Let me sample the evidence for Jane Austen's undermining of her own antithesis in *Sense and Sensibility*. I must say right off that the effect has not gone unnoticed: indeed almost every critic comments on it. I only mean to add some detail.

The only real peripety of the book is Marianne's marriage to Colonel Brandon, the man who is early on set beyond the pale of love because he wears a flannel waistcoat for his rheumatism and who is then made the butt of her and Willoughby's jejune prejudice. Some readers have thought that it is a second and gratuitous betrayal of Marianne to match her with the subdued Colonel (Mudrick in Watt 1963). But the outcome is clear from his first entrance. At least, and this is the delightful fact, it is clear to Mrs. Jennings, a goodhearted but crude and foolish comic figure, who seems nonetheless to see truths early. By merely scattering the shot of their surmises she and her silly son-in-law. Sir John Middleton, embarrasses Elinor by guessing that she has left an attachment behind in Sussex. But by some sort of quick understanding she sees — and announces — Colonel Brandon's love for Marianne long before it becomes perceptible to Elinor. And she maintains her conviction of their making a couple until shortly before the actual event — an insight that Marianne's mother only claims to have had in retrospect. No one would argue for Mrs. Jennings' tact, but who can deny her a species of sense, superior in its quickness to Elinor?

Elinor's sense, on the other hand, is somewhat slow not only with respect to Colonel Brandon's attachment to Marianne, but with respect to the seriousness of Marianne's disappointment with Willoughby. She considers Marianne on the way to recovery, when, after getting her feet wet on one of her solitary rambles at Cleveland, Marianne falls sick with what appears to be a mere cold. This illness is the entirely uncomic climax of the book (Tanner 1986). We would expect Elinor to fear it from the beginning, for she had earlier recognized the self-destructive tendency of Marianne's grief and had counselled:

"Exert yourself, dear Marianne ... if you would not kill yourself and all who love you ... you must exert yourself."

Self-discipline, exertion, is Elinor's specific virtue (Tave 1973), and so she cannot, for all her sense or perhaps even because of it, see immediately that Marianne is beyond exertion, that her body has taken over the suicidal intention.

We see in this episode the excesses of Marianne's sensibility, the romanticism that Elinor recognizes with concern in her sister at the very beginning of the book. But as Elinor's sense fails on occasion, so is Marianne's sensibility modified in various ways. In fact, I think I can discern three ways:

First, Marianne can be positively insensible. Her unrestrained interventions cause real pain to Elinor and social discomfort to her friends on several occasions. Second, she is no free spirit: she has a set of rules that constrain her as powerfully as will ordinary conventions when she is older (Brown 1979). Elinor rightly teases her with the predictability of her romantic canon of taste. It takes the whole tale of her sufferings to overturn her "favorite maxim" that second attachments are impossible. Indeed, one of her romantic opinions is indistinguishable from cool conventional calculation: she believes that wealth and grandeur have nothing to do with happiness, and she will therefore be satisfied with about two-thousand pounds a year. That is, as it happens, exactly what she gets when she marries the wealthy Colonel Brandon.

The third and best modification of Marianne's sensibility comes from her developing capacity for self-control and good sense. Until the sickness that reforms her she is ever a girl of violent feelings (Tave 1973). The violence of her affection comes to a head when she receives Willoughby's cruel parting letter, almost at the exact center of the book (Tanner 1986). Marianne,

covering her face with her handkerchief almost screamed with agony.

The point is the "almost." When in Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* Miss Walton loses Harley — to death, to be sure — she screams and faints. Marianne has it in her to repress the scream, to hide her face, and finally to recall herself from semi-suicide.

As Marianne has a foundation of sense, so, it hardly needs proving, Elinor has her full complement of sensibility, though her capacity and her cause for suffering is late to be borne in on her inattentive family. And to conclude, as I began, with the secondary characters: the two suitors, Edward and Colonel Brandon, are for all their stolid recessiveness, their subdued honorableness, men of genuine feeling and sensibility.

That *Sense and Sensibility* is the earliest full-scale novel, begun in 1797 when Jane Austen, who was born in 1775, was twenty-two, is simply amazing. It reminds me in point of precocious mastery, though probably in no other, of a novel whose author was born just a hundred years after her, in 1875, and who began to make notes towards his work at about the same time of his life: Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*. 
Each of Jane Austen's Six is my favorite while I am reading it, but I have never loved *Sense and Sensibility* best in retrospect. In the beginning I gave a reason—though there are many—for admiring the earlier works. Similarly I admire *Emma* for its perfect symmetries, *Persuasion* for its muted passion, and *Mansfield Park* perhaps simply for its lovely long-breathedness—and each of them for dozens of other reasons.

*Sense and Sensibility*, too, offers aspects for admiration: the astringent wit that has the ever-insensible Marianne at the pianoforte give an intimate conversation in her vicinity “the protection of a powerful concerto,” and the bold plotting that assigns to the emotional but humorless girl—Elinor tactfully describes her as not lively and seldom merry—a husband more than twice her age, who still seeks, as the book ends, “the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat.”

But *Sense and Sensibility* also has a characteristic, absent in the other five, that makes it at once very interesting and not absolutely lovable: its moral antitheses are not completely absorbed in its people; there is a remainder by which the author’s play with the categories exceeds the being of her characters. One consequence is the frequent question, unique to this book: Who is its heroine? Some say that the basic story is Elinor’s (Tave 1973). Jane Austen herself reports to Cassandra:

No indeed, I am never too busy to think of S&S. I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child …. I think [Mrs. K.] will like my Elinor. [Thurs., 25 April, 1811]

And that would indeed seem to say that Elinor is favored both as a character and as a heroine. On the other hand, Marianne “is the life and the center of the novel” (Murdrick in Watt 1963); she certainly occupies the book more intensely and longer—not, however, I suspect, for herself but for the problem of her sensibility.

Above all, the fact itself that there is occasion for the question: Whose sense? Whose sensibility? signifies that these terms remain somewhat outside the people, whom we consequently appraise rather than love. But lest I be thought to complain, let me put it positively: *Sense and Sensibility* comes closest of all the novels to presenting a play of ideas and to being a subtle entertainment for the intellect.

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It should be understood that Jane Austen when writing Sense and sensibility initially named the title “Elinor and Marianne” before changing the title to what it is popularly known today. So as you can see Austen had the characters Marianne and Elinor in mind when she wrote Sense and sensibility. In the first chapter of the Novel, Austen gives us an introduction to the main characters of the Novel. Elinor and Marianne are two sisters who are extremely close but different in personalities. As quoted from the Novel we are introduced to Elinor, 19 years of age whose advice was so effectual™ and o The earliest of her novels, Sense and Sensibility is a reaction to Jane Austen's youthful reading. The cult of sensibility, which was prevalent in the literature of that time, argued that there were overpowering feelings was a sign of superior character. Nevertheless, such is Jane Austen's skill in manipulating our responses, we favour Elinor's point of view. We see most of the action of the novel through her eyes. Elinor, for all her calm good sense and self-control, is never insufferably priggish. We understand that having a mother who can be as romantically unworldly as Marianne herself, almost foists on Elinor the role of the prudent one of the family. Elinor is finally saved from priggishness by her ability to laugh wryly at herself.