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Marianne Dashwood: When Money Rejects Love in the Eighteenth Century

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Abstract—**In the introduction to Sense and Sensibility, Anne Rowe states, "The novel's heroine, Elinor Dashwood, displays the kind of good sense which is regularly attributed to 'prudence'. She observes closely, cautiously weighing up situations, and ultimately follows the most politic course without compromising her principles or hurting others. In contrast, her sister, Marianne, behaves with 'imprudence'. She reacts on instinct, defying the consequences, and, as a matter of principle, refuses to act on a rational basis while failing to see the contradiction" (Austen, 1992, p. v). Rowe's comparison between the two young sisters is respectable; however, Marianne is more sensible than her sister, and her actions are justified. This paper focuses on Marianne's character to explain why her sensibility is sensible rather than imprudent and to prove that Austen shows her readers how Victorian women's feelings, emotions, and desire for love were controlled by money, social barriers, and the patriarchal system. Marianne is a unique woman in her society because she seems to break away from the traditional approach to marriage. It is important to understand Marianne's character in this way because she represents not only herself but also other women of her time who married men they neither liked nor loved.**

Index Terms—**love, eighteenth-century women, marriage, sensibility, money**

I. Introduction

Anne Rowe writes in the introduction to *Sense and Sensibility,* "The novel's heroine, Elinor Dashwood, displays the kind of good sense that is frequently attributed to 'prudence'" (Austen, 1992, p. v). That is, as a result of her careful observation and careful consideration of the circumstances, Elinor finally chooses the path that is the most politically sound, without surrendering her ideals or causing harm to other people. On the other hand, her sister Marianne exhibits so-called "imprudence" in her behavior: "She reacts on instinct, defying the consequences, and, as a matter of principle, refuses to act on a rational basis while failing to see the contradiction" (Austen, 1992, p. v). The comparison that Rowe makes between the two young sisters is admirable; however, Marianne is arguably more reasonable than her sister. This paper will demonstrate that her behaviors are, in fact, appropriate.

This paper will concentrate on Marianne's character to argue that Austen demonstrates to her readers how Victorian women's sentiments, emotions, and desire for love were constrained by money, social obstacles, and the patriarchal system. Marianne's sensitivity will be shown to be rational rather than unwise. Because she seems to deviate from the conventional approach to marriage, Marianne stands out as a unique lady in her local community. When seen in this light, Marianne's figure is significant because she represents not only herself but also other women of her day who married men whom they neither loved nor felt committed to.

II. Textual Analysis and Discussion

Quixotism, a notion taken from the main character in *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, is a concept that had an impact on English writing throughout the eighteenth century. A quixotic hero or heroine is someone who is highly educated, has a passion for reading (particularly romance novels written by French authors), and is idealistic yet unrealistic (doing what others in his or her society are not accustomed to doing; (Ardila et al., 2017, p. 17). Austen was influenced by William Cowper, an English poet and hymnodist; Walter Scott, a Scottish historical novelist; and Alexander Pope, an eighteenth-century English poet known for his satirical verse (Austen, 1992, pp. 11, 31). By this standard, Marianne Dashwood can be considered a quixotic female character. She has a passion for reading and could have been influenced by any of these authors. It is widely acknowledged that these three individuals were among the most influential poets in the Age of Reason, which spanned the first half of the eighteenth century. Marianne took inspiration from them. As will be demonstrated, she is also thought to be quixotic because she proclaims her love for Willoughby and follows her feelings without giving any consideration to what other people may think of her. This is something that is not typical in the Victorian society in which she lives.

One feature of both the eighteenth century and quixotism is sentimentalism, which is the practice of sentimentality, the tendency to act and behave based on excessive feelings:

> In principle, a sentimentalist account of moral concepts can even be combined with a robustly realist – that is, response-independent — explication of moral properties, regardless of whether such an account views moral properties as being reducible or irreducible to natural properties. For a robust realist our sentiments or

> emotions would then play primarily an epistemic role for recognizing or affectively perceiving moral properties that are constituted independent of our sentiments. Sentimentalists would normally regard a non-reductive account of moral properties to be incompatible with the naturalist framework that they favor. (Debes & Stueber, 2017, p. 12)

Based on the information presented in this passage, being an emotional person indicates that a person is realistic, and their responses are seen as being more moral and authentic because they are pure. In addition, sentimentalism indicates that a person develops a greater sense of independence and that they are aware of their social position as a result of reflecting deeply on the situation. In this case, Marianne is covered. She is quite sensitive, and she does not distort her remarks to capture the attention of others. Her feelings are thus not anything that can be described as "reductive" and are not deemed proper within the traditions or norms of her community. This is not to say that Marianne is "imprudent"; rather, her sentimentality is the most significant indicator of her sensibility. It makes sense to act in accordance with one's own convictions and disregard others' opinions. Will other people in Marianne's society experience life as she does? Is her society concerned about her feelings, whether she is happy or unhappy? Obviously, none of this is the case. Consequently, she is a reasonable person for putting her own emotions first.

Marianne is seventeen and the middle daughter of Mr. Henry Dashwood and his second wife. She has two sisters—Elinor, who is nineteen, and Margaret, who is twelve. After her father's death, her stepbrother, John Dashwood, comes to Norland Park in Sussex to take his inheritance. His father recommends that he take care of his stepmother and sisters "to make them comfortable" (Austen, 1992, p. 2). "Comfortable" here does not necessarily mean physical comfort; rather, it is giving them more money to help them have a decent life, or at least a life that is similar to the one they led when their father was alive because Marianne's "mother had nothing, and [her] father only seven thousand pounds in his own disposal; for the remaining moiety of [her father's] first wife's fortune was also secured to her child" (Austen, 1992, p. 1). The outcome of this is that her stepbrother, John Dashwood, does not fulfill his promise because his wife, Fanny, thinks only about her own son's fortune and wishes to get rid of the Dashwoods' shadow. Understanding these small details is important in comprehending the dynamic of Austen's story, as they lead to the incomplete love between Willoughby and Marianne because of the social traditions of marriage in Victorian England.

Austen's intended readers were girls fifteen to twenty years old at the end of the eighteenth century. This was the physical age for English girls to think about their future husbands ("Victorian Era-Victorian Wedding-THE ENGAGEMENT," 2017). To marry during the Victorian era, a woman needed an estate that made handsome young men think about it and not about her nature or education or whether her moral constitution matched his or what distinguished her among women. This estate would become her husband's property based on the laws of the eighteenth century. Thus, the mother of a man in the eighteenth century could gain access to the upper class by having her son marry a wealthy woman. As Gordon Edmund Mingay states in his book, *English landed society in the eighteenth century*:

> It must be recognized that the barriers to social advancement were still formidable, and that indeed there were various factors tending to increase the difficulty of entering the aristocracy in the eighteenth century. It was true that the acquisition of an estate conferred social status, but such a statement is misleading if it implies that the gate to advancement was wide open. It was in fact a narrow gate, and difficult to pass, and only the most able, ambitious, and fortunate could progress very far beyond it up the social scale. (Mingay, 2013, p. 26)

Mingay argues that it was hard to increase one's social status, and of course, it was hard for women of that time because if a woman inherited an "estate," her husband or son would become the landlord of it. This was the law; this law existed to encourage the spread of patriarchal ideology throughout the social classes. Having an estate would give a man his place in the aristocracy. An estate was like a credit card that "open[ed]" the door to material success (Mingay, 2013, p. 26). The eighteenth century was a time when men were looking for ways to increase their fortunes. But what if a woman did not have this credit card? She might be like Marianne. Common law granted property to husbands, and women "lost all rights of possession on marriage" (Wynne, 2016, p. 15). Knowing this social history helps us to understand how Austen satirized the unfair system that encouraged men to covet women for their property rather than to love or care about them.

It is also important to recognize how Austen presents her readers with the first meeting between Marianne and Willoughby. She does this for two logical reasons: to show that love is a dream for her gender and to show how easy it is to fall in love with an irresponsible man. According to the narrator, Willoughby's arrival mirrors a girl's dream of a knight who takes her away with him on his white horse. When Marianne walks with Margret, she takes a "false step [that] brought her suddenly to the ground," and Willoughby "took her up in his arms without further delay, and carried her down the hill" (Austen, 1992, p. 27). Marianne could not do anything but think about him and look for his best poets to even if they were William Cowper and Alexander Pope, instead of looking deeply into his nature and asking whether he were a responsible man. What a past he might hide! Moreover, although Marianne's affection is honest, when the first test of this love comes, Willoughby leaves Barton Cottage in Devonshire, Marianne's house after her father's death because of the property-less position she has been put in by the law (her inherence having gone to her brother, John Dashwood); in "the material world [of the eighteenth century], property is actually a relationship, a site of effect, sentiment, dreams and passions which focuses on objects" (Wynne, 2016, p. 16). Instead of discussing the

situation, he leaves without giving any explanation. He makes her suffer, and her honesty leads her to go to London to see him, but he lets her down there, too.

What matters here is that he leaves because he has impregnated a young woman named Eliza, whose father is unknown and whose mother, also named Eliza, was Colonel Brandon's first love. Willoughby's "old cousin, Mrs. Smith" (Austen, 1992, p. 214), had promised that he would inherit her estate, but when she learns about his sin, she immediately banishes him from her house. To overcome this financial hardship, he seeks to marry Miss Grey, who has "[f]ifty thousand pounds" that will help him pay off his debts. Moreover, Marianne states that "[her] feelings are not often shared, not often understood. But *sometimes* they are" (Austen, 1992, pp. 58-59). This signifies that her society does not care about the pleasure of affection, which she confirms when she tries to convince Elinor and justify why Willoughby turned his back on her. She explains that she has been exploited "[b]y all the world, rather than by [Willoughby's] own heart. [She] could rather believe every creature of [her] acquaintance leagued together to ruin [her] in his opinion, than believe his nature capable of such cruelty" (Austen, 1992, p. 125). "The world" is a reference to the eighteenth-century society that Wynne calls the "world of material" (Wynne, 1992, p. 15), and it is the main reason for her misery. She is pure in her level dealings with Willoughby, "as if the strictest legal covenant had bound [them] to each other" (Austen, 1992, p. 124). She does not think about money or material possessions; instead, she is looking for pure love. On the other hand, Willoughby later apologizes and admits his love and desire to propose to her the day he left, but he states that his apology is too late because he is married. He justifies his behavior to Marianne on what he calls "reasonable grounds" (Austen, 1992, p. 213)—his bankruptcy after Mrs. Smith banishes him and prevents him from inheriting. His irresponsibility guides him to refuse Mrs. Smith's offer for him to marry little Eliza instead of marrying Marianne. He chooses to marry Miss Grey due to her wealth, as Marianne's lack of money and the misguided beliefs about the need for riches, which he was predisposed to hold, were further amplified by an extravagant social environment (Austen, 1992, p. 216). Essentially, Austen aims to show that a woman's passion is sensible, but either men's avarice or the power of money leads them to reject this love.

When compared to Marianne, Elinor, her eldest sister, tends to give the impression that she is older than she really is. She is able to demonstrate how responsible she is, and this is laudable. It would seem that she is looking out for her personal interests even though she has a lot of passion for Marianne. Whenever Marianne tries to criticize Edward Ferrars' attention to her adoration, for example, she is pleased with her reaction. However, she does not accept Marianne's connection with Willoughby—or at the very least, she does not feel comfortable with it. She urges her mother to inquire of Marianne whether or not she is engaged to Willoughby (Austen, 1992, p. 56). In response to Lucy Steele's secret engagement to Edward, which began four years previously (Austen, 1992, pp. 86-87), she conceals her pain. However, later on, she is on the verge of ruining their engagement when Brandon asks Elinor to tell Edward that he is going to give Brandon the "little rectory [that is in] Delaford [and is] now just vacant" if Edward accepts (Austen, 1992, pp. 188-189). She is polite to Brandon, but in reality, she is trying to postpone sharing this excellent news with Edward because she loves Edward. She keeps Mrs. Jennings from informing him until she writes him a letter (Austen, 1992, pp. 189-190). She is nice to Brandon. On a deeper level, she cannot be considered receptive to being complimented by her mother, sisters, or friends. In the era in which the book was written, there was no need to be embarrassed about being in love. Although Lucy seems to taunt Elinor and appears to be attempting to dissuade her from liking Edward, Elinor needs to act in a manner that is consistent with what we as human beings perceive to be normal and tell her the truth rather than merely pretending that she is nice. At the conclusion of the book, she is looking for her own perks, which she was able to get by the time the story ends. She tied the knot with Mr. Edward Ferrars, who is affectionately referred to as "the letter F" by her neighbors (Austen, 1992, p. 83).

Readers can have access to the most valuable lessons that one can learn from Austen. Through one of the most eloquent lectures ever delivered by the intrepid Marianne, she feeds us with a feast of moral philosophy when she characterizes Elinor's actions in keeping Lucy's secret a secret: "If such is your way of thinking, ... if loss of what is most valued is so easily to be made up by something else, your resolution, your self-command, are perhaps a little less to be wondered at and a little less to be admired. They are brought more within my comprehension" (Austen, 1992, p. 174). When Marianne says that Elinor is "thinking" that if she loses something, she will find another thing that is "valued" and that life does not center on loving a man, she is implying that Elinor is thinking that there will be other recompense for her loss. Although she does not love Brandon, she will inherit his money. In point of fact, Elinor is not in a state of "self-command"; rather, she is skilled at esteeming others and demonstrating respect for them. That is, she is able to attract those who believe in social flattery and make them believe that she is intelligent through the use of social flattery. Congratulations to you, Elinor! By the time the book is over, you will have received the recompense you deserved for being in "self-command." You decide to wed the man you love, and you also manage to persuade your sister to wed Brandon, a man whom she sees as a financial guarantee. In general, Elinor is a loving and supportive sister to Marianne; nevertheless, when it comes to matters that pertain to her personal well-being, she will consider only herself. There is a secret lesson that Austen wants to convey to her female readers via Elinor's example: women should be more in "self-command" with any form of connection: they should avoid hurting other people but concentrate on their own advantages, especially when it comes to marriage.

In Marianne's story with Colonel Brandon, she first meets him at a party that Sir John Middleton holds at his house at Barton Park (Austen, 1992, p. 22). She is playing music sensitively, which leads Brandon to think about her in

comparison with his first love, Eliza. This relationship is sparked by Mrs. Jennings, a widow who has nothing to do after her two daughters marry except help other young people marry (Austen, 1992, p. 23). She teases both Marianne and Brandon that they love each other; however, Marianne does not like this joke for two significant reasons. She does not want to be a second love to anyone, and he is thirty-five while she is seventeen, which forms a gap (Austen, 1992, p. 25). As the narrator confirms this thought in the following:

> A woman of seven-and-twenty […] can never hope to feel or inspire affection again; and if her home be uncomfortable, or her fortune small, I can suppose that she might bring herself to submit to the offices of a nurse, for the sake of the provision and security of a wife. In his marrying such a woman, therefore, there would be nothing unsuitable. It would be a compact of convenience, and the world would be satisfied. In my eyes it would seem only a commercial exchange, in which each wished to be benefited at the expense of the other. (Austen, 1992, p. 25)

It is accurate and easy to comprehend Marianne's point of view. For a couple to understand each other, have the same interests, and eventually become close as a pair, it is vital for them to be the same age. A marriage like the one that Marianne portrays will not be anything more than what she refers to as a "commercial exchange." Nevertheless, Marianne is only nineteen years old when she ties the knot with Brandon, not twenty-seven! (Austen, 1992, p. 255) Due to the patriarchal nature of society, her morals, views, and ideals are unresolvable: she has to have an estate if Willoughby is to be greedy enough to seek her hand in marriage. However, she does not have an estate since the inheritance system gives her brother John the riches that her father had brought into the world. And thus, it comes to pass that she weds Brandon rather than Willoughby, the man she loves!

In order for the quixotic nature of Marianne's character to come to an end, she must either return to the order of the system or become more fully what was referred to in the eighteenth century as "the angel in the house" (The Angel in the House, 2024). In "The Angel in the House," a poem published in the 18th century, Coventry Patmore in his discussion of his wife Emily as a pleasant housewife who commits herself to the purpose of making her husband happy. In a similar vein, Marianne "found herself, at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village" (Austen, 1992, p. 255), or, to put it more succinctly, "the angel of house"—the archetypal woman of the eighteenth century. This is the way in which the term may be used to Marianne in an authentic manner. Through the character Marianne, Austen demonstrates to her audience that people of her gender were experiencing hardships in marriage and were not at all content with their destinies.

Austen's writing approach, which Holm calls "free indirect discourse" (2017), allows her to expose Marianne's point of view. It is a distinctive kind of third-person narrative that she employs to characterize the mental and emotional processes that take place inside a character. Austen is a caustic female novelist who is satirizing Marianne's sensibility and feelings, as well as those of young women like Marianne. She is doing this by comparing Maria to other young women. It is clear in the narrator's ways when the narrator tells us about Marianne's character:

> [Marianne] was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favorite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another!—and *that* other, a man who had suffered no less than herself under the event of a former attachment,—whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married. (Austen, 1992, p. 255)

In a double satire, Austen ridicules her gender throughout the novel. She describes Marianne's emotions toward her husband as "friendly" instead of "lovely"! Also, she accuses her of forgetting her "affection," although Austen herself understands the environment that surrounded eighteenth-century wedding customs—that is, the economic system and how much a woman needed property to get a husband that she could love. In Marianne's case, her marriage is "considered a business deal" ("Victorian Era-Victorian Wedding-THE ENGAGEMENT," 2017) because if she does not accept it, she will spend her life "[forever] with her mother, and [find] her only pleasures in retirement and study" (Austen, 1992, p. 255). She has no choice but to accept Brandon's proposal under the pleasure of her mother and sister, who see him as a distinguished man who will be responsible for her, be able to provide her mother with a good life, and help Elinor and her husband Edward Ferrars have a good married life. Marianne's acceptance of Brandon's proposal is all about money, not love. Equally important to note is that Marianne's sense is the reason behind this choice. That is to say, Marianne is not selfish; she can stay home with her mother forever; however, her sense leads her to think not only about her happiness but also about her widowed mother and her younger sister Margaret, who is supposed to be fourteen when the novel ends. In three years, Margaret will search for her dream knight, and of course, she will need Brandon's wealth. Ultimately, Marianne's great affection for her family makes her follow their advice and marry Brandon to empower her two sisters and mother and grant them access to upper-class society and thus the ability to encounter patriarchal society.

III. Conclusion

Austen is able to effectively generate sensitive readers via Marianne's character. These readers are able to connect with Marianne's struggle with love and marriage and come up with their own responses to it. She hopes that by means of Marianne, she will be able to educate her gender on two very important aspects of their choice of love. Initially, there are men who are like Willoughby, the knight of their dreams. While it is perfectly acceptable for young ladies to love

these men, they should exercise caution since a man who has a flaw in his character does not deserve to be the source of a woman's grief. Second, if a young lady comes across a guy who is capable of doing things to fulfill her but is not someone she loves, she needs to be extra careful. This is because the man could harm her heart in order to gain her (i.e., her body) for his own property, much as Brandon did. Willoughby was unable to marry his sweetheart Marianne because of this, and consequently, Marianne's heart was broken. Willoughby advises Mrs. Smith to refrain from giving her estate to Willoughby. The lesson that Austen intends to impart to young ladies is that they should choose their love with discretion and attempt to keep their emotions in check. Although falling in love is something that cannot be foreseen and is beyond our ability to control, it is important for a woman to make sure that the guy she is falling in love with is someone who really merits her affection and heart. Therefore, readers who are sensitive should not criticize Marianne for liking Willoughby; rather, she deserves empathy, and this empathy is what ties readers to Marianne. Readers need to have a moral perspective regarding her affection. It is important to recognize and appreciate her love and passion for Willoughby even though he does not merit her feelings and commitment.

It is essential to be aware that Austen communicates her double satire by describing a tale contained inside the primary plot. The person who is responsible for Marianne's misery is Brandon, who is portrayed as honest and trustworthy. In a chat with Elinor, Brandon recounts the narrative of his love with Eliza, an orphan and affluent woman who marries his eldest brother due to her poverty and debts (Austen, 1992, p. 136). This is an ironic way of telling the event. The fact that Brandon's brother needs the money that would enable him to get married is more important to him than his affection for her—Eliza. Brandon does the same thing with Marianne: although he is aware of her feelings for Willoughby, he marries her even though she is financially deficient. In addition to this, he is the one who tells Mrs. Smith of Willoughby's improper relationship with Eliza's daughter, the younger Eliza. Because Brandon is aware of the privileges the culture allows his gender, he is dishonest. It is always estates that men seek, not the love of women. Therefore, in order to conceal his inability to marry the younger Eliza, he does all in his power to stop Willoughby from marrying Marianne. Because he is aware that Willoughby is waiting to inherit from Mrs. Smith so he can marry her, he obstructs Willoughby's path at the same time. Willoughby tells Elinor that Mrs. Smith had received some information, possibly from a distant relative, who had an interest in taking away her goodwill towards me (Austen, 1992, p. 215). That "distant relation" was Brandon, who intended to remove Willoughby from the path to marrying Marianne even though Brandon is aware that Marianne loves Willoughby, not him. As a result, Marianne is in the same situation as Eliza and a great number of other women living during the Victorian era. It is impossible for them to ever come into contact with the inheritance system or the conventional method of getting married. It was a vicious circle!

According to Annette Federico, in her article, "Familiar Marriage' & Victorian Fiction," "Social conditions during the reign of Victoria had changed enough so that neither the marriage of rational esteem nor the marriage of emotional passion offered completely satisfactory models for women who desired a wider scope for self-development and for participation in public affairs" (2017, pp. 394-395). It is evident that eighteenth-century women were suffering and trapped between the hammer of social roles that made them marry for "rational" reasons and the anvil of "emotional" marriage. If Marianne had married Willoughby, she would probably not have been happy with an "emotional" marriage because her mother (Mrs. Dashwood) and her older sister Elinor would not have accepted him the way they did Brandon. When Marianne marries Brandon, the man who is most desirable by her mother's and older sister's standards, they see this as a "rational" marriage. This is why Federico says that women were not "offered completely satisfactory models": they were caught between their families and their hearts. Ultimately, Austen seeks not to create a sense of comfort, but instead to inspire and direct actions that enhance responses to the challenges and possibilities presented by the idea (Kerr et al., 2016, p. 25). Federico means that Austen urges us as readers to think about the marriage system as problematic and the limitation that Victorian women were in when they desired to marry their lovers. Generally, Austen wanted her sensitive readers to pay attention to the serious problem that eighteenth-century women faced.

Marianne, in a nutshell, is not what Rowe claims; rather than having "imprudence," she exhibits a disposition that is very moral, yet whimsical. It is impossible for her to practice her morals in reality during her time because of the philosophy of her socioeconomic class, which encouraged men to seek financial gain rather than love—or, what is more significant, the essence, heart, and nature of a woman. In the end, Austen satirized marital customs and the inheritance system via the creation of Marianne, who "has not abandoned all rationality in her allegiance to feeling" (Waldon, 2001, p. 66). However, she feels that by flouting traditions that seem to her to have no purpose, she is instead fulfilling the genuine dictates of reason. She has a strong feeling of responsibility for her mother and two sisters, which is why she chooses to marry Brandon.

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