



Sense and Sensibility--Annotated, with Commentary (Literature in Its Context: Annotations & Commentary)

Jane Austen

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BookDoors' SENSE AND SENSIBILITY is the most richly annotated edition of Jane Austen's novel available in print or online. Designed as an ebook, this and the other "In Context" editions of the Austen novels offer you swift, seamless access to information and commentary.

The modest price underscores BookDoors' mission (please see bookdoors.com) to make these works accessible to an audience of widely different experience and expectations. The "Literature in Its Context" series aspires to provide today's reader with the knowledge an informed reader of 1815 possessed and that Austen took for granted. As you read you'll have, should you wish, an interpretive discussion of SENSE AND SENSIBILITY. You'll also find illustrations, an Austen Glossary of some 1000 words, a time-line that includes cultural, scientific, and technological developments between 1770-1817, a select bibliography, and a brief biography of Austen.

Austen writes in EMMA that "Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken." That's true of Sense and Sensibility as well, and now, nearly two centuries later, "a little mistaken" and "a little disguised" understate the challenge.

At a basic level SENSE AND SENSIBILITY'S diction can be obscure, for words themselves have changed or disappeared. This edition defines words and phrases such as "demesne," "knowing gigs," "candour" (not at all as we use it), "jointure," "hanger," "cottage" (perhaps not our notion), "sublime," "Epicurism," and "glebe."

A second order of annotation explains the historical and the cultural background in which Austen roots the novel. Money, inheritance (primogeniture, entail, and jointure), and the extent and nature of the country estate are central to the novel. When Austen refers to a young woman's possessing £50,000 or to how expensive it is to keep a horse, it's important to know how much the former is worth in today's dollars and what it could buy then in the way of goods and labor. Similarly, when she refers to "enclosure," we benefit from knowing what that meant to the gentry and to the agricultural laborer. As we do from knowing what Austen means by the Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, the chief aesthetic touchstones of the day. Some in the novel rank and judge their own and others' sensibility (as we may by the pre-sets on a car radio) by their responses to those categories when found in nature or architecture.

A third level of commentary addresses SENSE AND SENSIBILITY as a work of the literary imagination. Central are the title's two terms, each represented by a sister, each opposed when, ideally, they should be complementary. One sister embodies a conventional morality, manners, and prudent conduct; the other is fiercely individualistic and, in the complex sense, "Romantic." Austen questions Romanticism while also recognizing that it provides a desirable infusion of sincere passion into a cold, mannered, class-bound society.

In the novel's background are several painful relationships, two sexual and mentally destabilizing.

Omnipresent is Austen's insight into the relations between marriage and money, complicated by the involvement of parents or guardians. Incidentally, the annotations discuss the novel as you read, never divulging or anticipating the plot yet to unfold.

Austen writes of one of her protagonists, Emma, what's true of all: their two supreme moral strengths are discernment (to see what's actually there) and judgment (what to make of what's there). Austen expects no less from her readers, but promises that the reward for our keener, braver discernment will be our far greater pleasure.

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