Everyone would agree that *Sense and Sensibility* creates the impression of being extremely rigid. The title itself announces the main antithesis, yet it can hardly suggest how diligently Jane Austen distinguishes between the mode of sense and the mode of feeling in the novel's plot, style, and theme. To review these quickly, before we look into the linguistic habits of the characters, may remind us how uncompromising *Sense and Sensibility* is, and how insistently it resolves—though readers sometimes overlook this—the initial antithesis.

In its broadest outlines, the plot sets up a series of comparable situations in which we are to watch the sense of Elinor Dashwood and the sensibility of Marianne, her younger sister, at work. The novel's first phase opposes the restrained courtship of Elinor by a despondent Edward Ferrars to Willoughby's ebullient relationship with Marianne, and, more important, contrasts Elinor's relative composure during Edward's long absences with Marianne's distraction at being separated from Willoughby. In the second stage, when both attachments seem impossible because of Edward's engagement to Lucy Steele and Willoughby's sudden marriage, Elinor's stoicism is reckoned against Marianne's wild despair. By the end of the novel, though, these extremes approach each other: the sisters agree in judging Willoughby's character, and Elinor, after suffering through Marianne's illness, Willoughby's self-vindication, and what appears to be Edward's marriage to Lucy, is finally united with Edward, while Marianne subdues herself to the point of accepting the warmhearted Colonel Brandon.

An outline like this, however, cannot indicate how deeply the distinction between sense and feeling is embedded in the non-conversational prose of the novel. It is this prose, of course,
that fixes the climate in which the action takes place, and passages like the one that follows, a simple description of how Elinor reacts on finding herself on the road to London with Marianne and her 'objections' to the trip overruled, turn up on almost every page:

**Sense**

But these objections had all, and Elinor, in spite of every occasional doubt of Willoughby's constancy, could not witness

and Marianne's eagerness to be gone declared her dependance on finding him there;

**Feeling**

with that happy ardour of youth which Marianne and her mother equally shared, been overcome or overlooked;

the rapture of delightful expectation which filled the whole soul and beamed in the eyes of Marianne,

without feeling how blank was her own prospect, how cheerless her own state of mind in the comparison,

and how gladly she would engage in the solicitude of Marianne's situation to have the same animating object in view, the same possibility of hope.

A short, a very short time however must now decide what Willoughby's intentions were; in all probability he was already in town.

and Elinor was resolved not only upon gaining every new light as to his character
which her own observation
or the intelligence of others
could give her, but likewise
upon watching his behaviour
to her sister

(p. 159; italics mine)

Although the diagram cannot reproduce all the discriminations that the passage makes, it brings out the main antithesis between Elinor’s sense and Marianne’s sensibility: in contrasting the sisters, the rhetoric of course evaluates them to some degree. Little wonder, with the distinction between sense and sensibility so woven into the texture of the narrative, that the novel feels inflexible.

But we would be wrong if we regarded the previous passage as purely antithetic, a mere treasuring of Elinor’s reason at the expense of Marianne’s feeling, for both the structure and the words declare that Elinor also has emotions. In lodging this claim, the passage at least points our way toward Sense and Sensibility’s theme, and about this, no matter how strait-laced it feels, we must make no mistake. The novel contends that the individual can morally engage himself in the social organism, of which he is necessarily a part, only when he achieves an appropriate balance between sense and feeling. Both are necessary: sense to formulate his relation with society, feeling to vitalize it. This is the meaning that Jane Austen enforces throughout the novel by its action, structure, and especially by her patterned groups of characters. We must defer considering the leading men and the minor figures until later in this chapter, but here we may glance again at Elinor and Marianne, who express the theme most plainly by their development in contrary directions as the novel continues. For Sense and Sensibility finally insists—though awkwardly at moments—on Marianne’s capacity to reason and on Elinor’s capacity to feel in making decisions.

Each sister has the necessary potential from the start. Marianne, to take her first, is described as “sensible” at her introduc-
tion (p. 6)—and indeed never strikes the reader as the kind of character oversimplified to sheer sensibility which he might actually find in the novels of sentiment, or might expect to find in an anti-sentimental novel. But through most of this story Marianne’s sensibility is in the ascendant, with the result that her definitions, and the actions they lead to, are quite in error. For her, morality is sheer emotion: “... if there had been any real impropriety I could have had no pleasure” (p. 68). And so is reason itself: “... the restraint of sentiments appeared to her a disgraceful subjection of reason” (p. 53).

Thus decorum, the meeting ground of sense and feeling that society has established, is a fraud in Marianne’s eyes because it somewhat restricts the free play of the individual: “... I thought it was right,” she jibes at Elinor, “to be guided wholly by the opinion of other people” (pp. 93-94). Although Elinor answers that her own “doctrine” of propriety has never countenanced “the subjection of the understanding” and adds what amounts to a warning against abandoning one’s mind to the grip of personal feeling, the truth of her reply is not borne in on her sister until the last section of the novel. By then, however, Marianne’s reason is no longer at the mercy of her sensibility. Rather, the qualities unite, enabling her to appraise Willoughby’s behavior morally and to decide against her own “most shamefully unguarded affection” (p. 345). With sense as sensibility’s partner rather than its slave, Marianne attains the perspective essential to living meaningfully within society.

The novel charts a course for Elinor precisely the opposite of Marianne’s, though the case of the elder sister is slightly complicated by the fact that she serves as our point of view in much of the story. In this early work, at least, Jane Austen apparently felt that she could not risk—as she frequently does later on—tying her reader to a mind liable to distort the world it perceives, so Elinor must see clearly for the most part. Although we are told at her introduction that “her feelings were strong” (p. 6), she is primarily allied with sense through the first two-thirds of the book in trying to guide Marianne toward reason. But once Marianne is relatively safe from Willoughby, Elinor’s capacity
to feel is stressed again and again. Jane Austen’s touch is not always sure: she treats Elinor’s emotional flutters arising from Willoughby’s final visit (pp. 333, 334, 339, 349) as she had Elinor’s earlier palpitations over the lock of hair in Edward’s ring (pp. 98–99)—with a kind of embarrassed irony, as if the reader cannot quite be trusted to recognize when the feelings betrayed by his point of view are excessive, given the situation, and self-indulgent. Elinor strikes a deeper note, though her passionate emotion is still to some extent self-centered, when she blames herself for having formerly decided so coolly that Marianne’s illness could not be serious (pp. 312–1+) or when she is shaken to the core at the news of Edward’s supposed marriage despite all that her sense can do (pp. 353–58). In her finest moment, however, Elinor shows Marianne, and us, what the proper quality of intense feeling is, how it may suitably inform judgment and behavior, when she explains how she has been “supported” in her disappointments: “By feeling that I was doing my duty.—My promise to Lucy, obliged me to be secret. I owed it to her, therefore, to avoid giving any hint of the truth; and I owed it to my family and friends, not to create in them a solicitude about me, which it could not be in my power to satisfy” (p. 262). She feels as deeply as Marianne, yet she expresses it in her obligation to others, thus controlling her emotion and charging it with extra-personal significance. As all these instances declare, however differently Jane Austen manages them, sense alone is not enough.

Indeed the entire novel argues that the “duty” to which Elinor has just referred—and its social counterpart is decorum—marks the highest achievement of the individual in compelling him to relate himself both sensibly and emotionally to others. The risk of the excessive feeling which the novel mainly, though not exclusively, attacks is that the individual in its grasp cannot escape himself sufficiently to discover what his personal or social duty is. And sheer self, of course, is the antithesis of society, which is the condition of man. One may well feel that Marianne’s conversion is a little strained and that Elinor is handled even more arbitrarily at moments. Still, Jane Austen’s very forc-
ing of her materials testifies to her concern that the theme of *Sense and Sensibility* should represent a mean valuable because it has a foot in either camp. The argument remains utterly conventional, and Jane Austen's pursuit of it by tracing what might be called the double allegiance of each sister makes the novel none the less rigid—though perhaps somewhat more inclusive in its claims than has sometimes been maintained.

In order to discover how the dialogues of *Sense and Sensibility* dramatize its meaning, we had best start with a few speeches by Elinor and Marianne, not only because the sisters represent the dominant principles in the novel, thus conditioning our approach to the other characters, but because the modes of sense and sensibility vent themselves in sharply contrasting verbal habits. Marianne is always bent on asserting her intense inner life, often favoring particular terms to lay bare her energetic responses: "That is an expression, Sir John, which I particularly dislike. I abhor every common-place phrase by which wit is intended; and 'setting one's cap at a man,' or 'making a conquest,' are the most odious of all. Their tendency is gross and illiberal" (p. 45). Every charged word dramatizes the distance that she feels between herself and the gregarious Sir John Middleton. She certainly does not avoid conceptual terms, yet she uses them in such a way that they reflect her emotional commitments rather than more objective standards. When she hears from Sir John that Willoughby once danced for eight hours without a break, she ardently replies, "Did he indeed? . and with elegance, with spirit?" and continues, "That is what I like; that is what a young man ought to be. Whatever be his pursuits, his eagerness in them should know no moderation, and leave him no sense of fatigue" (p. 45). Here Marianne's conceptual language first exalts an extreme which she finds attrac-
tive and then helps consolidate the extreme as a generalization, something valid for a class. That the diction is applied eccentrically and the generalization unreliable because it expresses the view of a single citizen only—none of this bothers Marianne at all, for her world is herself. It is a world in which “like” becomes “ought” without any strain, not only in language but in fact, as she later proves by defending as decorous her unchaperoned visit with Willoughby to Allenham.

For Marianne, plainly, a generalization is emotionally dictated, expressing something like an act of faith in herself. For Elinor, a generalization is the reverse: it means separating oneself from the fallibilities of private feeling and appealing to knowledge that is sure in its universal applicability. At one point, for instance, she carefully qualifies her mother’s fervent praise of Colonel Brandon as Marianne’s suitor, praise which Mrs. Dashwood—whose sensibility is so much like her younger daughter’s—delivers quite in the mode of Marianne: “But his coming for me as he did, with such active, such ready friendship, is enough to prove him one of the worthiest of men.” Although Elinor’s feelings are all on the side of Colonel Brandon, she in effect warns her mother against the dangers of hasty induction:

“His character, however does not rest on one act of kindness, to which his affection for Marianne, were humanity out of the case, would have prompted him. To Mrs. Jennings, to the Middletons, he has been long and intimately known; they equally love and respect him; and even my own knowledge of him, though lately acquired, is very considerable; and so highly do I value and esteem him, that if Marianne can be happy with him, I shall be as ready as yourself to think our connection the greatest blessing to us in the world.” (p. 337)

Elinor explores the very foundations of Colonel Brandon’s “character” before arriving at her closing generalization. In her usual fashion, she builds her case on conceptual terms, here stable because she uses them to minimize personal emotion: “kindness” is assessed in the light of “affection” and “humanity,”
just as "love" is measured against "respect." At the same time, Elinor secures her case further by citing other witnesses; only after they have testified does she offer her own judgment. It is this movement of mind, which justifies emotion rather than denies it, that characterizes her durable relation to the society of the novel.

The contrast between the sisters is carried out in the matter of rhetoric as well, though each is driven at last to use the mode of the other, which again suggests that Marianne is ultimately able to discriminate and that Elinor can feel. Elinor's usual rhetoric, however, is just what we would guess: emotionally low-pressured, controlled, it devotes itself mainly to articulating a series of distinctions. When Edward's engagement to Lucy Steele is made public, for example, Elinor explains her own reaction to Marianne in a thoroughly typical passage, typical in that her rhetoric divides sense and feeling into antithetic compartments, typical in that she allows an emotional series only at the close, and then in the interests of reason and propriety:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
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<td>&quot;I am not conscious of having provoked the disappointment by any imprudence of my own, and I have borne it as much as possible without spreading it farther.</td>
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<td>I acquit Edward of all essential misconduct. and I wish him very happy;</td>
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<td>and I am so sure of his always doing his duty, that though now he may harbour some regret, in the end he must become so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy does not want sense, and that is the foundation on which every thing good may be built. —And after all, Marianne, after all that is bewitching in</td>
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the idea of a single and constant attachment, and all that can be said of one's happiness depending entirely on any particular person,

it is not meant—it is not fit— it is not possible that it should be so.’” (p. 263; italics mine)

But Elinor’s scrupulous antitheses here between reason and feeling give way for once when Marianne accuses her of not being upset by the engagement because she does not care for Edward. In the face of this most serious challenge to her sensibility, Elinor responds with a passionate rhetoric that convinces even Marianne:

‘—It was told me,—it was in a manner forced on me by the very person herself, whose prior engagement ruined all my prospects; and told me, as I thought, with triumph.—This person’s suspicions, therefore, I have had to oppose, by endeavouring to appear indifferent where I have been most deeply interested;—and it has not been only once;—I have had her hopes and exultation to listen to again and again.—I have known myself to be divided from Edward for ever, without hearing one circumstance that could make me less desire the connection.—Nothing has proved him unworthy; nor has any thing declared him indifferent to me. —I have had to contend against the unkindness of his sister, and the insolence of his mother; and have suffered the punishment of an attachment, without enjoying its advantages.” (pp. 263-64)

The fundamental movement of the passage is straight ahead, generating its power mainly through the anaphoric structure: “It was told,” “it was forced,” “told . with triumph”; “I have had to listen,” “I have known,” “I have had to contend.” And the antitheses—“indifferent” vs. “interested,” “divided” vs. “less desire,” “unworthy” vs. “indifferent,” “contend” vs. “suffered,” “unkindness” vs. “insolence,” “punishment” vs. “advantages”—their primary purpose is not at all to differentiate but to intensify, for they accumulate all that Elinor has endured. This is far indeed from Elinor’s normal style, but it lets us look
for once below the disciplined surface that almost always conceals the depth of her attachments.

Marianne's typical rhetoric sounds very like the second speech by Elinor. It would be unfair to judge the younger sister by the purple passage in which she takes leave of "Dear, dear Norland!" (p. 27), even though the energetic movement of the lines straight ahead characterizes many other speeches by Marianne. But perhaps her essential difference from Elinor will come clear if we watch Marianne exert a charged rhetoric, as she habitually does, to support a precarious generalization, here in defense of her "intimacy" with Willoughby:

"I have not known him long indeed, but I am much better acquainted with him, than I am with any other creature in the world, except yourself and mama. It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy;—it is disposition alone. Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others. I should hold myself guilty of greater impropriety in accepting a horse from my brother, than from Willoughby. Of John I know very little, though we have lived together for years; but of Willoughby my judgment has long been formed." (pp. 58–59)

She generalizes on the basis of her particular feeling for Willoughby. In the antitheses—between "insufficient" and "more than enough," between her brother and Willoughby—she establishes extremes, not to search out a secure middle ground, in the manner usual with Elinor, but to validate the extremes themselves by drastically juxtaposing them. So she ends, with a kind of charming inconsequence, by claiming in effect that she has "long" known Willoughby when she began by denying it. For Marianne, the antithetic structure is normally a means to augment feeling rather than to make sensible distinctions.

Indeed, in terms of the novel one thing she must learn is a rhetoric that plainly differentiates between sense and feeling, a rhetoric that will prove her fully capable of evaluating personality by demonstrating that she can stand outside herself. Thus
in her climactic speeches, when she looks back on her past with Willoughby, Marianne takes over a style like the one that Elinor practices most often:

**SENSE**

what I know your judgment must censure. My illness has made me think I considered the past; I saw in my own behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself,

I did not know my danger till the danger was removed; as these reflections gave me,

**FEELING**

"—Do not, my dearest Elinor, let your kindness defend and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. . . .

but with such feelings

I wonder at my recovery,—wonder that the very eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for atonement to my God, and to you all, did not kill me at once. Had I died,—in what peculiar misery should I have left you, my nurse, my friend, my sister!—You, who had seen all the fretful selfishness of my latter days; who had known all the murmurings of my heart! —My mother too! How could you have consoled her!—I cannot express my own abhorrence of myself.
Whenever I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected, or some failing indulged."

(pp. 345-46; italics mine)

The entire passage—and my omissions would not alter its fundamental shape—issues from Marianne's newly found sense. One mark of it is what we might call her double vision, which now allows her to balance off observations about her reason, or earlier lack of reason, against comments on her emotions. Her antitheses here seem designed less to intensify than to distinguish meaningfully, and it might be added that Marianne's speech goes on to outline her future in a similarly stable two-part structure. This is not to say that all her feeling has evaporated. On the contrary, the emotional terms and broken clauses of her Norland rhetoric reappear in the second half of the quotation, when she speaks of her illness, but now they dramatize her fervently unselfish commitment to others. Taken as a whole, the passage suggests that Marianne can achieve a viable norm, the sort of norm we saw figured earlier in the fusion of sense and sensibility that governs Elinor's behavior.

III

Jane Austen carries on the theme of the novel by her characterization of its leading men, each one revealing an individual blend of sense with sensibility and a particular relationship with society that results from it. They are placed just as categorically for us as Elinor and Marianne: Edward Ferrars in the middle, flanked on one side by Colonel Brandon and on the other by Willoughby.

Edward's main trait is his self-control, not as steely as Elinor's, but as consistent. It shows itself through most of the extraordinarily few speeches granted this conventional "hero" in his tendency to stand apart from himself, gauging his capabilities, as
it were, from a responsibly objective vantage point. Sometimes he does so in a wittier guise than we may remember, given Elinor's somber picture of him that haunts the novel, but his underlying diffidence about himself is very real. If he commands a rhetoric of intensity, he will use its series and antitheses ironically, against himself:

“It has been, and is, and probably will always be a heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me any thing like independence. But unfortunately my own nicety, and the nicety of my friends, have made me what I am, an idle, helpless being. I always preferred the church, as I still do. But that was not smart enough for my family. They recommended the army. That was a great deal too smart for me. and, at length idleness was pronounced on the whole to be the most advantageous and honourable, and a young man of eighteen is not in general so earnestly bent on being busy as to resist the solicitations of his friends to do nothing. I was therefore entered at Oxford and have been properly idle ever since.” (pp. 102–3)

Edward's antitheses proclaim his distance from his family, but largely at another irresponsible extreme, and his final generalizations resolve them only to hoot at the foolishness of himself and his family. In short, the rhetoric passes judgment on him in the light of perceived responsibility—and Edward creates the rhetoric himself.

He may also employ an intense vocabulary, but again it mocks himself, this time from the perspective of Marianne and her enthusiasm about a “picturesque” landscape:

“I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere. You must be satisfied with such admiration as I can honestly give. I call it a very fine country—the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug—with rich meadows and several neat farm houses scattered here and there.” (p. 97)
This is no attack on Marianne; rather, Edward is taking his usual belittling measure of himself, admitting that he prefers the verifiable contents of the landscape to its privately affective qualities. Typically, he recognizes the claims of the other side while staking out his own to define himself.

Yet Edward's recurrent need to evaluate himself publicly, whether by a sometimes ironic rhetoric, by generalizations turned against himself, or by his diction, signals only his self-distrust, not any doubt about the virtues that he holds in view. And his distrust of himself is ultimately unfounded, for—like the highly emotional Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*, to take a more obviously sympathetic figure—he is moved to act with the strictest honor when put to the test, standing by his engagement to Lucy Steele though disowned for doing so and though he has long stopped loving her. "I thought it my duty," he says, "independent of my feelings, to give her the option of continuing the engagement or not, when I was renounced by my mother, and stood to all appearance without a friend in the world to assist me" (p. 367). This firm self-denial, even the words themselves, might come from the lips of the staunch Elinor.

If Edward usually observes decorum in what he says by restraining emotion unless it can be discharged against himself, Colonel Brandon is very different. It is his fate to see the decorum he clutches at on the verge of slipping through his fingers again and again—an early method on Jane Austen's part, it would seem, to dramatize acute feeling. He expresses his character fully during his first conversation, when he queries Elinor about Marianne's distaste for second attachments (pp. 56-57). Elinor tells him that Marianne's attitude is wholly unreasonable, yet Colonel Brandon gives away his liking for the younger sister by defending her: "there is something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind, that one is sorry to see them give way to the reception of more general opinions." Probably he hopes that the generalization will make him appear suitably disengaged, but clearly it arises only from his private feeling. And sheerly private feeling, at least Marianne's, as Elinor quickly
points out, bears little relation to sense or "propriety." However, the Colonel's affection for Marianne urges him on, though he still masks it with the indirection of "those who" and a conceptual diction: "Does your sister make no distinction in her objections against a second attachment? Are those who have been disappointed in their first choice, whether from the inconstancy of its object, or the perverseness of circumstances, to be equally indifferent during the rest of their lives?" But when Elinor reports the adamantine view of Marianne, who has "never yet" considered a second attachment "pardonable," Colonel Brandon's façade of objectivity breaks down:

"This . . . cannot hold; but a change, a total change of sentiments—No, no, do not desire it.—for when the romantic refinements of a young mind are obliged to give way, how frequently are they succeeded by such opinions as are but too common, and too dangerous! I speak from experience. I once knew a lady who in temper and mind greatly resembled your sister but who from an enforced change—from a series of unfortunate circumstances"—Here he stopt suddenly; appeared to think that he had said too much.

He tries to hold himself back by the generalization, emotionally based though it is, about the change of "a young mind." But his feelings, for the girl like Marianne and indeed for Marianne herself, are so strong that they threaten to burst through in too particular a revelation. Sensing his danger, he stutters into silence, his only way of retaining a perilous grip on propriety. This is the verbal pattern that Colonel Brandon enacts almost every time he speaks: in discussing Willoughby's supposed engagement to Marianne (p. 173) or Willoughby's marriage to Miss Grey (p. 199). And the pattern finds its analogy in the action of the Colonel when, stirred by Edward's loyalty to Lucy, he will not himself offer Edward the living of Delaford but commissions Elinor to do so. 8

Willoughby has by all odds the most attractive manner of the three suitors, which means here, as so often in Jane Austen's novels, that he is the one whose language we must study most
carefully if we want to get at his real character. In terms of the pattern formed by the leading men, he is stationed on Edward's other flank, occupying a position opposite Colonel Brandon. While the Colonel's acceptance of decorum constrains him to shroud his feelings in silence, Willoughby's rejection of anything conventional spurs him to advertise his emotions, often at the top of his voice. Yet in spite of his vivacity, the nature of his feelings differs sharply from the nature of Marianne's. What is a religion with her is more of a profession with Willoughby. This is what makes him dangerous in the world of the novel, and what Elinor intuits by her sense. For he does not utterly surrender himself to emotion in the mode of Marianne; rather, he seems to practice feeling as a means of gratifying himself momentarily. But to practice feeling is to be essentially detached, which denies the very basis of emotion. Willoughby plainly makes this point about himself when, in reporting to Elinor that he tried to attach Marianne while planning a marriage for money with Miss Grey, he questions whether he has "ever known" what it is to love: "for, had I really loved, could I have sacrificed my feelings to vanity, to avarice?—or, what is more, could I have sacrificed her's?—But I have done it" (pp. 320-21). Yet Willoughby need not have told us openly about this emotional discrepancy, for his linguistic habits reveal it over and over.

Consider his rhapsody on the Dashwoods' home (pp. 72-73). It seems at first the passionate cry of a sensibility like Marianne's, a celebration of picturesque detail by extravagantly emotional generalizations: "Improve this dear cottage! No. That I will never consent to. Not a stone must be added to its walls, not an inch to its size, if my feelings are regarded." But his fervor must be quite conscious, for his continuation and conclusion prove that all his remarks are calculated to praise Marianne, using the cottage as a metaphor for her. To take a single example, "this place will always have one claim on my affection, which no other can possibly share," at which point Mrs. Dashwood underlines his meaning for us by looking "with pleasure at Marianne." His whole speech, in short, amounts to a
work of art, which is to say that it no longer expresses raw feel­
ing, the kind that reveals itself in Marianne's talk.

Perhaps this basic distinction between Willoughby and Mari­
anne will become clearer in their different uses of figurative lan­
guage. Here is Marianne, denouncing marriage by any woman
over twenty-seven because, according to her standards, it could
not be for love: "It would be a compact of convenience, and the
world would be satisfied. To me it would seem only a com­
mercial exchange, in which each wished to be benefited at the
expense of the other" (p. 38). Marianne gives herself up to the
figure—commerce is completely antipathetic to her idea of love
—to pour out her disgust with the world's opinion. But here is
Willoughby, trying to convince Elinor of his love for Marianne
by describing what he felt on receiving her letters:

“When the first of her's reached me . . . what I felt is—in the
common phrase, not to be expressed; in a more simple one—per­
haps too simple to raise any emotion—my feelings were very, very
painful.—Every line, every word was—in the hackneyed meta­
phor which their dear writer would forbid—a dagger to
my heart. To know that Marianne was in town was—in the same
language—a thunderbolt.—Thunderbolts and daggers!—what a
reproof she would have given me! " (p. 325)

Apparently for him metaphor is largely a problem of expression
with attendant dangers, not an instinctive translation of feel­
ings into words. Willoughby makes fun of the metaphors, yet
uses them anyway, because to mock and then use them is a way
of pledging their intensity and thus his own. But this marks a
deliberate recreation of the vitality of language; the double atti­
tude of the artist, at the same time in and outside of his work,
remains. The ultimate effect is of Willoughby's detachment, and
the irony is its symptom.

Indeed he controls his conversation as industriously as Ed­
ward does, though for very different purposes. Where Edward
puts his detachment to work in judging himself, Willoughby's
detachment allows him to contrive his own intensification. We
can hardly avoid the sense that he is constantly performing, that
his rhetoric is often a stratagem designed for the specific occasion—especially in that long scene near the end of the novel when he accounts to Elinor for his behavior toward Marianne. One might argue that Willoughby's objectivity would be natural here inasmuch as he is looking back on the past, but mainly he is striving to convince Elinor of his past and present integrity: he engages himself directly in self-vindication. Thus it may appear at first surprising—though in the last analysis it is deeply typical—that he should be found constructing so careful an artifice as his reply to Elinor after she reproaches him with the seduction which she has discovered through Colonel Brandon. His rhetoric is brilliantly conceived throughout. He begins by claiming that Colonel Brandon is partial, and so by implication that he himself is impartial. Then he acts out a supposedly fair judgment of himself and the girl in a series of antitheses:

"Remember," cried Willoughby, "from whom you received the account. Could it be an impartial one? I acknowledge that her situation and her character ought to have been respected by me. I do not mean to justify myself, but at the same time cannot leave you to suppose that I have nothing to urge—that because she was injured she was irreproachable, and because I was a libertine, she must be a saint. If the violence of her passions, the weakness of her understanding—I do not mean, however, to defend myself. Her affection for me deserved better treatment, and I often, with great self-reproach, recall the tenderness which, for a very short time, had the power of creating any return. I wish—I heartily wish it had never been. But I have injured more than herself; and I have injured one, whose affection for me—(may I say it?) was scarcely less warm than her's; and whose mind—Oh! how infinitely superior!" (p. 322)

But Willoughby has no rationally sound defense, so he must insist, as he does in the last half of the speech, on his strong feelings and his inviolable attachment to Marianne, energizing these declarations by a rhetoric that moves straight on. He is certainly not carried away; in fact, he remains supremely conscious of his audience, for he bows to Elinor's propriety with "may I say it?" and hopes to placate her sense by praising the
“mind” of Marianne. His whole effort is very winning, but the meticulous formulation of his defense unmasks its policy. And sentiment is no longer sheer sentiment if one makes a production of it.

All this is not to say that we should take Willoughby as a mere faker who feels nothing for Marianne, but the quality of his feeling differs radically from the quality of hers. For him emotion is something to be professed by means of rhetoric, irony, and diction—they are tools to indulge it—but not to be thoroughly acted upon.

The minor characters fill out the theme by taking positions along a line stretching from the extreme of emotion to the extreme of sense, either limit marking a complete self-interest. The novel proposes, we remember, that one ought to mediate between the claims of the rival camps, sense determining one’s adjustment to society and unselfish feeling animating it. What the minor characters reveal, each in his different way, is a series of failures in mediation, therefore a variety of uncreative social adjustments, some less serious, some more. It is unfair to them as individuals to categorize them roughly in four groups, but perhaps such an arrangement will throw the dominant motifs of the novel into higher relief.

At one extreme is a cluster of figures whose feelings perpetually run riot in their talk, divorcing it from sense. Charlotte Palmer’s exclamatory bursts flatten all she mentions to the dead level of the superlative, obliterating any distinction between the particular and the general, thus annihilating rationality. Her absolutism has driven Mr. Palmer to one just as drastic, though the reverse of hers in that he invariably voices his disgust. And if Miss Steele’s grammatical errors seem a rather nasty insistence on the part of the author that Anne is underbred, still her
vocabulary implies that she is almost as witlessly intense as Mrs. Palmer: everything is "monstrous," "plaguing," "vast," the energetic counters proving, so Anne hopes, that she belongs to the fashionable world. The three characters in the second group are somewhat more subdued, and the novel presents them as essentially good-hearted, even though their conversation usually shows sense at the mercy of warmly private feeling. The talk of Sir John Middleton brims with generalizations, all of them based on his own pleasure, whether in hunting or in getting up a party to gratify himself and others. The vigorous emotions of Mrs. Jennings often confuse her thinking—witness her many false inductions—and sometimes make her as careless with her words, as in her indecorous reference to Colonel Brandon's "love child"; but when faced with the reality of Marianne's rejection by Willoughby and subsequent illness, Mrs. Jennings shows herself wholeheartedly sympathetic. With the last member of this group, Mrs. Dashwood, we approach Marianne's position on the scale, for the mother has an active sensibility of her own; though it tempts Mrs. Dashwood into a number of false inductions, still her sensibility is triggered by her unselfish love for her daughters. Lucy Steele has a post all to herself, out beyond Elinor's and not yet at the limit of sense: as we shall see in a moment, she almost always calculates her relation to society shrewdly, but her calculations do not square with her real feelings. As for the John Dashwoods and Robert Ferrars, who are placed at the extreme of sense, they brandish their reason in everything they say, but their version of reason consists of the ugliest self-interest.

Most of these minor characters reveal themselves so transparently in their remarks that they need not detain us. Yet we might linger briefly with Lucy Steele and then the John Dashwoods, for they are playing a deeper linguistic game. Lucy is convinced in her heart that she is the equal of anyone and jealously guards her success with Edward as a token of her value. But she also recognizes that society regards her as an inferior. In much of the novel she turns this fact to her advantage, playing the role of the inferior for all it is worth. However, the
conflict between the role she assumes and her real self breaks into the open toward the end of her two long talks with Elinor.

Throughout them Lucy is warning Elinor to leave Edward alone, most of the time with her usual astuteness. For instance, she parades her inferiority by drawing attention to her indecorums, thus in effect neutralizing her opponent by making Elinor over into a social arbiter (although of course the maneuver also serves Lucy by implying that she feels delicately enough to know her breaches for what they are). At the same time, she alleges a special fondness for Elinor, thus tying her rival's hands. Moreover, Lucy proclaims her passion for Edward at every turn, which automatically entitles her to the pity of the world for lovers in difficulties. These facets of Lucy's role are caught together in a speech near the end of her first encounter with Elinor:

"I was afraid you would think I was taking a great liberty with you . . . in telling you all this . . . but as soon as I saw you, I felt almost as if you were an old acquaintance. Besides . . . I am so unfortunate, that I have not a creature whose advice I can ask . . . I only wonder that I am alive after what I have suffered for Edward's sake these last four years." (pp. 132-33)

With ammunition like this, Lucy wins the first battle hands down.

But her tone changes, as does Elinor's, after they meet again. Elinor is under a special obligation to preserve the forms of decorum because she has been cast as the social superior; yet she has also been personally attacked by Lucy and can return the fire only by manipulating those forms so obviously that Lucy will understand her. Thus Elinor resorts, quite uncharacteristically, to generalizations loaded with ambiguity, such as "If the strength of your reciprocal attachment had failed, as between many people and under many circumstances it naturally would during a four years' engagement, your situation would have been pitiable indeed" (p. 147). And Lucy, fully alive to Elinor's implication that the "attachment" may have "failed," feels driven to speak out herself—not at all in the manner that her role
demands—when she replies with a generalization that authoritatively measures her power as a person: "I can safely say that he has never gave me one moment's alarm on that account from the first." By the end of their talk Lucy may again convert Elinor into a judge, but now the strain on her temper shows through her sentences:

"'Tis because you are an indifferent person," said Lucy, with some pique, and laying a particular stress on those words, "that your judgment might justly have such weight with me. If you could be supposed to be biassed in any respect by your own feelings, your opinion would not be worth having." (p. 150)

The personal venom here, however obliquely she may express it, and her assumption of equality, even superiority, in judging Elinor make it plain that Lucy's private sense of herself is wholly at odds with her normal public pose as the docile social inferior. Evidently Jane Austen wants us to make no mistake about this, for her own words strain, in the previous passage and throughout the two conversations, to fix Lucy's unpleasantness for us.

In treating the John Dashwoods, though, Jane Austen stands at a greater distance, trusting her irony and their dialogue to interpret them for us. They differ from most of the other minor characters in being perfectly aware that it is improper to generalize on the basis of personal feeling alone; thus, though they always do so, they scrupulously insist that they are not acting out of private prejudice but in an enlightened way, according to a community of opinion.

Their behavior is outlined at the opening of their first talk (p. 9), which dramatizes their allegiance to society, but to an utterly private version of it. The conversation begins with John reminding Fanny that he has promised his dying father to "assist" Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters, John himself having settled on an amount of three thousand pounds. This prospect irritates Fanny because she is entirely selfish, but of course she cannot admit such an indecorous motive. So she sets about erecting a supposedly reasonable standard of behavior, first by
assuming that the father was insane, although she propitiates her husband with “I dare say,” then by citing the probability of “ten to one” to justify her assumption: “He did not know what he was talking of, I dare say; ten to one but he was light-headed at the time. Had he been in his right senses, he could not have thought of such a thing as begging you to give away half your fortune from your own child.” A norm so patently rational, Fanny presumes, should appeal automatically to John. Still, she refuses to take any chances, pushing on to color her father-in-law’s departure from the norm by the emotive “begging.” Her husband hesitates momentarily: though admitting his father’s aberration, “He could hardly suppose I should neglect them,” John yet sees himself as a man of honor who must behave according to the letter of decorum’s law, “The promise, therefore, was given, and must be performed.” But a way out begins to glimmer in the generalization with which he closes: “Something must be done for them whenever they leave Norland and settle in a new home.” It sounds pompous and authoritative enough to satisfy propriety, yet is unparticular enough to evade any rashly concrete promises.

Fanny, however, is still not content. She takes over his generalization to avoid provoking him, but she feels impelled to qualify it, even at the risk of mentioning the specific sum, though she minimizes this breach of decorum by keeping her phrasing as impersonal as possible: “Well, then, let something be done for them; but that something need not be three thousand pounds. Consider that when the money is once parted with, it never can return.’ And she immediately fortifies her position by calling up the maxim about “money once parted with.” By the end of her speech she is seeking additional support in another emotive reminder of “our poor little boy,” but she hardly needs it, for her husband has already caught sight of the grounds on which he can turn against the Dashwoods. Though acknowledging that his boy may some day “regret” the giving up of “so large a sum,” John can make out what appears a much more objective case by following up Fanny’s maxim with an appeal of his own to a community of opinion: “If he should
have a numerous family it would be a very convenient addition.' Now safely allied with a public attitude, John can pronounce on the particular case, and of course start cutting down the amount of his assistance: "Five hundred pounds would be a prodigious increase to their fortunes!" His "prodigious" is wonderfully hypocritical, less congratulating him on his own kindness than expressing what he takes to be a normal public view of the Dashwoods' situation. And this hypocrisy typifies his character as well as Fanny's throughout the novel. Both subscribe to a presumably enlightened community of opinion, but it is one that utterly perverts social value because it twists reason into the service of merely selfish feeling. Thus, they provide the sharpest ironic statement of *Sense and Sensibility*'s theme.

Having glimpsed the characters pretty much in isolation so far, we might look finally at two scenes in which some of the major figures sustain their behavior in dialogue, interweaving their verbal habits to dramatize basic human conflicts. There is a sense of metaphoric indirection in each conversation, stronger in the second than in the first, though such scenes do not really flourish until the later works. Thus in the first example (pp. 50-52) Willoughby, Marianne, and Elinor represent themselves initially by their attitudes toward the absent Colonel Brandon, but, as their talk goes on, they often break the metaphoric tissue by commenting on each other more openly.

Willoughby starts the ball rolling with a well-bred sneer: "Brandon is just the kind of man whom everybody speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to." He controls his dislike for the Colonel by shaping it in witty antitheses, yet he refuses any personal responsibility for it by generalizing. Marianne is ready enough to agree with his verdict: "That is exactly what I think
of him. But she accepts her responsibility, both by “I” and by her flat statement. Now Elinor speaks up, trying to keep feeling separate from sense in the antithesis of her first sentence: “Do not boast of it for it is injustice in both of you. He is highly esteemed by all the family at the park, and I never see him myself without taking pains to converse with him.” And her second antithesis, between “all the family” and “I,” seeks to steady an opinion by balancing it on different authorities.

Willoughby is right on his toes to exploit Elinor’s modesty, taking over her antithesis to use it against her:

“That he is patronized by you is certainly in his favour; but as for the esteem of the others, it is a reproach in itself. Who would submit to the indignity of being approved by such women as Lady Middleton and Mrs. Jennings, that could command the indifference of any body else?”

The antithesis serves his purpose in two ways: first, by setting Elinor apart with a show of deference from those he wishes to attack; second, by intimating—because “patronized” echoes the feeling latent in her phrase “taking pains”—that Elinor’s judgment of Colonel Brandon is emotionally biased. Since Willoughby has apparently disproved her sense by the rhetoric of his first sentence, he then feels free to assert his own opinion, though again he formulates it impersonally, this time with all the power of a rhetorical question behind it. Of course the antithesis of his closing sentence does not mark out, as the shape of Willoughby’s speech would imply, a more truly rational scale than Elinor’s; rather, he aims at an emotional intensity that will dislocate the balanced view she has offered. However, Elinor knows how to restore an equilibrium: “But perhaps the abuse of such people as yourself and Marianne, will make amends for the regard of Lady Middleton and her mother. If their praise is censure, your censure may be praise, for they are not more discerning, than you are prejudiced and unjust.” Now her antitheses take over his adverse judgments, only to lay them off, point by point, against the recklessness with which he and Marianne have made up their minds.
This is too much for Marianne: “In defence of your protegé you can even be saucy.” Her assault with a particular diction is characteristic, and she implies, as Willoughby has, that Elinor’s opinion really rests on aroused emotions. Elinor replies, though not in kind, by diagramming the validity of her view. The generalization in her first sentence carefully attaches her feelings to sense:

“My protegé, as you call him, is a sensible man; and sense will always have attractions for me. Yes, Marianne, even in a man between thirty and forty. He has seen a great deal of the world; has been abroad; has read, and has a thinking mind. I have found him capable of giving me much information on various subjects, and he has always answered my inquiries with the readiness of good-breeding and good nature.”

The rest of her speech documents the opening generalization with evidence that always distinguishes precisely between Colonel Brandon’s qualities and her own response to them. It is a powerful retort that drives Marianne to sheer mockery: “That is to say . . . he has told you that in the East Indies the climate is hot, and the mosquitoes are troublesome.” She wants a series rather than an antithesis to pile up the specific items that express her contempt. And Elinor can vanquish petulance only by insisting on the integrity of her previous claim: “He would have told me so, I doubt not, had I made any such inquiries, but they happened to be points on which I had been previously informed.” Willoughby, of course, takes the part of the younger sister: “Perhaps . . . his observations may have extended to the existence of nabobs, gold mohrs, and palanquins.” But he converts Marianne’s instinctive scorn into conscious parody by juxtaposing highly exotic particulars to the sober Colonel Brandon.

Elinor’s reply brings the fundamental issue directly into the open: “I may venture to say that his observations have stretched much farther than your candour. But why should you dislike him?” Again she relocates Willoughby’s disparagement in a clarifying context, this time weighing the Colonel’s “observations” against Willoughby’s obtuseness. More important, she
goes on by asking Willoughby to accept responsibility for his feelings by declaring their cause. But Willoughby will not speak for himself honestly. At first he simply reverts to the kind of antithesis and generalization that he employed earlier to censure Colonel Brandon:

"I do not dislike him. I consider him, on the contrary, as a very respectable man, who has every body's good word and nobody's notice; who has more money than he can spend, more time than he knows how to employ, and two new coats every year."

Halfway through, though, Willoughby abandons his previous methods for a climactic series to show his disdain. Yet if he were to arrive at a serious climax after what Elinor has said, Willoughby might justify her attack by betraying too much feeling. So he expresses his detachment by the bathetically particular close, which suspends his rhetoric between a witty joke and a disagreeable sneer. Marianne can command no such finesse. She simply heaps up conceptual terms that designate emotion because she is convinced that feeling alone has value: "Add to which , that he has neither genius, taste, nor spirit. That his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression." Her final phrase rings with irony only for us; for her it is truly climactic, a fit indictment of Colonel Brandon's lackluster personality. In short, Marianne's feelings engage her completely, and her essential difference from Willoughby comes clear again.

Elinor cannot combat emotions of this order with mere argument:

"You decide on his imperfections so much in the mass and so much on the strength of your own imagination, that the commendation I am able to give of him is comparatively cold and insipid. I can only pronounce him to be a sensible man, well-bred, well-informed, of gentle address, and I believe possessing an amiable heart."

She may cite the main errors of Marianne and Willoughby once more: "mass" perhaps refers to their intense rhetoric, espe-
cially their series, and "imagination" suggests that their judgment is illogical. But Elinor's reason has made no headway against her opponents, so she ends—with conscious irony—by shaping an explicitly personal judgment in a series of her own. Willoughby pounces on Elinor's opinion, first professing to find a slight breach of decorum in it, but then pretending, like a true gallant, to overlook the breach by exaggerating his own willfulness:

"Miss Dashwood . . . you are now using me unkindly. You are endeavouring to disarm me by reason, and to convince me against my will. But it will not do. You shall find me as stubborn as you can be artful. I have three unanswerable reasons for disliking Colonel Brandon: he has threatened me with rain when I wanted it to be fine; he has found fault with the hanging of my curricle, and I cannot persuade him to buy my brown mare. If it will be any satisfaction to you, however, to be told, that I believe his character to be in other respects irreproachable, I am ready to confess it. And in return for an acknowledgment, which must give me some pain, you cannot deny me the privilege of disliking him as much as ever."

His exaggerated antitheses now seem designed to mock his emotion. But only in parody will he state his real feelings about Colonel Brandon, which is not to bear their moral weight. If Willoughby assumes the role of a social hero who will sacrifice himself for the comfort of a lady, yet his rhetoric derides the distinctions of reason throughout the passage.

The conversation itself generates a sense of speed which verbal analysis of this sort pretty mercilessly destroys, a sense that arises from one person putting the previous speaker's words or structure to a new use. But the dancelike movement, if it can be called that, is rigidly patterned: the dancers go through a series of prescribed groupings rather than improvise fluently. Although this first dialogue is the more brilliant, the second (pp. 288–90) is less mechanical, dramatizing the gravely restrained emotions of Elinor and Edward. Again an absent Colonel Brandon serves as the metaphoric vehicle by which deep personal feelings may be obliquely expressed. He has commissioned Elinor to present the living of Delaford to Edward, so she finds herself
in the predicament of offering the man she loves the means to marry Lucy. Edward, of course, has been avoiding Elinor since the publication of his engagement, and when he learns of the Colonel's plan from her, he becomes convinced that she must have an understanding of some sort with his patron.

At the start of their talk, however, he has simply dropped in to say goodbye, embarrassment at his own situation halting his delivery:

"Mrs. Jennings told me that you wished to speak with me, at least I understood her so—or I certainly should not have intruded though at the same time, I should have been extremely sorry to leave London without seeing you and your sister; especially as it will most likely be some time—it is not probable that I should soon have the pleasure of meeting you again."

In spite of his shyness, Edward wants 'extremely sorry' to prove his special interest in Elinor, though he also mentions "your sister" so as not to offend. And his personal regret lies even nearer the surface in the colloquial "it will most likely," too near, he evidently feels, for he replaces it with the more formal, more firmly general "it is not probable."

Elinor also defines her feeling by what she excludes, striving to appear impersonal in her remarks. At first she does so, following Edward's cue, by the "our" and 'we' that seem to speak for Marianne as well as herself; in similar fashion, the phrase "good wishes" suggests an emotional temperature suitable to friendship and no more:

"You would not have gone, however, without receiving our good wishes, even if we had not been able to give them in person. Mrs. Jennings was quite right in what she said. I am charged with a most agreeable office, (breathing rather faster than usual as she spoke,) Colonel Brandon has desired me to say that he has great pleasure in offering you the living of Delaford. Allow me to congratulate you on having so respectable and well-judging a friend, and to join in his wish that the living were much more considerable, and such as might better enable you to—as might be more than a temporary accommodation to yourself—such, in short, as might establish all your views of happiness."
Although she makes a gesture of putting Edward at ease by verifying Mrs. Jennings' statement, Elinor immediately withdraws even further, into the anonymity of an "office." Naturally she has to call it a "most agreeable" one because everyone must pretend that Edward knows what he is about with Lucy; but, much more important, by transforming herself into a mere agent, Elinor can tender the living without being thought to comment herself in any way on Edward's engagement. All the emotions behind the offer belong explicitly to the Colonel; for her part, Elinor will only "join in his wish." Since good breeding demands some expression of feeling, however, she brings herself to congratulate Edward on his "friend," not on his good fortune (which might come too close to Lucy), nor, of course, on his fiancée. She stumbles so at the end, I suspect, less because she despises Lucy than because to speak the word "engagement" would bring her own emotional relationship with Edward too directly into the open. Her desperate evasions all the way through betray her real passion.

Edward responds with two words—"Colonel Brandon!"—which are highly ambiguous. Perhaps they merely repeat the name of an unexpected benefactor. Or maybe they express a conviction—tinged with surprise? with regret?—that Elinor has urged Colonel Brandon to the act, which raises all sorts of doubts about her present feelings for Edward himself. Or possibly they signal a dawning suspicion on his part of an intimacy between her and the Colonel. Elinor sets out to be impersonal again in her reply, but her sympathy can be detected in the emotional terms with which she describes Edward's position:

"Yes. Colonel Brandon means it as a testimony of his concern for what has lately passed—for the cruel situation in which the unjustifiable conduct of your family has placed you—a concern which I am sure Marianne, myself, and all your friends must share; and likewise as a proof of his high esteem for your general character, and his particular approbation of your behaviour on the present occasion."

And she is aware that her feelings show, for she hurries on to
make the “concern” a general one and to bury herself in the category of “friends.” Yet we may question whether Elinor succeeds in obliterating herself completely in her conclusion. Of course, she again ascribes the praise to Colonel Brandon, and it is moral praise, thus not dangerously private in its emotion, whoever may be its source. But in the zealous approval of Edward’s stand against his family is there not a hint of Elinor’s own contempt for the family which has disapproved of a match between Edward and herself?

However this may be, Edward’s answer—“Colonel Brandon give me a living!—Can it be possible?”—sets up the same reverberations as before, ranging from sheer surprise to a suspicion that Elinor is close to Colonel Brandon. This time her response obviously transcends her “office”: “The unkindness of your own relations has made you astonished to find friendship anywhere.” Though her phrasing is impersonal and though she still mentions “friendship,” only keen sympathy could make such a remark possible. Edward senses this and tries to break through to her personal feelings: “No not to find it in you; for I cannot be ignorant that to you, to your goodness I owe it all.—I feel it—I would express it if I could—but, as you well know, I am no orator.” His emphatic “you” is instinct with emotion, even if he somewhat weakens its force in going on to speak of her as his benefactor rather than his beloved. Moreover, Edward refers directly to his own feelings, though denying his ability to “express” them.

Elinor tries to escape involvement by stepping back toward her earlier role, and on the surface, at least, she is successful:

“You are very much mistaken. I do assure you that you owe it entirely, at least almost entirely, to your own merit, and Colonel Brandon’s discernment of it. I have had no hand in it. I did not even know that the living was vacant . . . As a friend of mine, of my family, he may perhaps—indeed I know he has, still greater pleasure in bestowing it; but, upon my word, you owe nothing to my solicitation.”

Ironically enough, however, her most positive confession of re-
ward for Edward lurks behind her talk of the Colonel's pleasure in befriending the Dashwoods: Elinor's logic can only be that Colonel Brandon owes his good opinion of Edward to her family and herself. But Edward sees no further than the surface, which probably contributed to fix that suspicion in his mind which had recently entered it. finally, and as if it were rather an effort, he said, "Colonel Brandon seems a man of great worth and respectability. I have always heard him spoken of as such, and your brother I know esteems him highly. He is undoubtedly a sensible man, and in his manners perfectly the gentleman."

At first glance he seems simply to reflect on the character of his good Samaritan and perhaps to compliment Elinor on having such a man for a friend. Actually he is bringing himself—in hopes of pleasing Elinor—to praise the man whom he believes she has chosen to love instead of himself. After all, Edward has heard her deny his own plea for personal feeling by admiring Colonel Brandon.

Presuming now that she is to marry the Colonel, Edward completely mistakes her reply:

"Indeed I believe that you will find him, on farther acquaintance, all that you have heard him to be; and as you will be such very near neighbours, (for I understand the parsonage is almost close to the mansion-house,) it is particularly important that he should be all this."

He interprets her meticulousness in referring to Colonel Brandon alone to be a sign that she has so entirely rejected himself (and his future wife) as to forbid him her presence. In the same way, Elinor's insistence that the Colonel "should be all this" seems to command Edward to take over a favorable opinion of his patron. And for her to recall the nearness of the "parsonage" to the "mansion-house" must appear to Edward a gratuitous cruelty. From his point of view there is indeed nothing left for him to do but leave Elinor and go to thank Colonel Brandon.

Most of these motives that I have been spelling out are
intuited readily enough, of course, by anyone who reads *Sense and Sensibility*. But translating the dialogue in such detail seems the only way of showing precisely how Jane Austen manages, even in this early novel, to communicate urgent emotional tensions within a superficially narrow tonal range. At any rate, the scene between Elinor and Edward proves that the very restraint of language—when the characters speak impersonally or decorously about a particular situation—may itself be a device for intensification. In proving this, the scene again reflects the theme of the novel, that sense and sensibility must intertwine, and warns us to keep a sharp lookout for similar effects, or more subtle ones, in the novels to come.

1. One symptom of Jane Austen's immaturity in the matter of point of view is that her manipulation of it sometimes produces narrative effects which are highly suspect, to say the least. What are we to make of that curious passage in which we are transferred into the mind of Mrs. Jennings while Elinor and Colonel Brandon, as we later learn, discuss the offer of a living to Edward Ferrars (pp. 280–82)? If we are meant to share momentarily Mrs. Jennings' supposition that the Colonel is courting Elinor, the less likely alternative, surely Jane Austen should sustain the ambiguity longer. But if, as seems much more probable, she designs the shift in point of view to make us laugh at Mrs. Jennings' absurd speculation, surely the old lady's foibles have been sufficiently underlined earlier—and to tease the joke through ten pages is nearly tedious. Also dubious is the novel's climax, where we learn with Elinor of Lucy Steele's marriage to a Mr. Ferrars, but it turns out to be Robert, not Edward: the final effect is less dramatic than coy.

2. In my opinion, several critics have been misled by the major emphasis on Elinor's sense to interpret the novel as rejecting all emotion. Thus Marvin Mudrick, who puts the case most forcefully, finds the author contending that "Not merely false feeling, but feeling itself, is bad . . . , because it is a personal commitment" (*Jane Austen*, pp. 90–91). But I think the novel differentiates more firmly between excessive and appropriate emotion than the critic will allow. Surely the speech about "duty" just cited insists that Elinor's sense of what is proper is deeply informed by her feeling, that she makes an intensely "personal commitment." Mudrick is hampered, to my mind, by his reluctance to concede that one may express personal emotion in adhering to social forms—or even that these forms may have any meaningful content. The split that he assumes between private and social code lurks behind a remark like "Elinor has misgivings about Willoughby, but they exclusively concern his failure to attend to social forms" (p. 83). Yet the
implicit distinction here between a personal and a social judgment would be inconceivable to Elinor—and in the world of the novel.

3. Colonel Brandon's most interesting variation of his technique, or violation of it, occurs when he tells Elinor about the seducing of his ward by Willoughby (pp. 204-10). Although the Colonel's emotions lead him into one of his typical verbal morasses at the outset, and though he periodically lunges at the cloak of decorum with explanations like "I will be more collected," most of his remarks beg openly for tears: indeed Jane Austen has him describing such items as a "spunging-house," a former beloved "in the last stage of a consumption," and "a little girl, the off-spring of her first guilty connection" in the sort of stock rhetoric and trite language that she could ridicule unmercifully in the Juvenilia. I think we may fairly wonder whether these verbal monstrosities really represent the flowering of Colonel Brandon's personality—in which case we can be thankful that we hear no more from him than we do—or a collection of pressures on Jane Austen. It seems to me that the latter is more likely, that she temporarily forces him out of character, making him abandon his habitual retreat to the decorum of silence so that he can speak in behalf of the novel. For the course of Sense and Sensibility demands that Willoughby's past come clear; Colonel Brandon is the only character in anything like a position to tell a story of this sort; and I suspect that Jane Austen, in her inexperience, felt it necessary to treat such a revelation in absolutely unambiguous moral terms—though the result here is stylistically gross. This is the kind of overeagerness, I think, that we have seen before: when Jane Austen shifts our point of view to make fun of Mrs. Jennings or underlines the irony at Elinor's excessive feeling.

4. A distinction such as I have suggested between the use of figurative language by Marianne and by Willoughby appears as well in Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, where he sustains it to dramatize a similar clash of personality: between Clarissa, who is always in the grip of her ideals, speaks her figures from the bottom of her heart, and Lovelace, who is playing a part and remains in control of his figures. But I doubt that one should think of this as a technical device which Jane Austen discovered while reading Richardson and later employed herself. Rather, it seems to me the sort of dramatic vehicle that any author might happen on when imagining his characters intensively. Of course, Willoughby does strike one as deriving, at some remove, from Lovelace, but Marianne and Clarissa feel worlds apart. If it is true that Jane Austen should be regarded as a distant follower of Richardson in treating to some extent the interior of personality, still the novels of the two create radically different impressions. Richardson proceeds—and no one can doubt the power of the method—by suffocating the reader through enveloping him in the minutest details of personality and event; Jane Austen keeps us further off from her characters, even those with whom her point of view identifies us, and the air is always plentiful, its temperature more various.

5. Mary Lascelles has noted that for the type of the parenthetical
intrusion here—"(breathing rather faster than usual as she spoke.)"—Jane Austen is ultimately indebted to Samuel Richardson, who discovered that "a parenthetical phrase, most often built upon a present participle, if introduced abruptly into the midst of a speech ... gives the air of eyewitness" (Jane Austen, p. 110). According to the critic, this trick was also taken over by Fanny Burney and Boswell.