



Persuasion

Jane Austen (1775 - 1815)

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Genre:	Romance		

Jane Austen published *Sense and Sensibility* under the pseudonym, “A Lady” in 1811. It is an epistolary novel (a story told in letters) written to deepen and expand what had been a character sketch of two sisters, Elinore and Marianne Dashwood. It is significant that reviews of the novel often start with its title in various attempts to discern Austen’s view regarding the supremacy of “sense” or “sensibility” in the process of choices to be studied and decisions to be made. “Sense” and “sensibility” are other words for the age-old and on-going polar tension between one’s reason and one’s emotions—the Classical world view versus the Romantic world view. By 1811 England had already embarked upon a Romantic movement with the 1798 publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge. After the Age of Reason and its many

failures, including the devastation of the Napoleonic wars, there was a growing desire to return to nature in its purity, youth in its innocence and the heart as governor of man’s reason. *Sense and Sensibility*, in the comings and goings of the Dashwood sisters as they seek their way to happiness, picks up on the transition and sets forth the field of endeavor where characters make their way under the light of reason or feelings. It is not a novel to solve a problem since there is no problem to be solved. Rather it is a novel that presents one of the most basic facts of the human condition: we are creatures of thoughts and feelings, creatures of reason and emotion, creatures of impulse and consideration. The miracle is that Austen’s novel intuitively presents all of this so thoroughly.

Jane Austen (December 16, 1775 – July 18, 1817) was the seventh of eight children born to George and Cassandra Austen. Both parents were members of the lower ranks of the landed gentry. Her father was the rector of Anglican parishes in Steventon, Hampshire. She was educated by her father and brothers, and her family was supportive of her artistic ambitions. In her early twenties she began publishing novels of romantic fiction set among the landed gentry that focus on relationships and marriage as the only path available for women to achieve economic security and social standing. Although the plots of her books are quite comic, she is unsparing in her depiction of the people and the manners of the times and finds abundant opportunities for satire and trenchant social commentary.

Jane Austen was relatively unknown in her lifetime. Although she published four popular novels in rapid succession between 1811 and 1815, they were published anonymously and she had few reviews and little recognition. Her nephew published *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1869 that introduced her to a broader audience, and by the middle of the 20th century she was recognized by academia as one of the great English writers. Her focus on the realities of the lives of women in the late 18th and early 19th centuries gained even greater currency with the advent of feminism and women’s studies. Her work has a large and ardent fan base that results in her works consistently ranking among the top best selling and most highly regarded classics in all literature.