

The Social Status and Adherence of Characters to Social Norms in Sense and Sensibility a Novel by Jane Austen

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* depends upon social status and the adherence of characters to these social norms. Edward Ferrars is presented as a man of virtue and quaintness, a perfect companion to the narrator's beloved character Elinor, who is the embodiment of sense. The novel is presented in favor of Elinor's character, and this leads us to see Edward in a positive light due to their involvement. Edward, despite his mistakes, was a man who was trapped between societal duty and the path his heart wanted. While under the same circumstances, Willoughby broke Marianne's heart but was ultimately much more vicious in his actions and intentions than Edward Ferrars was.

From the beginning, Mr. Edward Ferrars is described to us as a man of good will and heart who was not entwined with the Dashwoods through any selfish intention. Edward Ferrars was not recommended to their good opinion by any peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing. His behavior gave every indication of an open, affectionate heart" (Austen, 13). The character that is being drawn out for us is one that we are being persuaded to trust, as he was not with the Dashwoods under any hidden agenda, and he was a humble man. Without the ideas of money on the back of his mind, Edward was in the company of Elinor and fell for her without any social pressure telling him he had to. He was the type, described here, that was homey and not the most charming, but he was trustworthy and kind. During our reading, we are led to believe that Edward is a good fit for Elinor, in both romance and in sense. He not only seems to understand Elinor on an intellectual or mature level, but also in the sense that he also differs from the crowd. He says in the novel: I am so foolishly shy, that I often seem negligent, when I am only kept back by my

natural awkwardness. I have frequently thought that I must have been intended by nature to be fond of low company, I am so little at my ease among strangers of gentility Austen,75)! Edward, through his use of words, says that he is not cut out for the life of high society and wishes to be alone in his own wishes and people he chooses. This is a reflection of Edward's rationale and an indicator to us for later in the story. This set up of Edward's character is what makes his story of only being engaged to Lucy out of teenage ignorance seem plausible. We are supposed to sympathize that due to one hormone-driven mistake, he has entangled himself in a web he wishes to escape. Edward himself acts like kind of man who does as he thinks he ought to do, despite his intentions and desires.

Even when wants to change his course of action, Edward was not a man or confrontation, or one to want to act in a socially deviant way. when confronted about wearing a ring that contained a lock of hair, pointed out by Marianne, "He colored very deeply, and giving a momentary glance at Elinor, replied (78). Edward was embarrassed of his situation, one that he was stuck in, and wanted more than anything to keep the favors of his love Elinor. In this scene Edward does lie, but he does it out of affection and fear that he will lose her. After the secret of his and Lucy's engagement became public and Edward had to defend himself, the narrator tells us that "He could only plead an ignorance of his own heart, and a mistaken confidence in the force of his engagement (280). Edward was a man dragged into high society who did not belong, and this is why his heart had been given to Lucy long before he knew what it meant to give it away. He professes to Elinor that he had done what he thought he had to do, especially for his young age, and what was good for his family and for himself. it was later down the road he realized that he just wanted Elinor and a simple life far more. Edward made no selfish decisions of money or of higher class, but only of where his feelings dragged him.

Contrasting with Edward is the character of Willoughby, who is solely prompted by Mariannes deathbed illness in order to re-visit his heart's "love". When he returns to Marianne and actually has to talk to Elinor, Willoughby makes up a drunken excuse as to why he had left her and acted the way he did. Neil Edward, a scholar, comments on this act and suggests a layer of fabrication to Willoughby's act. In his essay "What Edward Promises He Will Perform: How to Do Things With Words in Sense and Sensibility," the image of Edward as a man of commitment is brought to mind to compare the two. Neil Edward essentially states that through his words and promises, Willoughby had never committed himself to Elinor, but he had pretended to the way he spoke to her. His deception had fooled Marianne and bent her to his will. When it came to Edward Ferrars, he was more committed to his word and did not go out of his way to deceive with actions. Neil Edward's description of Willoughby says that "Having originally put on the sort of show he imagined Marianne would like, in this scene he is putting on melodramatic self- inculpation tailored to Elinors requirements as he cannily imagines them (Edward, 117). When he has rushed to the deathbed of his true "love Willoughby is blocked by Elinor, and therefore manifests a speech for her and that would reach her heart As he has grown up in the society that requires him to bend to its will, Willoughby is man who not only acts upon social construct, but also With the intent or personal gain. Despite his claim or love for Marianne, he never made an effort to reconcile with her or to do right by her. His compassion was lacking, even in his sloppy apology to Elinor as Marianne lays sick in bed. Neil Edwards comments on these relationships again, stating that in social contexts Edward and Marianne seem to scorn the troublesome disguises of roleplay while Willoughby and Elinor assume them, if for opposite reasons. Austen also implies that "Edward is deep, Willoughby superficial" (Edward, 9). Both in the author's influence and in our own intuition, we are supposed to see how

Willoughby is shallow for stepping into his role without question and acting solely on the grounds of personal gain. Edward, on the other hand, may have fallen into this social trap, but he had the mind to question it. Given this, we can feel satisfied in the ending that Willoughby is stuck with an unloving, miserable wife. When it comes to Edward, we feel a longing for Elinor's happiness so much that we will root for them to be together. His mistake may have caused temporary heartache for Elinor, which may leave some with a grudge, but this does not sway Elinor, the narrator's perspective, or much of the audience.

Sense and Sensibility focuses on both the logical and emotional side of the main characters of the novel. Elinor, our respected sense, falls for the quiet, uncharming Edward Ferrars. Throughout the course of the novel, we understand that despite Edward's best intentions, he had made a mistake and broke Elinor's heart. Mr. Ferrars did not intend to do anybody harm, and did not even wish to gain much for himself unlike the dreaded Willoughby. Matters of family and society had pushed and pulled Edward so, but by the end of the novel his circumstances change and allow him to follow through with his unconventional dreams. Though not completely deserving, Edward still won over Elinor and receives her hand in marriage, thus on the true path that his heart wanted to take.