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## The Power of the Film Over the Novel

"To His Royal Highness The Prince Regent, This work is, by his Royal Highness's Permission, most respectfully dedicated, by His Royal Highness's dutiful and obedient humble servant, the author" (Austen, Emma ii).

The preceding is the dedication of Jane Austen's 1815 novel, Emma, to the Prince of Wales- at his humble suggestion. While Austen was critical of the Prince's lifestyle, she entertained his wishes- craftily weaving a satirically superfluous commitment of Emma to him (Austen "Letter"). This example is quite indicative of Austen's writing style: subtle and witty, as well as her opinion of high society: superficial. When applying these contentions to Austen's novel Sense and Sensibility, one can derive an entirely new appreciation of her character depiction, particularly of Marianne Dashwood, Ms. Sensibility.

Austen portrays a world in which the rich become slightly less rich and all happiness rests in the arms of a man. Perhaps ironically, Austen uses the very few, and relatively undeveloped, male characters to define her two main characters: Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. The women's interaction with these men at different times intensifies their satirically, and almost unbelievable, bifurcation as staunchly sense and sensibility.

The 1995 film version of the same title, directed by Ang Lee, faced the task of making Elinor and Marianne appealing to a twentieth- century audience, upon whom Austen's subtlety may have been lost. Interestingly, screen play writer, Emma Thompson, chose to alter the behavior of male characters such as Colonel Brandon, in an effort to redefine the sisters for the modern day; thereby, softening their intensity and rendering them relatable. This paper will examine how the portrayal Colonel Brandon in the novel forces Marianne to appear forever tormented by Willoughby and seek Colonel Brandon as a last resort. While, in the film, Colonel Brandon is presented in such a way to allow the viewer to believe that Marianne truly loves him- this adds depth to her character and develops her beyond mere emotional sensibility.

In the novel, Colonel Brandon is a last resort for Marianne not to become a spinster. Marianne, in a sense, has no choice but to marry him once all hope for Willoughby has been extinguished and she recovers from perilous illness. It is debatable whether or not this was the intention of Austen, but she develops Colonel Brandon in such a way that makes him unappealing as an unappealing marriage choice for Marianne. When Marianne first meets the Colonel she finds him "an absolute old bachelor, on the wrong side of five thirty... [with] a face [that] was not handsome" (Austen Sense 32). In reference to the Colonel's being in love with Marianne, she tells her mother: "he is old enough to be my father; and if he were ever animated to be in love,

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must have long outlived every sensation of the time."(35). Marianne then refers to the Colonel as "infirm" (35).

Throughout the rest of the novel, Marianne deeply, and passionately loves Willoughby, and Colonel Brandon is but in the periphery. Therefore, when, in the very last chapter, Austen tells us Marianne has married the Colonel- it is less than romantic. Furthermore, Austen juxtaposes the marriage as an alternative to worse situations of living. Her first choice was to pine for Willoughby: "Instead of falling sacrifice to irresistible passions" (352). Her second choice was life as a spinster at home: "Instead of remaining even for ever with her mother"(352). However, she decides in a moment of "calm and sober judgment" that it is best to marry Colonel Brandon, the only other male really available, as a last resort.

Although it may appear that Marianne has overcome her former manner of "sensibility," it is not truly believable. The preceding forty-nine chapters entailed her attachment to Willoughby; this small paragraph offers only a way to survive- one of the only ways to survive in 18th/19th century England for a woman: to become a wife.

The film Colonel Brandon is drastically different than he is in the novel. In the film the Colonel is handsome, noble, and dashing. He is constantly portrayed as devoted to Marianne, but not in the "older gentleman" way he might seem in the novel. Instead, he becomes the underdog for whom the audience roots- because they are better able to draw their own conclusions of him.

The most important difference in his interaction with Marianne in the film versus the book, is the moment in which he reads her the sonnets that she so loves. Director, Ang Lee, is able to present a moment of true love and adoration. The way in which Marianne hangs on the Colonel's speech and the way in which he affectionately speaks to her- allow the viewer to feel excitement for a new romance for Marianne, not simply to pity her. Very significant to this scene is when she asks how long the Colonel will be gone, in hope that he will shortly return.

James Monaco's book *How to Read a Film* tells us the power film has over the novel is that "whatever the novelist describes is filtered through his language, his prejudices, and his point of view. With film we have a certain amount of freedom to choose, to select one detail rather than another" (46). This is precisely how the film version of *Sense and Sensibility* is able to let the viewer see Marianne as more than the emotionally overwrought character of the novel. Because she is able to love the Colonel, she is a more believable and deeper character. The novel version of Marianne makes her appear pathetic and forever stuck in her turmoil of sensibility.

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