

Sense and Sensibility Notes

Session 2

Housekeeping:

- Ask participants to introduce themselves and wear a name tag if they have one
 - Ask those participants without an email address to see me afterwards please.
-

Three main periods can be traced in Austen's writing career.

1. Austen's early writings: [1795 – 1798]

We know she wrote skits and amusing short plays as entertainment for her family, but she began to write productively and attempting the longer novel form, in the three years after she turned 20. These were three very productive creative years although these early drafts of what would become her later novels remained unpublished.

- a. 1795 writing "Elinor and Marianne" "The Middle Years" which became *Sense and Sensibility*. She is 20 years old
- b. 1796 – 7 Writing "First Impressions" i.e. *Pride and Prejudice*, she is 21 -22 years old
- c. 1798 Writing "Susan" - later *Northanger Abbey* She is 23 years old .

2. The Middle years [1801 – 1809]

- a. Ten years pass without any success . Family leaves the Steventon Rectory and moves to Bath. Her six brothers are settled in their careers or well started upon them . Only Jane and Cassandra remain unmarried and living with their parents.

3. . In 1803 her father attempts to have *Susan* published but it is rejected.

- a. While it is assumed she kept reworking the early drafts or writing other pieces, nothing emerges from this period.
 - i. Was she discouraged by the rejection of her early novel?
 - ii. After her father's death in 1804 the family moves into a period of increasing hardship. Mr Austen had no large fortune to speak of which may explain why the girls could not marry as neither would have had even middling dowries. Over the next two years the family moves house in Bath several times into increasingly shabby rentals. They leave Bath and move to Southampton, an unglamorous port town, where one brother takes them in to his small house.
 - iii. This period contrasts with her early days in Steventon where they were accepted as part of the County Gentry in the area.

- iv. Did the hardships she experienced leave Austen with no time or inclination to write during this period?

4. The Late Creative Period [1809 – 1817]

- In 1809 Jane, her sister, mother and a female friend move back to Hampshire. Her eldest brother, who inherited a very grand estate as heir to his uncle, invited them to live in the Bailiff's cottage on his estate. This comfortable home remained theirs for the duration of the Austen family's lives and maybe gave Jane the security and comfort she needed to get back to serious editing and writing.
- While they were not wealthy, they were able to maintain a satisfactory life style on the fringes of the County Gentry. This included the employment of at least three servants to maintain the household.

During this period the six novels for which she became well known were published.

1811: *Sense and Sensibility* revised from the old Elinor and Marianne drafts and published.

1811 -13 Writing *Mansfield Park*

1813 *Pride and Prejudice*, revised from the old 'First Impressions " draft and published.

1814 *Mansfield Park* published

1815 -1816 Writing *Emma*

1815 -1816 Writing *Persuasion*

1816 *Emma* published

1817 Jane Austen dies.

1818 *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* published together posthumously

Discussion:

Could you select a character from the novel that has engaged you in some way and share this with the group?

It can be a major or minor, or nasty or nice character.

What are the main issues Austen is raising in *Sense and sensibility*?

1 . It's all about marriage for women.

- a. The dowry system blights many women's chances
- b. Rich widows are the only really independent and secure women

- c. Marriage is a contract for many in these times. Younger sons looking for a woman with a large dowry and women looking for a man with an estate and income that will give them life security
- d. Love is an afterthought? Only one pair in the novel appear to marry for love: Elinor and Edward Ferrars. However, the other couples accept 2nd best yet still seem to be able to get along: Willoughby and Sophia; Marianne and Colonel Brandon.
- e. What about love rats?: those men and women who deceive their lovers and even bring about their ruin?
 - i. Lucy and Robert Ferrars?
 - ii. Willoughby? Why was Elinor eventually sympathetic to him? Do you agree?
 - iii. Was Colonel Brandon the opposite of a love rat?

2. Sense or sensibility? This was a big public debate around 1790s -1800s

- a. Is it better to be rational, discrete and hiding your feelings like Elinor or emotional, self-obsessed and open about your opinions and feelings like Marianne? What does Austen think?

If we have time we may watch an excerpt from the 1995 film starring Hugh Grant as Edward Ferrars, Alan Rickman as Colonel Brandon; and Greg Wise as the perfidious Willoughby.

Emma Thompson as Elinor and Kate Winslet as Marianne held the film together.

Some great performances by some of the minor characters - Mrs Jennings [Elizabeth Spriggs] Mr Palmer [Hugh Laurie]

However, for me, the film failed to capture the nuances of character and ideas in the novel.

April Program

- Watch the 2nd half of film, Sense and Sensibility. Any comments? Compared to the novel?
- How similar or different are Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice. Their first drafts were both written during Austen's early creative period [1795 – 1797]. Does Austen's message change in Pride and Prejudice?
- Did Austen write the same novel six times? Maybe we should hold judgment on this till the end of the series? Keep it in mind.

Meg Dillon

March 2023