



Mrs. Jennings and Mrs.
Palmer: The Path to Female
Self-Determination in
Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

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BEGINNING WITH THE TITLE OF *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen makes readers aware of the two archetypes to be explored. Austen's female bildungsroman is more nuanced than the title suggests at first glance, however, and readers themselves journey to deeper enlightenment as her heroines do. The Dashwood sisters are the focal point for a courtship plot of love lost and love found that is simultaneous with the protagonists' more critical personal awakening. In *Sense and Sensibility*, "Austen links Elinor to sense . . . and Marianne to sensibility . . . but she continually muddies the semantic waters" (Auerbach 101), both revealing complexity in the two heroines and including other female characters outside the simple paradigm the sisters initially seem to allegorize. Indeed, the novel's women represent a range of levels on the continuum between extreme sensibility and extreme sense. A great deal of critical attention has been paid to Austen's conversation with her readers below the surface of the text through the "added philosophical depth to what began primarily as a sketch of two characters" (Auerbach 100). We all know that the brilliantly satirical author communicates more to her readers than what is explicitly stated in the text, especially in evoking such seemingly straightforward conceptual terms as "sense," "pride," or "persuasion."

The novel combines sense *and* sensibility in its title; that coalescence of qualities reflects its ultimate message to women, which Austen propounds

through the collective impact of a range of female temperaments, from over-sensibility to over-pragmatism. The female characters in *Sense and Sensibility* can be divided into several groups, none of which neatly mirrors the novel's title: those with excessive sensibility, those with too much "sense" and no apparent sensibility, and those with an intriguing blend of both qualities. Despite Elinor's practicality, both Elinor and Marianne manifest the dangers of a heightened sensibility, whereas characters such as Lucy Steele and her role models, Lady Middleton and Fanny Dashwood, portray a purely self-serving, distorted "sense." Significantly, two commonly overlooked characters—Mrs. Jennings and her younger daughter, Charlotte Palmer—embody the blend of sense with sensibility that the novel depicts as most advantageous to a woman's well-being. While all of the female characters experience some benefit and detriment because of their dispositions, whether rational or highly emotional, Charlotte and her mother are the two women whose combination of qualities the novel ultimately defines as the most healthful. Moreover, their qualities emerge from a deliberate stance of self-reliance and allegiance to an emotional median.

Charlotte Palmer and Mrs. Jennings are largely absent from the criticism of *Sense and Sensibility*, the few references tending to be backhanded compliments or oversimplifications. For example, apRoberts suggests that Mrs. Jennings is a morally upright character but "wonderfully deficient in both sense and sensibility" (357). For Ashley Tauchert, Charlotte is simply "all surface chatter, gossip and drollery" (66). Claudia Johnson acknowledges these commonly overlooked characters in relation to the novel's "progressive social criticism" of male-female relationships (*Jane Austen* 49), but not in terms of their role in advancing a particular female response to the novel's central binary opposition. In offering an alternative perspective on Austen's portrayal of the concepts of women's "sense" and "sensibility" in the novel, through the explication of her distinctly character-affiliated methods of defining these categories, we will exhume Mrs. Jennings and Charlotte Palmer from their burial place as minor background characters.

Much scholarly criticism of *Sense and Sensibility* investigates the roles of Elinor as the model of sense and Marianne as the model of sensibility. Countless analyses detail the many rational, logical actions of Elinor during the novel in contrast to the melodramatic outbursts of her younger sister. Readers are fascinated by the characters' apparent "rival value-systems" (Butler 184). Whereas Elinor is commonly assessed as being "overly reasonable to the point of becoming overly reserved" (Stone 40), the story of Marianne is "a sermon

on the dangers of ill-regulated sensibility” (Moler 413). When the novel is reduced to a categorical study of two easily contrastable characters, the complexity of Austen’s heroines is underestimated.

Although Elinor demonstrates more self-control than Marianne, both sisters manifest intense sensibility. Some scholars do acknowledge greater intricacy in Austen’s portrayals, for example, noting that “Elinor has her full complement of sensibility” and “Marianne has a foundation of sense” (Brann 132). If sensibility refers to “the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering” (Todd 7), Elinor always possesses these traits: “She had an excellent heart;—her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them” (*SS* 6). The fact that the narrator first praises her “strength of understanding” and “coolness of judgment” (6) does not negate her sensibility. While Marianne’s “sensibility” is self-centered, theatrical, and imitative, Elinor experiences intense emotions but suppresses them; while Marianne eventually becomes more “refined,” compassionate, and restrained in her feelings, Elinor learns to express herself more openly. Moreover, both sisters are emotionally dependent on men, whether consciously or unconsciously (Marianne’s dependence is blatant, Elinor’s secret). When the reader liberates Elinor and Marianne from the dichotomous roles to which they have been consigned, this shared manifestation of sensibility becomes evident.

While the dissimilarities between the sisters (their taste in suitors, their sense of their obligations to society) are continually brought before the reader, the ends to which Marianne and Elinor come are not so dissimilar as might initially be expected. By the end of the novel, both have married and, more important, both have chosen to marry due to a deep emotional bond with a man. Although Marianne expresses an initial aversion to Colonel Brandon and loses her beloved Willoughby, and although many readers are dissatisfied with her marriage, the point is that she *needs* to be passionately in love and eventually transfers that need to a new object in the form of Colonel Brandon: “Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby” (379)—probably more so, in that Marianne can respect and admire the Colonel’s genuine sensibility.

Before her reformatory illness and shift in love object, Marianne has very few reservations about pursuing Willoughby, and she also often refuses to participate in the conversations entertained at social gatherings, “offend[ing everyone], by declaring that she had no opinion to give” (234). By contrast,

Elinor seems wholly devoted to duty, loyalty, and truth in her actions throughout the novel. Zelda Boyd argues that “[s]he does none of the foolish things Marianne does in the name of love. . . . She never abandons herself to her feelings when her love fails her, and unlike Marianne, she is never publicly distraught” (146). Yet in private, Elinor still indulges her “disappointed heart” (*SS* 198), demonstrating the sensibility to be deeply disappointed and distressed by love despite being silent in her grief instead of outspoken like Marianne. In one of the earliest scenes of the novel, as Susan Morgan argues, when “Elinor explains to Marianne the doubtful state of her hopes concerning Edward, . . . her explanation involves, though in subdued and careful tones, a confession of love” (189). Thus, while Elinor often demonstrates practicality and an almost transcendent adherence to social responsibility over personal passion, she also reveals her “extremely refined” (Todd 7) feelings for Edward. It makes no difference whether the emotions are publicly known or private; they still exist. Neither Elinor nor Marianne is capable of creating her own happiness—a truth that is demonstrated each time Marianne is indisposed for company or life because she is nursing a broken heart, and each time Elinor throws herself into her duties to her family and society to distract herself from such consuming emotions as the “distress beyond any thing she had ever felt before” (135) evoked by the news of Edward’s engagement to Lucy.

Despite Elinor’s grandiose philosophies, such as her assertion of the impossibility “of one’s happiness depending entirely on any particular person” (263), her happiness depends on her union with Edward Ferrars. This is nowhere more apparent than when the news of his release from Lucy triggers her spontaneous release of long-suppressed emotion: “She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease” (360); “it required several hours to give sedateness to her spirits, or any degree of tranquillity to her heart” (363). These descriptions sound like Marianne, who must reevaluate her original notions of romantic felicity in order to discover a new kind of love and happiness. Although one might argue that if Edward had married Lucy Steele, Elinor would have managed to live a life of contentment, the novel does not suggest that such a life would have been happy. But more important, Elinor is never required to experience the potentially harsh consequences of her philosophy of the primacy of duty over all other claims, including those of love.

In many ways, Marianne and Elinor are models of extreme sensibility, both absorbed in and emotionally dependent on outside sources for their fulfillment. Their perpetual entertainment of various romantic notions—

Elinor's assumption that the lock of hair in Edward's ring must be her own (98), or Marianne's belief that Willoughby has shown her Allenham because it will one day be hers (68-69)—disables them from developing self-reliant identities. Both manifest emotional dependency during their time spent in London as well, though by then they have ample evidence that their loves are unlikely to be fulfilled: Marianne impulsively sends correspondence to Willoughby (161), and Elinor continues her romantic suffering by silently nursing her broken heart (198). In their marked sensibility, they remain romantic heroines throughout the novel though they both prove fortunate enough to attain loving marriages by the end. Or, as Tauchert expresses it, from being "near-mad with grief, paralysed by misery, the heroines are brought back from the brink to new lives of reasonable and harmonious happiness" (71).

Though Austen clearly does not endorse women's immersion in a sensibility that produces emotional and social vulnerability, neither does she propound the kind of callous, egocentric "sense" that protects women from the whims of fate or circumstance but diminishes their humanity. "Sense" in this analysis implies a uniquely female resourcefulness that promotes one's survival in a patriarchal material and social landscape. Lucy Steele and her role models, Lady Middleton and Fanny Dashwood, function as representations of overblown "sense"; they embrace a purely materialistic vision of life in which self-aggrandizement is the only goal. These female characters possess decidedly unromantic ideals—primarily those of wealth and social status—upon which "all [their] happiness depends" (131).

Lucy Steele is arguably the chief villain in the novel, given the role she plays in Edward and Elinor's relationship. Although ignorant and unprincipled, she is extremely clever when it comes to securing her future prosperity. She is overrun, not by extreme sensibility but by extreme sense, at least in terms of her pragmatic focus on self-preservation in the deterministic jungle of English social life. Lucy knows that her best protection in such a society lies in marrying "well," and she successfully achieves this aim as a "sycophant to wealth and power" (Johnson 50). She is a resourceful strategist who keeps her emotions in check throughout her interactions with possible suitors, making and breaking engagements until she finally settles on the man who will benefit her the most financially. Once Mrs. Ferrars replaces Edward as heir with his younger brother, Lucy replaces Edward with Robert in her affections (365). "[I]t is through Lucy Steele, whose very surname evokes the hardening of the object, that materialism's epistemological reign is potently figured" (Goodlad 70). Yet besides her preoccupation with money, Lucy's association with metal

conjures up an image of her personal strength: she conveys a “single-minded intensity” in her “search for a husband who can give her a position in the world” (Lauber 39).

Some scholars have defended Lucy Steele by pointing out her lack of resources in a patriarchal world. Without a dowry, Lucy understands that her worth will be defined by the worth of her husband, so “she both exchanges and is exchanged” (Eddleman 10) in the marital marketplace; fully aware of her limited social status, she makes the decision early on to “steel” herself emotionally, avoiding the vulnerability of a tender heart by approaching marriage as a business agreement. She demonstrates a worldly detachment and the ability to step outside of herself and control the only aspects of her life she can. Nonetheless, Austen makes clear that Lucy represents “a parody . . . of the extremes of ‘common sense’—reinterpreted to mean selfish calculation” (Stone 41). The narrator satirically praises Lucy’s heartless pragmatism as demonstrating “what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest . . . will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience” (376).

The portrayal of Lucy Steele’s role models, Fanny Dashwood and Lady Middleton, reinforces this condemnation of living for social and financial gain, even as it shows the heartlessness of such women. Significantly, women of this category have a clear affinity for each other. Mrs. John Dashwood is described as “a caricature of sense” (Lauber 28) who demonstrates her “perverse lack of [sensibility]” (Tauchert 65): she and Lady Middleton prove “equally pleased with” one another because “[t]here was a kind of cold hearted selfishness on both sides, which mutually attracted them” (*SS* 229). Recognizing that Fanny Dashwood and Lady Middleton possess the wealth and consequence that she desires, Lucy lavishes obsequious attention on both, flattering their vanity with empty compliments and pretended adoration of their children: “Her flattery had already subdued the pride of Lady Middleton, and made an entry into the close heart of Mrs. John Dashwood” (254).

Lady Middleton demonstrates to Lucy that wealth and title provide sufficient fulfillment to one with an empty head and luxurious habits; she is not in the least discomfited by the fact that she and her spouse are “dissimilar in temper and outward behaviour” (32). Her pleasures consist of “spoil[ing] her children all the year round” and displaying “the elegance of her table, and of all her domestic arrangements; and from this kind of vanity was her greatest enjoyment in any of their parties” (32). She merely exists; her character is completely without consequence: “She had nothing to say one day that she had

not said the day before. Her insipidity was invariable, for even her spirits were always the same" (55). Her clear rejection of and embarrassment at her mother, Mrs. Jennings, underscores her choice of empty elegance over benign albeit boisterous substance.

Like Lady Middleton, Fanny Dashwood is devoid of substance, choosing material and social power over personal development or the joy of human connection. The narrator suggests that a lifestyle focused on wealth and status renders one mentally and spiritually bereft:

John Dashwood had not much to say for himself that was worth hearing, and his wife had still less. But there was no peculiar disgrace in this, for it was very much the case with the chief of their visitors, who almost all laboured under one or other of these disqualifications for being agreeable—Want of sense, either natural or improved—want of elegance—want of spirits—or want of temper. (233)

Fanny Dashwood's main preoccupation is securing her family's wealth and acquiring more; early in the novel, we see this concern caricatured in her fear that any gift from John to his half-sisters would lead "to [the] ruin [of] himself, and their poor little Harry" (8).

Stone-hearted Fanny, Lady Middleton, and their protégé, Lucy, all choose narcissistic self-absorption over genuine community and suffer no apparent loss in doing so. By contrast, Elinor and Marianne depend too much on others for their happiness, as we are reminded when even the very mature, practical, eldest daughter, who is able to manage her mother's household and finances, is unable to protect her sensitive heart from the disappointment she experiences each time it appears Edward does not return her sentiments. And yet, the steely women of distorted "sense" are not so different from the women of distorted sensibility in that both types are reliant on something outside of themselves for fulfillment. Their emotional detachment spares them the inner turmoil the Dashwood sisters endure, but just as circumstances can reveal a man's inconstancy, they can also alter one's wealth and social security.

In a world in which romantic, social, and financial prosperity are elusive, Mrs. Jennings and her daughter Charlotte Palmer are the two women whose happiness does not depend on anything or anyone other than themselves. Neither overly sensitive nor emotionless, they also remain consistent in their benignity. Because the mother and daughter appear somewhat sporadically and do not play a direct role in the main conflicts that develop, readers and critics commonly overlook them. Readers are acutely aware of other charac-

ters' denigration of the mother and daughter as silly women without the insight to recognize what is occurring around them. For example, the narrator describes even the sensitive Colonel Brandon as "probably . . . perfectly indifferent" to Mrs. Jennings' "raillery" (36). Charlotte Palmer's incessant talking, along with the endless unanswered questions she directs to her husband, makes her appear foolish. Her husband's lack of respect for her is evident in his ignoring her presence; he assumes she says nothing of substance (Dinkler 4). Scholars also generally accept this view, assuming that the women's good spirits are simply the result of deficient perception and ignorance of other people's true opinions of them. Karen Stohr argues that "Mrs. Jennings lacks the imagination necessary to see beyond the surface of her immediate circumstances" (391-92); because she is seen as having a narrow scope of understanding, Mrs. Jennings is marginalized rather than respected.

Yet the minimal presence of this mother and daughter does not negate their use as models for Austen's readers. In one of the few complimentary (though qualified) scholarly references to Mrs. Jennings, Eva Brann remarks that "[n]o one would argue for Mrs. Jennings' tact, but who can deny her a species of sense, superior in its quickness to Elinor?" (131). Charlotte and Mrs. Jennings embody the perfect measure of sense and sensibility in the novel: they are able to be sensitive without being melodramatic, and sensible without being calculating and cold-hearted. They consistently remain in good spirits, never overwrought by the mini-dramas occurring around them. Charlotte and Mrs. Jennings involve themselves in the lives of others without letting external complications affect their individual well-being; they do not place the responsibility for their personal fulfillment on any source outside of themselves. Neither appears to need romantic sensibility, increasing wealth, or a prominent name in order to find contentment.

Although both women are intellectually marginalized and perceived as absurd and shallow by those around them, in reality they have discovered a way to be happy in themselves. Others cannot conceive of this self-reliant personal contentment, so they judge the women to be insensible, with no tangible reason for their excessive happiness. Mrs. Jennings and Charlotte each have enough wealth to live in comfortable security, and they either have experienced or are in the process of experiencing some positive aspects of marriage, yet the true source of their contentment seems to come from neither of these conditions. This fulfillment Charlotte Palmer and Mrs. Jennings manifest comes about only through a personal commitment to be happy with themselves, without any apprehension about outside variables.

As “a widow, with an ample jointure” (36), whose husband “traded with success in a less elegant part of [London]” (153), Mrs. Jennings, unlike the Dashwood women, is well provided for. But while Mrs. Jennings may have experienced the felicity of marriage at one point in her life, and while she recalls “all the particulars of Mr. Jennings’s last illness, and what he said to his wife a few minutes before he died” (54), she is now alone. Regardless of the delight she takes in the company of others, it does not seem that her happiness stems from social interaction. She is not dependent on being surrounded by people; she simply enjoys their company: “Though Mrs. Jennings was in the habit of spending a large portion of the year at the houses of her children and friends, she was not without a settled habitation of her own” (153).

Mrs. Jennings is first introduced to the reader as “a good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and . . . was full of jokes and laughter” (34). She is not affected by her older daughter’s, or anyone else’s, uneasiness at her vulgar jokes and topics of conversation, nor is she discouraged from asking questions and prying into the personal concerns of others. For example, when Colonel Brandon is unexpectedly called away the morning of the excursion to Whitwell, Mrs. Jennings is the only one who continues to question Colonel Brandon on the nature of his urgent business in town (63–66). She evinces no anxiety at violating any of the rules of propriety with her questions; she is curious, like the others, but only she possesses sufficient confidence to ask the questions.

This blunt self-assurance can cause others pain or discomfiture even as it underscores this matriarch’s inner strength and independence. Elinor observes her lack of perception when Mrs. Jennings assumes that Willoughby’s cruel rejection letter delivered to Marianne must be a love letter, “which appeared to her a very good joke,” and she “hop[ed], with a laugh, that [Marianne] would find it to her liking” (181). She later bursts into the sisters’ room upon hearing the news of Willoughby’s engagement, venting her outrage before the sobbing Marianne, but then “tiptoe[ing] out of the room, as if she supposed her young friend’s affliction could be increased by noise” (192). There are several other occasions throughout the novel where “Mrs. Jennings’s well-meant but ill-judged attentions” (193) do not benefit those around her. Many of her friends appear to be indifferent to her humor and at times even overwhelmed by her presence. She is able to disregard the indifference of others because her own enjoyment depends solely upon herself. However, she also appreciates good humor even when it comes at her own expense, a trait that offsets her occasional insensitivity. For example, she gives as

her rationale for inviting both Elinor and Marianne to London that “if they [get] tired of me, they might talk to one another, and laugh at my odd ways behind my back” (154). She is confident and happy enough to make herself a joke without feeling like an object of ridicule.

Mrs. Jennings is also arguably much more penetrating than others realize. For example, she immediately perceives Fanny’s ugly character: “to *her* she appeared nothing more than a little proud-looking woman of uncordial address, who met her husband’s sisters without any affection, and almost without having any thing to say to them; for of the quarter of an hour bestowed on Berkeley-street, she sat at least seven minutes and a half in silence” (229). Mrs. Jennings’s awareness of Fanny’s cold rudeness is reflected in humorously precise detail as to both the spirit and the duration of her bad behavior. Though her own efforts are sometimes misplaced, she consistently shows kindness, generosity, and compassion toward the Dashwoods as well as toward many others. After the revelation of Willoughby’s betrayal, both she and Charlotte sensitively refrain from speaking of him in Marianne’s presence (214), and she speaks her mind “with blunt sincerity” on such subjects as Edward’s virtue in remaining loyal to Lucy (267) and the absurdity of Mrs. Ferrars’s decision “to make one son independent, because another had plagued [her]” (269). She is a truth-speaker with a kind heart and solid principles, one who cares for others without becoming emotionally distraught over their concerns. Overall, while Mrs. Jennings most demonstrates sense in her ability to recognize that she is the only one responsible for her own happiness, she also maintains a certain sensibility to the joys and sufferings of those around her. She proves to be an excellent role model for her younger daughter, Charlotte.

Although sometimes dismissed as “merely silly” (Lauber 29), Mrs. Palmer manifests an admirable joviality that offsets the novel’s sedate characters and dark themes. She “had a very pretty face, and the finest expression of good humour in it that could possibly be. . . . She came in with a smile, smiled all the time of her visit, except when she laughed, and smiled when she went away” (106). Charlotte’s pleasantness remains intact beside her husband’s grave expression throughout the Palmers’ visit with the Dashwoods. Every time the Palmers make an appearance in the novel, the reader is keenly aware of Mr. Palmer’s apparent disregard for his wife. He habitually separates himself from conversation with her or anyone, and ignores her questions. This marital relationship is not enviable, yet Mrs. Palmer seems perfectly content. Although some critics cite Mr. and Mrs. Palmer’s interactions as intended to portray a “comic relationship” (Dinkler 4), one cannot ignore the hurtful ele-

ment present in Mr. Palmer's treatment of his wife. How would Elinor or Marianne react to such apparently complete disregard? However, in response to Mrs. Jennings's joke that Mr. Palmer has to keep Charlotte, "Charlotte laughed heartily to think that her husband could not get rid of her. . . . The studied indifference, insolence, and discontent of her husband gave her no pain: and when he scolded or abused her, she was highly diverted" (112).

Clearly, there is more going on in this marriage than appears on the surface. Though Elinor "wonder[s] at Charlotte's being so happy without a cause" (118), she also suspects Mr. Palmer of role-playing: she "was not inclined, after a little observation, to give him credit for being so genuinely and unaffectedly ill-natured or ill-bred as he wished to appear. . . . It was rather a wish of distinction she believed, which produced his contemptuous treatment of every body, and his general abuse of every thing before him. It was the desire of appearing superior to other people" (112). On the visit to Cleveland, Elinor "found him very capable of being a pleasant companion" (304) and "liked him . . . much better than she had expected" (305); he also reveals his better nature when he helps the Dashwoods during Marianne's illness. Charlotte, like her mother, is more discerning than she appears. She likely knows better than Elinor her husband's true identity in private, enjoying his charade even and especially when it is at her expense. Such an interpretation of Charlotte's marriage adds even more comic tension through the irony of her asseveration that "Mr. Palmer is just the kind of man I like" (117).

Like her mother, Charlotte does not depend on man or circumstance for her well being; she has chosen to be joyous and is authentically so: "It was impossible for any one to be more thoroughly good-natured, or more determined to be happy than Mrs. Palmer" (112). She is sensible enough not to place the responsibility for her own happiness on anyone or anything outside of herself. She is prosperous but not mercenary. Her lack of concern with money or with society's perception of her sets Charlotte Palmer apart from women of either too much sensibility or too much cold, material "sense." Elinor, for example, in addition to being highly attuned to others' feelings, is concerned with society's perception of herself and her family; she goes to great lengths to make amends for her sister's conduct. Charlotte is keen enough to be fully aware of her husband's rudeness (112) and independent-minded enough to be her own source of contentment. She is happier than sensitive women like Elinor and Marianne or cold fish like Lucy Steele, Fanny Dashwood, and her own sister, Lady Middleton. She loves others freely and enjoys being alive. When she sees the Dashwoods, "She took them all most affectionately by the hand, and expressed

great delight in seeing them again" (110). She expresses her loyalty through outrage over Willoughby's bad behavior, which she only voices in Marianne's absence: "she hated him so much that she was resolved never to mention his name again, and she should tell everybody she saw, how good-for-nothing he was" (215). That benevolence is often dressed in comic or ironic garb in the novel does not lessen its sweetness, and both Mrs. Jennings and Charlotte function as salves to others' pain without themselves being exposed to the raw chill of others' wickedness.

Clara Tuite categorizes *Sense and Sensibility* as "an antisentimental novel" (56) that "parod[ies] . . . the novel of sensibility" (95), and Inger Sigrun Brodey rightly points out that "Austen attacks only the sensibility which has become *insensible* to others, to nature, and even to oneself" (114). In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen delves into the complicated elements comprising the concepts named in the title and effectively presents readers with three sub-groups of female characters that manifest these qualities in different ways. In her experience with love, Elinor is revealed to have some of the same traits Marianne displays, and both sisters represent a form of sensibility that ultimately reveals dependence on romantic love for happiness. Lucy Steele and her role models are women who demonstrate purely practical, unfeeling sense in their focus on monetary and social status. Neither of these first two groups is meant to be emulated by Austen's readers, though the narrative clearly inspires our admiration for Elinor and our empathy for both her and Marianne. We do not aspire to the struggles they have endured, whether through martyr-like fortitude or theatrical, public venting. It is only in the characters of Mrs. Jennings and Charlotte Palmer that the reader finds unexpectedly desirable role models for the healthiest blend of sense and sensibility. Anne Ruderman argues that "the idea that the truest sensibility is found in moral involvement and not flights of emotion is common to all [Austen's] work" (93). These two feel for others, but without the burden of emotional embroilment or dependency. Completely comfortable with their individual insistence on being happy, and fully able to take their happiness into their own hands, they might be a glimmer of the modern women to come. They gain that happiness without stepping on or being jealous of other people and while actively seeking the good of others as well.

If it is true, as Ruderman suggests, that "it is only with self-acceptance, as a separate individual with distinct ego boundaries, that one can truly love others" (67), Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer demonstrate this principle. They are both communal and self-reliant. They are emotionally autonomous, inde-

pendent of the whims of circumstance, even as they reach out benevolently toward others, a trait essential to self-preservation in an unpredictable universe. Claudia Johnson contends that *Sense and Sensibility* “urges the need to govern what we allow ourselves to hope and to believe” and dramatizes “the danger of hoping too intensely for so much, given a world that cannot be penetrated by our understandings, much less conjured by our wishes” (“Twilight” 172-73, 184). Mrs. Jennings and Charlotte Palmer have separated their inner lives from dependence on particular individuals or circumstances while maintaining their kind-hearted, humanitarian spirit. Overall, this mother’s and daughter’s unique balance of sense and sensibility serves them well. They are the only characters to remain happy of their own accord throughout the novel.

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