และช่วงเวลาที่ “sensibility” ถูกโจมตีอย่างที่มีมนต์ถูกโจมตีมาตลอดมาในนวนิยายต่อต้านนวนิยายโรแมนติก บทความนี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าการที่นวนิยายเรื่องนี้นำเสนอตัวละครร้ายที่ชื่อลูซี่ สตีล ผู้ที่ผนวก “sensibility” จอมปลอมเข้ากับ “sense” ในแง่ที่เห็น

แก่ตัวเพื่อประโยชน์ของตนเองนั้น นวนิยายเล่มนี้ได้เสนอให้เห็นว่า “sensibility” เป็นคุณลักษณะและอาการที่สามารถเสแสร้งทำได้ และ “sense” ที่มีมากเกินไปเป็นสิ่งที่อันตราย

## Abstract

*This paper interprets Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility (1811) in the context of the literary and social debate about “sense” and “sensibility” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when the concept of sense was viewed with a suspicious eye as it might lead sensible persons to machination and manipulation; and, sensibility with a disapproving one as such it had been throughout the tradition of the anti-sentimental novel. This paper thus aims to argue that the portrayal of a female antagonist Lucy Steele who unites assumed sensibility and prudent, self-serving sense to achieve her ambitious aims shows that the novel was responsive to the belief promoted by the anti-sentimental works that sensibility could be feigned and used to dupe others and at the time rejected the idea that (too much) sense is a desirable quality.*

<sup>1</sup> (นายหญิงแห่งเซนส์ และ เซนสิบิลิตี: ลูซี่ สตีลในนวนิยายเรื่อง *เซนส์ แอนด์ เซนสิบิลิตี* ของเจน ออสเตน) The first draft of this paper was presented at the Expanding Horizons in English Language and Literary Studies 2 (ELLS2015) conference (3-4 August 2015), organized by the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

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*Sense and Sensibility* was written around 1795 and published in 1811. At the time of its publication, the debate concerning the merits and flaws of sensibility, which had started after the publication of the first sentimental novel *Pamela* in 1740 by Richardson, was not yet waning. On one hand, sensibility, the capacity for highly refined emotion and delicate emotional/physical susceptibility, was a

superior quality as any individuals who possessed it were considered to be benevolent, sincere and virtuous. The revealing of it through involuntary bodily manifestations of tears and trembling in a response to someone's suffering heightened one's virtue and showed that he/she is morally improving. However, that very act of weeping and kneeling could be feigned. Sensibility, on the other hand, was thus seen as a pretentious female quality. That is, it could be affected and used to dupe others as it is portrayed in Fielding's *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741) which parodies Richardson's *Pamela* by exposing her to be a scheming woman who feigns her crying and trembling only to entrap her master. The anti-sentimental works also emphasized excessive sensibility as a debilitating quality as it turned a man of feeling into an "isolationist" who was often "in retreat from the metropolitan sources of power or fragile in its contact with the worldly and the predatory" as portrayed in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) in which its hero's extremely fine feeling is wounded through the sequence of suffering he witnesses or he himself encounters while a woman of great sensibility was "often reclusive, melancholy or doomed" (Todd 1986: 129).

"Sensibility!—what is it?" was the title of one article in *Universal Magazine* published in February, 1790. This suggests that throughout the course of the eighteenth century the word "sensibility" was difficult to define as it encompasses various meanings, ideas and concepts. In the early century, sensibility was a medical term used by physicians to refer to

physical sensitivity or the physical reaction to stimuli. It later went beyond the physical to include emotional responsiveness and the capacity for refined emotion<sup>3</sup>, thanks to sentimental philosophy of the Earl of Shaftesbury, David Hume and Adam Smith. Shaftesbury posits an innate moral sense, an inborn conscious, leading humanity towards benevolence and friendship. Hume and Smith modified and developed Shaftesbury, contending that "sympathy" (the equivalent of the modern term "empathy") derived from a "spectator [within us....which] changes places in fancy with...the person principally concerned" (Smith 2008, 2-3). In other words, humans have the ability to change places with the unfortunate and to feel terrible for a person's suffering; therefore, they act benevolently and spontaneously. They also see a community as the human desire for fellowship. The cult of sensibility, in this sense, was thus instrumental in promoting sociability and social harmony, especially after the idea of "politeness", which had governed public decorum, came under attack, being seen as

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<sup>3</sup> Medical significance was still there since an individual's capacity to react emotionally and physically was considered to depend on his/her nervous constitution. The 1797 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined "sensibility" as "a nice and delicate perception of pleasure and pain, beauty or deformity" which "seems to depend upon the organization of the nervous system" (qtd. in Todd 1986:7). Literary figures with great sensibility are described as having "weak nerve" such as Yorick from Stern's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) who possesses "great SENSORIUM of the world!" (111)

a hypocritical quality<sup>4</sup>. Sensibility as a feminine attribute which includes generosity, sincerity, virtue and weak nerves and which displays in a variety of spontaneous physical activities such as swooning and weeping is the focus of this paper.

Only one year after the publication of *Pamela* whose virtuous and emotionally susceptible heroine provides an exemplar for later sentimental female figures, many writers were quick to perceive that those female qualities could be feigned and used to dupe others. Fielding thus published *Shamela* in 1741. Heywood, in the same year, published *The Anti-Pamela; or Feign'd Innocence Detected*. Sensibility as a quality open to be feigned was also heavily discussed during the latter part of the century with the appearance of articles such as "On the Affectation of Sentimental and Sensibility" in *Universal Magazine*, 1791, and "On the Affectation of Excessive Sensibility", published in *Winter Evenings*, 1805. The latter describes the fictional Belinda who "would weep" and "would frequently utter sentimental soliloquies on benevolence and humanity" (71) but who refused to help a suffering man. In the Gothic fiction of Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), Ann W. Rowland observes that a demonic female is a figure "whose initial charms

are all the traditional sentimental virtues"—"vivacity of genius," "simplicity of manner," and "rectitude of heart" (2008: 197). Indeed, what Austen's sentimental burlesque, *Love and Freindship* [sic], mocks "is not the virtue of sympathy, but the hypocritical assumption of it" (Knox-Shaw 2004: 54). In addition, the whole idea of learning how to feel from or "exercising sensibility" by reading the sentimental novel is also questioned. Again, the same hypocritical Belinda is said, at the beginning of the article, to "indeed contract[...] so great a tenderness of sensibility from such reading" (71). A. J. Van Sant explains that, since the traditional theory of fiction-reading depends on the imitation of an action, to imitate a man/woman of feeling is absurd since he/she does not act but feels and since there are no objective tests for feeling (as there are for actions), "Imitation of feeling is by definition affectation" (1993: 121).

The late century anti-sentimental works not only saw sensibility as a pretentious quality but also considered sense to be a desirable one. The characteristic of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century anti-sentimental work is its excoriation of sensibility and glorification of sense. To put it simply, it praised reason and attacked feeling. Edward Copeland sees Edgeworth's *Letters of Julia and Caroline* (1795), which contrasts two heroines, the one with sense is rewarded while the other with sensibility is punished, as the epitome of the late eighteenth century anti-sentimental work. Not surprisingly *Sense and Sensibility* with its contrasting heroines, each representing one of the

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<sup>4</sup> Lord Chesterfield wrote a series of letter to his son Phillip for a successful diplomatic career. The publication of those letters entitled *Letters to His Son* in 1774 (although they were not intended for publication) is considered to expose the hypocrisy of enacting politeness to deceive and climb the social ladder.

qualities, was viewed by contemporary critics such as *Critical Review*<sup>5</sup> (February 1812) as belonging to the anti-sentimental novel camp with its glorification of sense and excoriation of excessive sensibility. This theme was particularly prominent during and in the aftermath of the French Revolution when sensibility was linked to the turmoil and the Reign of Terror as a time when people were thought to be too emotional, sentimental because they left “reason” behind.

Sensibility thus had to be regulated by reason and so reason is glorified by the late eighteenth century anti-sentimental works. It must be governed so that sentimental figures would not be attenuated to physical ailments such as melancholia, hysteria, and hypochondria<sup>6</sup> (collectively known as the English Malady), and not to become separatists unable to cope with the world or, worse, to share the same fate as France. It can be concluded that there are two trends in anti-sentimental works: one exposes sensibility as a hypocritical trait and the other emphasizes it as a destructive quality which should be governed and subdued by reason.

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<sup>5</sup> The review firmly placed *Sense and Sensibility* in the pro-sense camp: “[the novel] furnishes a most excellent lesson to young ladies to curb that violent sensibility which too often leads to misery, and always to inconvenience and ridicule” (153).

<sup>6</sup> John Mullan sees sensibility as both privilege and affliction. While it heightens one’s perception of beauty and pain and highlights one’s virtue, it, when excessively indulged, can lead to physical and mental collapse.

It should be noted that the word “sense” encompasses a variety of meanings as the word “sensibility”. “Sense” basically refers to sense-impressions, expounded by John Locke’s theory of knowledge as ideas and knowledge originating in sensation or sense experience. In other words, knowledge is not given but comes from sensory experience. Sensibility, at one level, is the capacity to discriminate those sense-impressions; that is, refined sensibility enables individuals to see and hear with finer discrimination (Doody 2008: xii). However, too much sensibility can override sense which, in general expression, comes to mean “good sense” and “common sense” and even “politeness” and which, in Austen’s usage in particular, means “intelligence, discernment, capacity for making sound judgements”, (Doody, 2008: 308, quoting Stokes’ *The Language of Jane Austen*). Critics then see “sense” vs. “sensibility” as “reason” vs. “feeling”, both of which are needed to be balanced and reconciled. Gilbert Ryle considers “sense” and “sensibility”, as Austen entitles her novel, as her attempt to explore the relationship between “Head and Heart, Thought and Feeling, Judgement and Emotion, or Sensibleness and Sensitiveness” (1966: 287). Therefore, the whole debate between “sense” and “sensibility” can be simply put as the debate between “reason” and “emotion”.

If sensibility were blamed for the turmoil in France and destruction and the doom of sentimental women and the emasculation of men, sense, which the anti-sentimental works of the late eighteenth century tell their reader to harness, was also under

attack. One of the famous Enlightenment thinkers, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), while arguing that the use of reason should be as far developed as possible, was aware of the consequences of the unbounded development of reason which, if it were carried too far, he believed, could lead to social, religious and politic upheaval (Outram 2013: 2). Indeed, at the heart of the debate over the French Revolution lay the question as to whether the Enlightenment had been pursued too rationally or not rationally enough (Outram 2013: 130). Margaret A. Doody also argues that “ ‘sense’ could be equally dangerous if it led the sensible woman...either to make strong antagonistic judgements of the world or to try cleverly to manipulate others to her advantage” (2008: xii). By putting *Sense and Sensibility* into the context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, this paper aims to show that the novel was responsive to the belief promoted by the anti-sentimental works that sensibility could be feigned and used to dupe others and at the same time rejected the idea that (too much) sense is a desirable quality by portraying a female antagonist who unites both sense and sensibility, albeit in debased, perverted forms, to manipulate and dupe others.

If Pamela is “the virtue rewarded” (as Richardson subtitles *Pamela*), Lucy is then the wicked rewarded. She is the only Austen female antagonist who goes unpunished at the end of a novel. Throughout the novel, she is successful in her dealings with men and almost everyone around her. Some critics consider Lucy’s success simply lies in her

shrewdness and affectation. Mary E. Pinkes illustrates that Lucy’s success is built around her art of pleasing and affectation, her beauty and personality, and concludes that beauty and intelligence renders Lucy dangerous. Shannon A. Blatt sees Lucy’s success as dependent on her shrewdness and a self-absorbed man whom she manipulates, and argues that Lucy, though she manages to marry the man she wants, encounters domestic disagreements which are the sign of an unhappy marriage and thus a punishment. Other critics link Lucy’s achievement to the exercise of her fake sensibility. Ryle for instance, points out the issue of “sham and real sensibility or emotion” (1966: 288) in the novel. Ian Watt sees “Lucy Steele’s pretense at sensibility [as] a mere surface veneer to hide her basic cruelty and selfishness” (2009: 52). Like Ryle and Watt, both of whom however do not discuss this issue in this detail, this paper shows that her success lies in her pretence to sensibility, a quality which is always open to counterfeit. That is, she uses her sense cleverly to manipulate and dupe others by means of a pretence to sensibility. She feigns her physical manifestations of sensibility from weeping to trembling. She pretends to be benevolent and disinterested to achieve what she wishes. Lucy, all in all, is a peculiar mixture of assumed sensibility and prudent, self-serving sense.

Lucy, as well as her sister Anne, is first introduced at Barton Park as a distant relative of Mrs. Jennings. Elinor allows Lucy “some kind of sense” after she has seen her “constant and judicious attention” (90) in making herself agreeable to Lady

Middleton. Her attempt at cultivating Lady Middleton's favour chiefly consists of a display of affection towards her children. She is thus sensible, in both aspects of the word "sense", which Elinor uses to describe her clever attention to Lady Middleton and the word "sensibility" which describes her love of children. In other words, Lucy uses her "sense" to find a way of ingratiating herself with Lady Middleton and this way involves her pretence to sensibility and feigning to be, arguably, a heroine of sensibility who loves children and who is extremely affected by the scene of Lady Middleton's child's suffering.

To make sense of Lucy feigning to be affected by a child's suffering, it is important to understand how an individual's response to affectionate or miserable scenes, including to poetry and nature become a means by which one's sensibility is measured. As briefly mentioned above, sensibility allows one to exchange places with the unfortunate and brings sympathetic identification. Also, sensibility is the capacity for aesthetic responsiveness since one's keen perception allows him/her to feel acutely both pain and beauty. As Claire Lamont suggests: "[w]hat readers of sensibility enjoyed in [the poetry of Cowper and Thomson] was a keen perception of nature and an awareness of the movement of human feelings" (2008: 307). Critics have noted that Marianne's rhapsodizing over dead leaves, quoting sentimental lines from William Cowper, is a part of the stock of the heroine of sensibility. It is difficult to see Lucy as a woman who truly appreciates poetry. This is because she

lacks education and taste as Elinor observes: "she was ignorant and illiterate" and deficient "of all mental improvement" (96). (This is one point where Lucy differs from other sentimental heroines who were usually accomplished<sup>7</sup>). The love of children is as much an attribute of feminine sensibility as is universal benevolence in humans. Again, it is unconvincing to argue Lucy's genuine love for these particular children. Not only are they highly self-indulgent and badly behaved children whom Marianne, the sentimental heroine of the novel, cannot tolerate, they are also brats who, perhaps, deserve no special preference from anyone. In addition, the novel strongly suggests that the Steele sisters adore these children only to please Lady Middleton. In one scene, Lucy excuses herself from the card game to make a basket for the girl and the narrative is somewhat satirical about this: "Lucy directly drew her work table near her and reseated herself with an alacrity and cheerfulness which seemed to imply that she could taste no greater delight than in making a filigree basket for a spoilt child" (107). Indeed, Lucy does not sacrifice herself for the sake of the little girl's happiness but uses her as an excuse and pretext to separate herself from the party so that she can continue her talk with Elinor alone.

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<sup>7</sup> "[T]he sentimental heroine is exemplary in accomplishments," argues Todd, Mackenzie's Julia in *Julia de Roubigne* (1777), Mary in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) and Emmeline in Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788) are examples (118).



Hugh Thomson's 1896 illustration of *Sense and Sensibility* shows the mischievous behavior of Lady Middleton's children. Neither the illustration nor the description of these children in the novel<sup>8</sup> encourages affection at all.

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<sup>8</sup> "She saw their sashes untied, their hair pulled about their ears, their work-bags searched, and their knives and scissors stolen away, and felt no doubt of its being a reciprocal enjoyment. It suggested no other surprise than that Elinor and Marianne should sit so composedly by, without claiming a share in what was passing." (91). The illustration is retrieved from <https://austenonly.com/2011/03/31/hugh-thomsons-illustrations-for-sense-and-sensibility-part-four/>

An incident involving Lady Middleton's child, which is portrayed parodically, provides Lucy with the first opportunity to exhibit her feigned sensibility. Lady Middleton's pin accidentally scratches, but only "slightly", her daughter Annamaria's neck and the narrative comments, "This pattern of gentleness", however, produced "such violent screams" (91). This child is not really suffering and her violent screams are a tantrum. The fact that she does not cease crying or stop shouting is not because she is in real pain but because she knows that by continuing her crying she will be consoled by a sugar plum (boiled sweet), as the narrative makes clear: "With such a reward for her tears, the child was too wise to cease crying. She still screamed and sobbed lustily" (91-92). The novel also employs language associated with a sentimental scene of suffering to refer to the anguish of this girl—"the agonies of the little sufferer" (91). But, since there are no "agonies of the little sufferer", the whole scene becomes a parody of the traditional sentimental scene and Lucy's sympathetic reaction to the event can be seen as not so much concerned with her attempt to alleviate the girl's suffering (when she knows there is no such agony) as with her attention to the girl as a way of pleasing Lady Middleton. Indeed, it is arguable that she knows that there is nothing seriously amiss with the girl. Marianne, in a response to Anne's calling the event "a very sad accident", opines "Yet I hardly know how" [...] "unless it had been under totally different circumstances. But this is the usual way of heightening alarm, where there is nothing to be alarmed at in reality" (92). It becomes even more parodic when the narrative states that "[t]he mother's

consternation...could not surpass the alarm of the Miss Steeles" (91). Lucy knows that there is nothing to be alarmed about. She cleverly makes use of the situation to show Lady Middleton and the Dashwood sisters, that she has a greater degree of sensibility which will make Lady Middleton like her. Lady Middleton likes her precisely because of the "excessive affection and endurance of the Miss Steeles towards her offspring" (91). This incident portrays Lucy's strategic behaviour to Lady Middleton's spoiled children as acts of feigned sensibility driven by self-serving sense.

It is worthwhile noting that the figure of little Annamaria provides a childish or mischievous version of feigned sensibility due to Lady Middleton's lack of sense while Lucy's pretentious sensibility springs from her having too much sense. It has been noted by critics that Annamaria is virtually the reverse of the name "Marianne" and critics such as Katherine E. Curtis have suggested that Annamaria's excessive emotional theatrics embody those of Marianne, the reverse of the name arguably suggesting the reversed quality of Marianne's genuine sensibility. Annamaria clearly uses her tears to get what she wants. While this can be seen as the normal case of a spoiled child, Doody observes that "little Annamaria is already a sad creation of mock sensibility, made 'feminine' to a dangerous point" (2008: xx)." She cries her way into attention and she gets "a reward for her tears". Tears which are the sign of feminine sensibility and even a virtue, are portrayed here as Annamaria's attempt to *deceive* her mother and everyone around her. The scene of "the agonies of the little sufferer" thus portrays a double mockery of sensibility. Lucy displays



her feigned sensibility through her concern for Annamaria who simultaneously makes use of her weeping sensibility to provoke such concern. The whole scene also suggests the idea of exercising sense. Just as Annamaria's tantrum is the outcome of "Lady Middleton's conspicuous lack of sense" (Doody 2008: xx) which leads to the cultivation of wrong sensibility, Lucy's possessing too much sense can also result in the manipulation of sensibility.

Lucy next uses her sense cleverly to present herself as a sentimental heroine who needs Elinor as her confidante to whom she can impart the painful secret of her engagement to Edward as a way to imply to Elinor to step back from Edward and in which she can display her sensibility. Female friendship is a prominent element in the sentimental novel—a convention set by Clarissa and Ann Howe from Richardson's *Clarissa* and later repeated by Julia and Maria in Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigne*. It is clear that Lucy deliberately informs Elinor of her secret engagement to Edward after she has learned from Sir Middleton about Edward being the supposed lover of Elinor. While telling Elinor her story, Lucy constantly checks Elinor's reaction. The most interesting moment comes when Lucy assures Elinor that it is "the eldest brother" with whom she is engaged and Elinor, though in extreme surprise, "[stands] firm in incredulity, and [feels] in no danger of an hysterical fit, or a swoon" (98). The hysterical fit and swoon are typical symptoms of hysteria to which women of great sensibility are prone because of their sensitive nerves and delicate frames. As the physician, Robert Whyatt, observes, "MANY hysteric women are liable to be

seized with faintings, during which they lie as in a deep sleep...Others, along with faintings of this kind, are affected with catchings and strong convulsions" (qtd. in Mullan 1988: 217). Austen is satirical about this in *Love and Freindship* [sic] in which the two female protagonists spend their lives swooning. The ascribing of these symptoms to Elinor is ironic because readers know Elinor will not swoon. Instead, these symptoms are appropriate to Lucy who, while narrating her unhappy story and incurring the displeasure of Mrs. Ferrars if she learns about their engagement, is described as performing the necessary acts of a sentimental heroine in sadness: "she took out her handkerchief", "wiping her eyes" etc (101). The novel ironically suggests that if anybody is going to swoon, it has to be Lucy who can feign a swoon because she is in pretend distress. Indeed, the whole relationship is a form of false female friendship which is the reverse of that in sentimental fiction and, as several critics have noted, is common in Austen's novels. Whilst it is true that Elinor is not deceived by Lucy's counterfeit sensibility it is by means of a pretence to sensibility that Lucy hopes to dupe not only Elinor but also other people.

Next, all the main characters are transported to London where Lucy meets Mrs. Ferrars and the John Dashwoods whose favour she attempts to court by displaying her sensibility towards their children. So far this paper has shown how Lucy uses her sensibility to deceive Lady Middleton and Elinor, although the latter is not fooled. To say that Mrs. John Dashwood (Edward's sister) is as beguiled as Lady Middleton is just a part of the story. It is true that Mrs.

John Dashwood invites Lucy to stay with her because she wishes to slight the Dashwood sisters', however, to say that Mrs. John Dashwood is not duped at all by Lucy would be untrue. Mrs. John Dashwood has to be impressed by Lucy's attention to her as well as by her sensibility which is displayed in the form of her attention to her children. Indeed, the important reason Mrs. John Dashwood gives her husband is that "[the Steele sisters] are such favourites with Harry!" (190). Winning the favour of Mrs. John Dashwood is a big step to being accepted by Edward's family. Lucy has to impersonate sensibility in order to further her "sensible" ambitions.

But only a chapter later Lucy's engagement becomes known to Mrs. John Dashwood who drives her and her sister from the house. Lucy thus, arguably, feigns her fit and swoon in an attempt to harness sympathy. Lucy is driven "into a fainting fit" (194), finally becoming the heroine of sensibility whose own grief is too much to bear after the enraged Mrs. John Dashwood "[has] scolded like any fury" (194). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a real faint by so cunning and manipulative a woman as Lucy and it is possible that Lucy, like Shamela, feigns her faint in order to enlist Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood's sympathy, particularly that of the former, who is so moved by the scene that he "[is] forced to go down upon *his* knees" (194) to beg his wife to forgive Lucy. Even if she really faints, it is more likely that she faints from the horror of losing a chance to be married to a rich man rather than from the miserable idea of being parted forever from the man she truly loves (particularly since she does not really love Edward). The novel also presents the

pathetic scene in which Lucy and her sister are told to leave the house immediately with "poor Lucy in such a condition...she could hardly walk" (195). Lucy here skillfully manifests all kinds of physical symptoms associated with great sensibility ranging from trembling to fainting.

After their engagement has been revealed, Lucy remains with Edward in an apparent sign of her constancy and her sentimental pursuit of love; however, she chooses to stay in the relationship because she perceives the prospects in Edward's future. In a letter to Elinor, Lucy talks of her earnest attempt to talk Edward out of the engagement for his own sake. It is difficult to know if she really wishes this, let alone has really said any such thing, because the readers learn from Anne, who has been eavesdropping on their conversation, that it is Edward who talked of breaking up. It is likely that Anne's account is more authentic because Anne has nothing to gain by telling a lie to Elinor while Lucy, by talking of breaking the engagement for Edward's sake, presents herself to Elinor and the world as a virtuous and unselfish woman. This is important in that, while readers are naturally drawn to sympathize with the plight of the heroine of sensibility, Lucy deliberately tries to evoke sympathy from the readers and from Elinor, who, it must be said, has little sympathy for her. If we take Anne's account to be more trustworthy, Lucy stays in the relationship, in spite of being persuaded to leave, because she knows that somehow Edward will be able to gain a living. Again, in a letter, Lucy speaks with some confidence of Edward's possibly being helped by Mrs. Jennings, Sir John and Mr. Palmer. In addition, it is not likely that she will find another man if she

really breaks up with Edward. It is true that she is pretty and not that old (she is speculated by Elinor to be 22 to 23), but she is not far from being old (27 normally considered to be old in Austen's novels). It is also possible that she knows that she can use her flattery and attentiveness to win Mrs. Ferrars' forgiveness and, indeed, it is flattery and concern that she uses to reconcile herself and Robert to Mrs. Ferrars.

It should be noted that London is a crucial setting in the sentimental novel. That is, central to the sentimental novel is the narrative of the virtuous in distress whose misery, oftentimes, results from or is intensified by contact with the city. As historians of sensibility all agree, sentimentalism is clearly at odds with the city because its self-interestedness, cruelty, malice and economic greed are too much for a man/woman of feeling. The real heroine of sensibility, Marianne, suffers a great deal from her contact with the city. She is jilted by Willoughby in London assembly and later her misery is heightened by her association with her London relatives.

However, London here is not a dangerous place for Lucy but rather a place of social and sexual liaison and the one under threat is not Lucy, but, in fact, a man, since she is not a heroine of sensibility or an example of virtue in distress, Robert. London comes close to being a place of misery for Lucy when the revelation of her engagement and her humiliation makes her miserable and this happens in London. However, since she does not really suffer from the treatment she has received from Mrs. John Dashwood nor from the idea of

losing the man she loves, she is, as Fielding calls his hypocritical Shamela, a "virtue" in feigned distress. That is, neither is she virtuous nor is her distress severe at all. As a woman of sense, indeed, she does not allow herself to remain long in this (minor) distress. When Robert seeks her out in an attempt to tell her to leave Edward, she sets out to entrap him once she perceives his vanity. London, thus, becomes a place of sexual liaison as it has always been reputed to be and the one who is under *threat* turns out to be Robert. For one thing, London allows Robert to "privately [visit] her in Bartlett's Buildings" (286). Such private and frequent visits would have been viewed with suspicious eyes had they been undertaken in the country where everybody knows everybody else's business. Lucy flatters Robert, attempting to seduce and beguile him into eloping with her. Her seduction is so cunning that it makes Robert believe that he is actually seducing her rather than being seduced himself, "He [was] proud of his conquest, proud of tricking Edward" (286) and little knows that he has been vanquished and tricked by Lucy. The trend of seduction and abduction established by Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* is, here, undercut because it is the woman (of sense) who sets out to seduce a man. Again, Lucy, perhaps like her predecessor Shamela, uses sense to trick a man by means of feigning sensibility.

It is important to note that marriage of convenience becomes an indication of someone possessing (economic) sense because the eighteenth century generally links affectionate matrimony to sentimentalism. Todd argues that as "the loose financial ties of early capitalism were emerging in the market-place,

sentimentalism expressed a longing not only for a domestic close-knit family but for a community firmly linked by sentiment and familial structures...[and] an emphasis unknown before was placed by literature and art on the image of the small, loving nuclear family and the kindly parents” (1986: 16). An affectionate marriage is thus a necessity for such a small and loving family. Although there is some disagreement among historians over the interpretation of marriage in the eighteenth century with H. J. Habakkuk, on the one hand, arguing for the increasing number of marriages of convenience, at least in the upper and upper-middle classes, in order to maintain and increase landed wealth<sup>9</sup>, historians such as Lawrence Stone, on the other hand, sees a growth of affectionate ties and the desire for ‘companion marriage’<sup>10</sup> and Christopher Hill, in his review of Stone’s work, remarks that “[a]ll the historian is entitled to say, surely, is that *talk* about marriage for love increased” (1987: 462). Lucy’s marriage to Robert is a purely financial tie. Therefore, Lucy’s marriage of convenience to Robert confirms her as a woman who uses her sense to achieve financial prosperity as opposed to an advocate of marriage for love which was seen as part of the cult of sensibility.

Indeed, upon closer inspection, one finds that one of the primary representations of sense in this novel appears to be manifested in the form of prudent economy. In its

milder form, Marianne’s prudent marriage to Colonel Brandon, as some critics have suggested, can be seen as an example of her good sense. This form of prudent economic marriage is underlined by the narrative because Marianne, who earlier in the novel despises Elinor’s contention that “wealth has much to do with it [happiness]”, marries a man whose fortune is twice that which Elinor considers to be the prerequisite of happiness (Watt 2009: 51). Elinor, the embodiment of moral sense, loudly admits what is quoted above. This is because economic sense is quite a substantial part of good sense because money matters a great deal to Austen’s characters. While moral characters need money to maintain their genteel lifestyle, immoral ones need it to advance their social position. As Watt has also shown, sense in its economically selfish form is epitomized by Mrs. John Dashwood who tries to persuade her husband to provide as little assistance to the Dashwood girls as possible and in the character of Willoughby who lets his economic sense overrule his romantic sensibility when he chooses to marry for money. Lucy clearly uses her sense to pretend sensibility in order to deceive and manipulate others, all for her social and financial advance.

Lucy’s elopement and subsequent marriage to Robert ultimately suggests that she never loved Edward and that she is a woman of (economic) sense. It is foolish of Robert, who attempts to persuade Lucy to give up the engagement, to think that his plan will easily meet with success “as there could be nothing to overcome but the affection of both” (286). But, in fact, affection is the biggest obstacle when one tries to separate someone from another person. His intention

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<sup>9</sup> Habakkuk, H.J. “Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century”. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (1950).

<sup>10</sup> Stone coined this term in his *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1977)

is readily accomplished not because there is only affection to overcome but rather because there is no affection between Lucy and Edward at all. Lucy sees the chance to be married to a rich man and, as Claire Tomalin argues, she immediately secures it; "Lucy Steele gets her claws into one victim and hangs on, lying and cheating, until she achieves the position in society that she has set herself to win" (2012: 160).

Robert also becomes an example of a man who lacks sense but prides himself as being "sensible" which leads to an explanation as to why he is so easily manipulated by Lucy. It is interesting that a large part of Robert's character is revealed through his association with the sensible Elinor. In other words, oftentimes the readers know him by listening to his conversation with Elinor. Upon his first introduction to Elinor, he talks about Edward's "extreme *gaucherie*" (188) fostered by Edward's private education as opposed to his public education at Westminster, complimenting his own socializing ability and a readiness to supply conversation which however tends to be nonsensical. Later in the novel, he takes pleasure in telling Elinor about Edward being financially and socially ruined. When Elinor informs him of her family living in a cottage, he readily expresses his desire to own one and mentions Lord Courtland to whom he has given a piece of advice on a cottage. He also boasts about his "sensible" advice given to his acquaintance who has asked him how to arrange a cottage to accommodate a party. He talks of his acquaintance being "delighted" and "the affair...arranged precisely after his plan" (189). Elinor agrees in silence, for "she [does] not think he deserve[s] the

compliment of rational opposition" (189). Robert shows Elinor how "rational" his advice and plan are, but Elinor, perceiving not only the irrational plan and advice he has talked of in particular but also irrational talk in general, does not give him any rational opposition. Shannon A. Blatt views Lucy, along with Fanny Dashwood and Sophia Grey, as using her arts to secure a man in a dishonest way and Lucy's success partly depends on the weakness of the man whom she can easily manipulate. A marriage to Lucy, according to Robert, is possibly a "sensible" one since "[h]e [is] proud of his conquest, proud of tricking Edward and very proud of marrying privately without his mother's consent" (286).

Lucy succeeds in pretending to be a heroine of sensibility. She cunningly harnesses Lady Middleton and Mrs. John Dashwood's favour by means of showing her affection towards their children. Upon learning that Elinor is Edward's object of affection, she next presents herself as sentimental heroine in distress who needs advice from Elinor whom she in fact tortures through the revelation of her engagement to Edward. Not long on an excellent terms with Mrs. John Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars, Lucy receives harsh treatment from them after her engagement with Edward reaches their ears. As a woman of economic sense, she does not allow herself to be long in disappointment, but quickly secures Robert, now the one with money, and marries him.

It can be argued that Lucy is the only bad character of Austen's who goes unpunished unlike other immoral or amoral characters, especially Lady Susan. Before writing her first draft of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1795,

Austen wrote an epistolary novella called *Lady Susan* in 1794. It is known for its calculating, pretentious and amoral widow heroine who is a fortune hunter both for herself and her daughter who is described in the novel as “the most accomplished Coquette in England” (195). Claudia L. Johnson calls it a “playful apprentice-piece” in which the famous libertine Lovelace in *Clarissa* is transformed into “a woman seeking dominion over men and fortune for herself” (2008: xxvii). The novel makes clear that her success in winning people around her and making those disapproving of her succumb to her attractiveness lies in her “attractive Powers” (194) and “happy command of Language” (198). Like Lucy, she employs her sensibility as a means of insinuating herself with her sister-in-law whom she knows does not like her by showing affection toward her children. She writes of her scheme to her friend Mrs. Johnson: “I mean to win Sister-in-Law’s heart through her children; I know all their names already, and am going to attach myself with the greatest sensibility to one in particular” (197) while she at the same time rarely shows maternal affection towards her own daughter, dismissing her as the “greatest simpleton on Earth (192) and “a stupid girl,” whom has nothing to recommend her” (199). “[H]er display of Grief, and professions of regret” (194) over her deceased husband greatly invokes her brother-in-law sympathy. Although Lady Susan manages to have a second marriage with a rich man, she is literally shunned by society. Her relationship with her brother and sister-in-law collapses and so does her friendship and correspondence with her close friend Mrs. Johnson who is prevented from associating with her by her husband Mr. Johnson.

Even though some critics consider Lucy to be punished offstage, it is less likely that Lucy feels herself punished. Lucy’s sign of punishment, as many critics suggest, is “frequent domestic disagreements between Robert and Lucy themselves” (287) which are alluded to at the end of the novel. It seems to be an unhappy marriage into which Lucy has thrown herself. It is also a marriage of which Austen disapproves since it is not built upon conjugal companionship, love and honesty, in contrast to Elinor’s and Edward’s which illustrates what Austen wishes for nuptial bliss. However, it is more possible that Lucy would have felt being punished if she could not have married Robert, given the strong possibility that her happiness rests more on mercenary rather than conjugal but penniless marriage. In addition, unlike Lady Susan, Lucy is not totally shunned by society. She rather successfully insinuates herself, through her use of both sense and sensibility in debased and perverted forms, into the favour of Mrs. Ferrars and the John Dashwoods who have previously disapproved of her marriage with Robert.

Lucy is brought back to the context of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century debate of sense and sensibility. She represents the novel’s attempt to explore the flaws of both sense and sensibility. Sensibility can be faked and sense enables one to fake it a means of manipulating and duping others. By using her sense, Lucy is able to turn sensibility, which is destructive for both men and women of feeling, to her own use in order to manipulate others for her own benefit and, importantly, to secure a wealthy man.

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