

Women Characters in Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey

Laban, Andrea

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2017

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:401875>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-24**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i
književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Andrea Laban

**Ženski likovi u romanima *Razum i osjećaji* i *Northanger Abbey*
Jane Austen**

Završni rad

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2017.

Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Andrea Laban

**Ženski likovi u romanima *Razum i osjećaji* i *Northanger Abbey*
Jane Austen**

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2017.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language
and Literature and German Language and Literature

Andrea Laban

**Women Characters in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and
*Northanger Abbey***

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Associate Professor
Osijek, 2017

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of English
Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language
and Literature and German Language and Literature

Andrea Laban

**Women Characters in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and
*Northanger Abbey***

Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities
Scientific field: philology
Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Associate Professor
Osijek, 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Social Criticism in Jane Austen’s <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	2
2. Women Characters in <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	4
2.1. The Manipulative Nature of Women Characters in <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	8
3. <i>Northanger Abbey</i> as a Gothic Parody	10
4. The Portrayal of Catherine Morland and Other Women Characters in <i>Northanger Abbey</i>	11
Conclusion.....	15
Works Cited.....	16

Abstract

At the time when Jane Austen lived and worked, being a female novelist was not appreciated, therefore she never gained acknowledgment during her lifetime; nowadays, she is considered to be one of the most prominent names in English literature. She is known for her distinct social commentary, e.g. her novel *Sense and Sensibility* mirrors the patriarchal English society of the early nineteenth century and provides an impeccable insight into the position of women, who were at the time deprived of many economic and legal rights including a right to vote and a right to inherit property. *Sense and Sensibility* deals with the two confronting features of human personality, namely Sense vs. Sensibility, and indicates the importance of a proper balance between the two. Furthermore, she is notable for her wittiness and irony, which she perfectly incorporates in her works, so it is no surprise that her novels are famous worldwide and have numerous film adaptations. On the other hand, her posthumously published novel *Northanger Abbey* differs from the latter work in that it serves as a parody of the Gothic novel in which the female protagonist, Catherine Morland, embodies an atypical heroine in comparison to the ones usually present in Austen's works.

Keywords: Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, position of women, atypical heroine

Introduction

Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is a romance novel initially published anonymously under the pseudonym "A Lady." Although Austen was at the time underrated as a writer, the novel, nevertheless, achieved great commercial success. Nowadays, Austen's works enjoy immense popularity "due to her unrivalled creation of plausible characters and their idiolects, her melding of emotional analysis and psychological acuity with social satire and comedy" (Todd 144). The aim of this paper is to analyze Austen's novels *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey* in terms of female characterization as well as to provide a social and historical context of the time in order to comprehend Austen's explicit criticism of stereotypical gender roles. Chapter I of this paper will be dealing with the social context of the time in which Jane Austen lived and worked as well as the implied criticism present in *Sense and Sensibility*. Chapter II focuses on the representation of women characters in *Sense and Sensibility* with the addition of characterization of minor female characters and their manipulative nature.

Northanger Abbey (1803/1817), another Jane Austen's work, is a parody of Gothic novels and plain romances. The main features of *Northanger Abbey* as a Gothic parody will be discussed in Chapter III of this paper. The protagonist, Catherine Morland, a young countryside girl, is the embodiment of an unconventional heroine, whose excessive love of Gothic romances is ridiculed by Austen throughout the novel. Chapter IV of this paper concentrates on both Catherine Morland's personality and the characterization of other female characters with the aim of clarifying Austen's view on Gothic romances of her time.

1. Social Criticism in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

To understand Jane Austen's work, one must first be acquainted with the position of women in the early nineteenth century. There is no doubt that life was difficult for women at that time; they were subordinated to men and had extremely limited opportunities. In the so called Regency Era that started in 1811, around the time when *Sense and Sensibility* was published, there were rules of appropriate behavior prescribed for women, which only contributed to their marginalization in society. Because no formal education was expected nor desired from a young woman, they had little chance of achieving a prosperous future:

With no property of their own and little to expect through inheritance and with very restricted access to paid employment, marrying a wealthier man [was] an urgent financial necessity. Pressure to make what was called a "good" marriage could in any case be oppressive, all the more so as it was almost all that was expected of her. (Irvine 26)

One of the focal points presented in *Sense and Sensibility* is marriage. The novel begins with Elinor and Marianne as being eligible, youthful women, whose lives revolve around possible engagements, finding a future husband and eventually settling down. Their idea of marriage includes love and emotions, but there are individuals in the novel who see marriage as a means of achieving prosperity, which was a common practice in the nineteenth century. Austen exposes the true nature of marriage as an institution implicitly motivated by financial interest rather than a union idealistically motivated by love:

For the landed classes generally, and particularly for the aristocracy, marriage had traditionally been, at least in part, a means to a political or economic end. Marriage was a means of uniting, not so much two individuals, as the estates that were attached to them, and the income and political influence that went with those estates. (Irvine 24)

Austen thus criticizes avarice and hypocrisy of marriage through the character of John Willoughby. Willoughby was never truly in love with Marianne because as soon as he was disinherited by his aunt, Mrs. Smith, he realized Marianne was not wealthy enough to fulfill his greedy aspirations so he found a replacement in Miss Grey whose only asset was her material wealth. In the novel, Austen also reveals other social and cultural imperatives women

of the early nineteenth century had to deal with such as the pressure of finding a husband, female dependence on a man, lack of individuality, etc.

Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* also contains a frequent motif present in almost all of her novels – the position of women and their “place” in the society. At the time when Jane Austen lived, women were not regarded as being intellectual or intelligent enough to handle matters such as property ownership or pursuit of a career of their own. At the very beginning of the novel, Austen reflects on this aspect of women’s social position as she acquaints the reader with the law of primogeniture stating that “only the eldest son of a landowning family inherits the estate” (Irvine 6). Because of this law the women of the Dashwood family are obliged to leave the estate in Norland Park and thus forced to limit their finances to a bare minimum and find a new residence.

Moreover, Austen criticizes the pattern of a proper woman’s conduct and disagrees with the notion of an immaculate woman that was popular at time. Women were supposed to be gentle, meek, emotional, submissive and easily influenced as well as to have their “spirit humbled, heart amended, and . . . practice the civilities, the lesser duties of life” (*Sense and Sensibility* 247). On the contrary, Austen introduces the reality of a woman’s personality by depicting her both as realistic and flawed in decisions and in dealing with what life gives her:

Austen’s fictional world approximates real-life experience – the lack of absolute knowability, the necessarily futile, engagingly absurd attempts at wholly fathoming our own selves and others. By thus granting her characters a depth of human freedom, Austen forces us to become actively involved in the analysis of their psychology. (Todd 145)

As the title of the novel states, one can argue that Austen favors Sense over Sensibility and criticizes the extreme emotionality through the characterization of Marianne Dashwood. Austen proves sense to be more sensible and wiser in the long term, although she never unequivocally asserts such state of affairs. It is important to note that Austen does not implicate Sense to be devoid of Sensibility, but rather shows the reader that excessiveness in any way proves to be wrong. It is not easy to make a clear distinction and say that one is right and the other is wrong because at first glance a seemingly light novel shows more complexity and ambiguity due to the fact that “it is [the] one that is less prim and rational than many of her interpreters have supposed” (Jenkyns 200).

2. Women Characters in *Sense and Sensibility*

The novel deals with the topics of that time, such as women marrying at a young age to gain social recognition and to acquire a respectable social status. Furthermore, it deals with the notion of femininity and female psyche, showing the reader that although there existed a behavioral pattern of women as “delicate flowers,” there is more to a woman that meets the eye. The gentle exterior of female characters is often deceiving and reveals hidden passions, anxiety as well as antagonism. Female characters engage in romantic relationships and each of the protagonists exhibits a different way of dealing with the trials and tribulations present in their lives. The household of the Dashwoods includes four women: Mrs. Dashwood, Elinor, Marianne and Margaret, who altogether represent “a community of women characterized by sense, elegance, mutual affection and domestic comfort” (Tamm 2). At the beginning of the novel, the four women face a harsh reality after their father and Mrs. Dashwood’s husband dies and they have no other option than to leave their property to John Dashwood, the son from Henry’s first marriage. Even though John was instructed by his father to take care of his half-sisters’ and stepmother’s financial well-being, with the persistent pressure of his wife Fanny he eventually fails to complete his duty. The Dashwood women realize that it is solely on them to take care of their financial affairs because they cannot count on John.

The position in which the women found themselves is perplexing, and each of the women has their own way of coping with it. Marianne is concerned with the welfare of their family and Mrs. Dashwood is, although loving and nurturing, not very helpful, because she resembles her daughter in displaying excessive emotionality, which is at times desirable, but not when it comes to real-life problems which one, sooner or later, must face with:

Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister’s sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again but with the help of Elinor, who represents the Sense of their family. (*Sense and Sensibility* 8)

Mrs. Dashwood is a good-hearted, caring mother, who is genuinely interested in the well-being of her three daughters. She is as well as Marianne more of a tender soul led by her heart and emotions and not by reason. She takes good care of her daughters and wants them to be happy and find good husbands. It is important to emphasize that she is not motivated by her

interest for them to achieve financial stability, but rather wants to see them happy: “It was enough for her that he appeared to be amiable, that he loved her daughter, and that Elinor returned the partiality” (*Sense and Sensibility* 10). She is not very pragmatic, but is quite fortunate to have a daughter such as Elinor, who provides a balance between the excessive sensibilities. The character of Mrs. Dashwood differs from the ones Austen usually promotes in maternal figures: “Exceptional it may be among her works . . . while the mothers in Austen’s other novels are stupid, lazy, silly, or selfish, [Mrs. Dashwood represents] the independent-minded though romantic [character]” (Tamm 2).

Mrs. Dashwood accepts the invitation to live at Barton Cottage, which came as a blessing considering how they were treated by Fanny, who recently started “unconscionably descend[ing] upon the Dashwood estate in role of [its] new mistress” (Perkins 41). We can argue that Mrs. Dashwood’s decision was not based on reasoning and was more of an impulsive decision than an astute one. One can assume that her decision was motivated by Fanny’s general inhospitality towards the Dashwood women and the fact that she was sabotaging the relationship between her brother Edward and Elinor.

Mrs. Dashwood’s eldest daughter, Elinor, is the rational and motivational force in the Dashwood family as well as the embodiment of a true heroine. She exemplifies the “natural understanding, intelligence or a practical soundness in judgment” (Wierzbicka 373). The reader must not be mistaken to think that Austen strictly supported the notion of Sense; on the contrary, “Austen seems very keen to make clear to us that Sense does not in the least imply insensibility” (Jenkyns 203). Elinor deserves reverence and is often applauded by the readers for her behavior and way of thinking. She is always “committed to acting and speaking within the codes of politeness (or ‘civility’ or ‘propriety’)” (Irvine 55). Elinor is always finding a perfect balance between emotion and reason and often subdues her emotions by not outwardly expressing them, but rather by keeping them for herself. It is crucial to point out that she is not devoid of emotionality, but is in control of her feelings: “Her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them” (*Sense and Sensibility* 4).

Elinor is concerned for propriety and manners unlike Marianne, who is led by emotions and outwardly expresses her feelings, both good and bad. Elinor often makes apologies and tries to make allowances for her younger sister's behavior. When Marianne is upset over Willoughby's sudden departure, she disregards the rules of appropriate behavior and indulges in her sorrow by treating Mrs. Jennings rudely, despite her utmost hospitality in London:

She insults her host openly, stating that she “detest[s] cards” and would prefer to play the piano. Once again, Elinor feels the need to provide an excuse for Marianne's behavior, stating that Lady Middleton's piano is tempting because it is one of the finest. (Mosher-Knoshaug 46)

Elinor is put forward by Austen as the female role model in the novel. She is perfectly balanced in conduct, “yet her inner thoughts reveal that she is not blindly following social standards but using them to discover who she is as an individual” (Melz 3). When it comes to love, Elinor is just as composed and restrained as in everything she does in life. Upon discovering that Edward, brother of Fanny Ferrars, is engaged to Lucy Steele and that meaning no hope for their love and marriage, one might assume that this would be the point where Elinor would burst into tears. Once again, Elinor's thoughtfulness and reason come forth. Instead of selfishly revealing the truth, which would be something characteristic of Marianne, “she keeps the knowledge to herself because it would cause her mother and sister pain” (Stove 3). Edward indeed loves Elinor; even though he is Lucy's fiancé, he seems like a perfect match for her: reserved, modest and not interested in status and financial fortune. He does not approve of his family's aspirations to find a wealthy wife and scorns Fanny for her open antagonism towards Elinor. His uprightness and gentleman's code of conduct do not allow him to break off the engagement, which is one of the reasons why “Elinor respects Edward all the more when he refuses to break off his engagement to Lucy, despite being cut off by his family” (Stove 3). Elinor is always putting aside her feelings for the sake of others and the only time when she evidently displays her emotions is a joyous moment when “Edward's fiancé runs off with his brother, and he is at last free to marry [her]” (Irvine 54). Elinor is a character worthy of reader's admiration because she is strong, independent, reasonable and above all a character “whom other women should attempt to emulate” (Melz 3). “Although less exteriorized, spontaneous and apparently less ironic and charming, Elinor capture[s] the interest of readers through [her] strength of character, honesty, intelligence, reason and moral force” (Radu 5).

Marianne is Elinor's younger sister, who is the epitome of Sensibility as one of the two extremes portrayed in the novel. She is “an example of a woman who allows too much feeling to control her behavior, a way of life that can lead to social disapprobation” (Melz 3). She is unable to hide her emotions and is full of romantic idealism. Her spirit is marked by impetuosity and impulse: “It was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor, therefore, the whole task of telling lies when politeness

required it always fell” (*Sense and Sensibility* 118). She is never concerned about silly matters such as propriety and practicality and she is, unlike her sister, devoid of senses and exclusively motivated by sentiment. Her behavior is at times marked by selfishness and it is often the case that due to her sensibility she is on occasion too egocentric to see beneath the surface, especially how her sister Elinor is feeling: “What! While attending to me in all my misery, has this been on your heart? And I have reproached you for being happy!” (*Sense and Sensibility* 184).

As everything in her life is governed by impulsion, so it is the case with love as well. When she sprains her ankle during a walk with her sister, she is immediately enchanted by Willoughby, who gallantly rescues her. He appears as a romantic Prince Charming. The duo seems to have many common interests and is involved in artistic pursuits. They spend a lot of time together and by doing so disregard the rules of proper behavior. Countless hours spent together helped Marianne to fall deeply in love with Willoughby, so it is no surprise that she was devastated upon discovering that Willoughby abandoned her for another woman, namely Miss Grey, whom he decided to marry out of financial interest, after his aunt had disinherited him. Such state of affairs leads Marianne to despair and the only way to ease her pain was through her piano playing and reconstructing the things they did together: “She read nothing but what they had been used to read together, she plays over every favorite song she had been used to play to Willoughby” (*Sense and Sensibility* 59). Austen exemplifies the consequences of extreme sensitiveness when Marianne allows herself to fall ill from misery and grief:

Marianne, now looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into her chair, and Elinor, expecting every moment to see her faint, tried to screen her from the observation of others, while reviving her with lavender water . . . “Go to him, Elinor, I shall not have a moment's peace till this is explained.” (*Sense and Sensibility* 124)

At the very end, Marianne realizes the foolishness of her acts and decides to reassess her unreasonable behavior that almost led to her death. She abandons her foolish and childish views of romance-like love and decides to give Colonel Brandon a chance, for he was a man she deserved, yet towards whom she was at the beginning indifferent. One can argue that in fiction of that time “the folly of Marianne . . . have meant her ruin; but in the wiser and milder aesthetics of Jane Austen it meant merely her present heart-break, with her final happiness” (Bloom 127).

2.1. The Manipulative Nature of Women Characters in *Sense and Sensibility*

It is clear that the 1800s were a male-dominated world where women had very little power and control over their lives and individuality, but there are women in this novel who succeed in wielding power and getting their own way even within a strictly patriarchal world. Austen portrays them as being clever, authoritative, influential and deceiving. They are Lucy Steele, Fanny Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars.

Lucy Steele is an example of how goals can be achieved with the power of persistence and determination, even though Lucy's ultimate goals are not worthy of admiration. Her beauty is undeniable, but her character is far from beautiful. She is self-concerned and heartless; a woman for whom to achieve financial security is of greatest importance, while love is at the bottom of her list. She is not remotely interested in anything Edward can provide except financial gain because her only purpose is "to marry as well as possible" (Copeland and McMaster 45), and that is why she has a sudden change of hearts when Edward gets disinherited. Without any scruples whatsoever, Lucy begins a relationship with Robert, Edward's brother, who represents a chance of climbing up the social ladder and accomplishing her superficial goals. She is in many ways similar to Willoughby, who is also only interested in his own well-being. Lucy Steele is not a representative of a moral or admirable character. Nevertheless, in the end she attains her aims owing to her success of manipulation and her "calculating approach to life" (Copeland and McMaster 45).

Another woman in the series of manipulative female forces is Fanny Dashwood. Fanny is a truly greedy character whose manipulation culminates when she succeeds in persuading her husband not to give any money to his half-sisters and stepmother: "From the extraordinary duty laid on him by his father, to look after the financial well-being of Mrs. Dashwood and the girls, John, encouraged by his wife Fanny, retreats" (Irvine 54). Fortune and status represent Fanny's biggest concerns so it is not surprising that she does not approve of Edward and Elinor's relationship due to the fact that Elinor is not wealthy enough for her brother to marry. She exerts her power to such an extent that she becomes "the mistress of Norland, and Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters became mere guests" (Irvine 54).

Mrs. Ferrars, a cantankerous and irascible woman, as well as the mother of Edward, Fanny and Robert, has great authority over her children and is even more avaricious than Fanny. Unlike Mrs. Dashwood, she is not concerned with the happiness of her children, but prioritizes an affluent marriage for them, from which she would benefit financially. Upon discovering that Edward and Lucy are engaged, she thoughtlessly disinherits him, thus

exercising her power. It is important to note that Mrs. Ferrars' power is limited to determining the inheritance of her children, but her power does not extend to them fulfilling her wishes because in the end both of her sons end up impeding her aspirations. Surely, one can conclude that she is not a positive character in the novel and "with her actions and overall behavior [one] despises and shrinks from the elder Mrs. Ferrars, with her pride, ill-nature, and narrow mind" (Bloom 123).

3. *Northanger Abbey* as a Gothic Parody

Northanger Abbey is regarded as one of the most popular Gothic satires that parodies “novels of highly wrought mystery” (Bloom 75). It is one of Austen’s earliest works written in 1803, yet published posthumously in 1817. *Northanger Abbey* is not like any other work written by Austen because it portrays an unusual heroine devoid of all virtues a classic heroine should possess. With her unusual heroine and obvious irony, Austen wanted to depict “the corrosive effect on the leisured classes, especially on women” (Jenkyns 127). A satirical tone is present from the very beginning of the novel as well as the fact that the reader is dealing with the antithesis of a heroine. Catherine is not clever, appealing, gentle or fearful. She is humorously rendered as an anti-heroine with the purpose of mocking the Gothic genre. Her portrayal in the simplest terms serves to depict her as being ordinary and exhibiting un-heroic characteristics in the role of a heroine: “She is not prodigiously clever as a child, not strikingly pretty as an adolescent; not at all wicked, but not very well behaved either” (*Northanger Abbey* 45).

At the time when Austen wrote her work, Gothic novels were immensely popular and generally written and read by women. Austen considered Gothic novels to be trivial and evoking elementary emotions such as fear and horror. She wanted to show their impact on the reader with their fictitious nature. Furthermore, she wanted to indicate that young female readers could mistake fiction for reality and can easily be influenced by Gothic romances:

But the serious charge against the Gothic novel here is that its largely young and inexperienced female readership will take the dangers and horrors it portrays as representations of the real world rather than as a set of novelistic conventions; they will accordingly misread their actual circumstances in accordance with those conventions and fail to understand the “common life” around them. (Irvine 46)

4. The Portrayal of Catherine Morland and Other Women Characters in *Northanger Abbey*

Catherine Morland is the protagonist of the novel whose love of Gothic romances encourages her imagination to run wild. She is a young, rural seventeen-year-old girl whose personality is marked by gullibility, innocence and foolishness. Catherine's physical appearance and her psychological characteristics render her as atypical in every sense. She had a "thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without color, dark lank hair, and strong features" (*Northanger Abbey* 164). Not only is Catherine an unusual heroine, but she is also an unconventional female character. She is somewhat boyish and represents Austen's apparent resistance to female uniformity: "Catherine was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket . . . to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush" (*Northanger Abbey* 5). Through the depiction of Catherine, Austen is mocking literary conventions of the Gothic genre "especially, Ann Radcliffe and her many imitators" (Irvine 46).

At the beginning of the novel, Catherine leaves her family in Fullerton to go to Bath with Mr. and Mrs. Allen, a prosperous family with no children. Catherine is delighted to visit Bath in order to change scenery and for the first time leaves her home in the countryside for a prolonged period of time. She is soon acquainted with the beautiful resort town where she is attending balls and getting to know the glamorous social world. Catherine meets many new people in Bath and among them, at one of the gatherings, she is charmed by Henry Tilney, a young clergyman who delights her with his wittiness and charm: "He seemed to be about four or five and twenty, was rather tall, had a pleasant countenance, a very intelligent and lively eye, and, if not quite handsome, was very near it" (*Northanger Abbey* 25).

As Catherine's relationship with Henry progresses, she is soon, unknowingly, invited by his father General Tilney to Northanger Abbey under false pretences: "This seems a generous gesture, but it turns out that John Thorpe has told the General that Catherine is rich, and for this reason he is eager that his son should marry her" (Irvine 45). Despite her naiveté, Catherine is able to recognize the true personality of John, whom she immediately finds abhorrent, even before he and Isabella try to deceive her with the attempt of thwarting her meeting with Henry:

“For, as we turned into Broad Street, I saw them — does he not drive a phaeton with bright chestnuts?” “I do not know indeed.” “Yes, I know he does; I saw him. You are talking of the man you danced with last night, are not you?” “Yes.” “Well, I saw him at that moment turn up the Lansdown Road, driving a smart-looking girl.” (*Northanger Abbey* 92)

The second section of the novel takes part in *Northanger Abbey*, which enables Catherine’s aspirations of becoming a Gothic heroine to come true. Owing to her imaginative spirit, *Northanger Abbey* proves to be a fruitful ground for fabricated events with its mystical appearance resembling to settings of Gothic romances, which she so vigorously indulges in. Being rather unexperienced, she perceives real people as the characters in Gothic novels:

The possibility that the female reader might interpret reality through the categories of the Gothic novel is most obviously raised once Catherine arrives at *Northanger Abbey* itself. Old religious houses, like castles, being a characteristic setting for abduction, incarceration and murder in the genre. (Irvine 46)

Catherine's love for Gothic fiction reaches its peak during her stay at the Tilney residence, where it is evident just how much overactive her ability to make faulty assumptions is. Catherine becomes the victim of her own fantasy world to the extent that she evokes fear and horror where there are not any. She accuses General Tilney of either killing or confining his wife somewhere, which elicits a strong response from Henry, who tries to bring her to reason:

Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? ... Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (*Northanger Abbey* 108)

Catherine persists in plotting a Gothic romance while staying in *Northanger Abbey*, so wherever she finds a remotely mysterious object, she ponders on the possibility of finding bones or even the late Mrs. Tilney. She asks herself “What can it hold? Why should it be placed here? Pushed back too, as if meant to be out of sight!” (*Northanger Abbey* 179). The reader almost feels suspense and terror as if reading a true Gothic novel, but after all this is a mockery of the genre and Austen quickly reveals the humor behind it when Catherine finds nothing unusual or even slightly mystical about the chest, which only contained “a white

cotton counterpane, properly folded, reposing at one end of the chest” (*Northanger Abbey* 181).

Catherine is not only unable to differentiate fiction from reality, but she is also a poor judge of character. She befriends Isabella Thorpe, a cunning and deceiving young woman, who is in many ways similar to Fanny Dashwood from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, whose mutual goals are financial gain and finding an affluent husband at any cost. Their friendship is “mediated by the novels that they read, [but] should not necessarily be read as a signifier of the friendship’s shallowness” (Irvine 52). Catherine perceives Isabella as a genuine friend and fails to realize her true intentions. Isabella’s friendship has a hidden motive and that is getting close to her brother James, whom she found eligible to fulfill her frivolous endeavors. When Isabella openly refers to Catherine’s fondness of the Tilneys in front of James, according to Irvine, Catherine [perceived it as] a failure to enact the reciprocal pleasure-giving essential to polite discourse (52).

Unlike her friendship with Isabella Thorpe, Catherine’s friendship with Eleanor Tilney differs greatly. Eleanor “had a very agreeable countenance . . . and her air, though it had not all the decided pretension, the resolute stylishness of Miss Thorpe's, had more real elegance” (*Northanger Abbey* 29). Eleanor's personality varies from Isabella's; firstly, she has manners and is not eager to find an affluent husband. At the very beginning, it seems that Catherine wanted to befriend Eleanor for the same reason Isabella befriended her, to get close to her brother: “Catherine, interested at once by her appearance and her relationship to Mr. Tilney, was desirous of being acquainted with her and readily talked therefore whenever she could think of anything to say, and had courage and leisure for saying it” (*Northanger Abbey* 29). Their friendship evolved with time and in the end turned out to be “a contrastingly sincere and selfless female friendship” (Irvine 52).

Catherine is a character who is inexperienced and gullible in perceiving the world around her. Although ridiculed and exaggerated in her foolishness, Catherine is not a passive character. She gradually develops from an innocent, naive girl to a more mature person who becomes better at distinguishing people’s intentions and eventually realizes her foolish ways. Catherine achieves it with the help of Henry who “is the guide that Catherine needs in the new social world she finds herself in, and [whose] ability to instruct her is a large part of his appropriateness as her eventual husband” (Irvine 51). Henry functions as “lover mentor” (Irvine 51) and has authority as a tutor by instructing Catherine on the rules of appropriate language:

He is forever finding fault with me, for some incorrectness of language, and now he is taking the same liberty with you. The word “nicest,” as you use it, did not suit him; and you had better change it as soon as you can, or you shall be overpowered with Johnson and Blair all the rest of the way. (*Northanger Abbey* 60)

It is indisputable that Catherine differs from other Austen’s characters. Catherine’s portrayal can be analyzed in terms of evident mockery of the Gothic genre, because she is an unconventional heroine, and as Austen’s disagreement with female conformity due to Catherine’s portrayal as an unlikely female character. She does not have the necessary intelligence, wisdom or experience at the beginning, but despite her failures and at times poor judgment, she matures as a character and eventually finds happiness the same way as other Austen’s characters, married to the man she loves.

Conclusion

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel that deals with the difficult position of women in the nineteenth century and their restricted opportunities in achieving a promising future that was solely feasible by means of a wealthy marriage. Primarily, it speaks of two sides of human character by presenting the two extremes, namely Sense vs. Sensibility in form of Elinor as the former and Marianne as the latter. By depicting them, Austen shows the negative sides of inordinate emotionality, but at the same time does not explicitly label either as being good or bad, but rather accentuates the equilibrium between the two. *Northanger Abbey* is a parody of the Gothic novel that portrays a young girl as a Gothic heroine, who exhibits none of the ordinary characteristics of any kind of a heroine one is familiar with, with the attempt of mocking the widely popular Gothic novels of Austen's time. Austen humorously portrays the "corrosive effect" (Jenkyns 127) romances can have on a young, excessively imaginative girl's mind. In the end, Austen's anti-heroine is not punished for her foolishness, but rather evolves and becomes much better at discerning character. Conclusively, her kindness and integrity gain Henry's affection and assure her a happy marriage with a man whom she was fond of from the very beginning.

Works Cited

- Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Penguin Books, 2006.
- Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. Penguin Books, 2008.
- Bloom, Harold. *Bloom's Classic Critical Views: Jane Austen*. Yale University Press, 2008.
- Copeland, Edward and McMaster, Juliet. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Irvine, Robert P. *Routledge Guides to Literature: Jane Austen*. Routledge, 2005.
- Jenkyns, Richard. *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Melz, Sarah. "Ideal Gender Roles and Individual Self-Expression in the Novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*." *Mospace*, <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10355/10691>. Accessed 29 June 2017.
- Perkins, Moreland *Reshaping the Sexes in Sense and Sensibility*. University of Virginia Press, 1998.
- Tamm, Merike. "Performing Heroicism in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, vol. 15, 1979, pp. 396-407.
- Todd, Janet. *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Stove, Juliet. "Instruction with Amusement: Jane Austen's Women of Sense." *Renascence* vol. 60, no.1, 2007, pp. 3-16.
- Mosher-Knoshaug, Jessica M. "From Weakness to Wisdom: Jane Austen Transforms the Female of Sensibility Tradition." MA thesis, Oregon State University, 1999.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. *Experience, Evidence, and Sense: The Hidden Cultural Legacy of English*. Oxford University Press, 2010.