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The Failed Principle of Reformed Female Politeness – Exploring Tactical Silence and Voices in
Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

In Jane Austen's 1811 novel *Sense and Sensibility*, an essential piece of information is revealed when Marianne receives the last letter from Willoughby. Through this letter, she learns that the person she had spent joyful time with, whom she had believed to share feelings, turns out to be engaged to another woman. The disclosure Marianne receives provokes in her an emotional breakdown. Seeing her sister in such a state, Elinor encourages the emotionally devastated sister with what she has always believed to be the most sensible response.

Elinor would not contend, and only replied, "Whoever may have been so detestably your enemy, let them be cheated of their malignant triumph, my dear sister, by seeing how nobly the consciousness of your own innocence and good intentions supports your spirits. It is a reasonable and laudable pride which resists such malevolence."

"No, no," cried Marianne, "misery such as mine has no pride. I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to all the world. Elinor, Elinor, they who suffer little may be proud and independent as they like—may resist insult, or return mortification—but I cannot. I must feel—I must be wretched—and they are welcome to enjoy the consciousness of it that can" (Austen 179).

This is not the only time in the novel when a shocking secret is revealed. *Sense and Sensibility* is a story about the uncertainty and secrecy that fills the romance plots of its two protagonists, Marianne and Elinor. In their world, personal experiences rarely remain private; those around them are always eager to learn about their private matters. The story often juxtaposes how these two characters respond differently to distressing situations while still obligated to remain calm and sensible during social gatherings. The sisters' ideological debate of whether one should

conceal emotions comes up many times throughout the novel. The stark difference in manners of its two protagonists is often central to the readings of this novel.¹ While Marianne values her openness and refuses to withhold her expression, Elinor values self-control, and emotional concealment. These choices, to contemporary readers, might appear as a personal preference. However, reflected in the two sisters opposing views is the ideological debate on female modesty during the eighteenth century.

Based on the fashionable model of female modesty during the eighteenth century, many critics read Elinor's reservation as the novel's ideal image of female public manners. However, I want to argue that *Sense and Sensibility* criticizes the intellectual and social impacts this ideology of female modesty has on young women. By looking at the novel's juxtaposition of the Dashwood sisters' internal thoughts and their vocal participation, this paper will explore different questions about female manners raised in the story. In such a strictly hierarchal society, how does the concept of female modesty help sustain class hierarchy during social interactions? How do the protagonists, Elinor and Marianne, navigate through the oppressive structure? Ultimately, if emotional concealment was put forward as a new form of female virtue, *Sense and Sensibility* reveals how this social doctrine is an oppressive concept that veils the egocentric manners of those in superior positions in its society.

Elinor's reservation reflects the concept of female modesty developed by the end of the eighteenth century. England, during that time, saw a transformation of its urban society. As a response to this social change, some cultural commentators put forward one's performance of generosity as an appropriate form of public manners. However, some critics viewed this

¹ See Butler, Johnson, Morgan and Ylivuori for their readings of the contrasted portrayals of the two protagonists' manners.

commended practice as morally corrupted because it was not always an honest act. To respond to the concern of hypocrisy, some cultural commentators brought a concept of sensibility into the discussions. Sensibility, defined by one's refined expression, was seen as influenced by sympathy and was brought to justify the concealment of emotions. As sensibility was seen as a feminine feature, this moral link between sensibility and politeness puts moral pressure on young women's public manners. As a result, it is not surprising that Elinor often feels obligated to remain calm, even when she feels disturbed deep down. By doing so, Elinor believes she is acting most sensibly. The contradiction between both sisters' expressions traces this conceptual development of sensibility as a response to the debates of polite culture. By the end of the eighteenth century, the desirability of Elinor's practice of emotional restraint replaced the initial attraction to Marianne's version of sensibility.

Silence, recurring throughout the novel as Elinor's usual response, was associated with genteel mannerism during the eighteenth century. The transformation of British society during the industrial revolution influenced this cultural association. The inventions of the machine introduced more laborers to the city of London. As a result, there were more noises in the city than ever. The disturbance caused by these new noises consequently gave a new cultural, class-specific perception of noise. Noises were seen as vulgar and often associated with the working class, while tranquil demeanors and atmosphere defined genteel mannerism.

Set in a genteel community, *Sense and Sensibility* portrays the hierarchical nature of its society's moral expectations. The novel allows us to see the transgressions of both moral and sonic restrictions during social gatherings. While noises are temporarily allowed during these gatherings, private matters are on the verge of being exposed to the public. The double transgressions such as these inspire this paper to explore Austen's uses of noises and silence to

participate in the century's debates of female manners. The transgression of noises and the transgression of polite manners show that the social restriction of manners does not apply equally to everyone. The rules are imposed strictly on certain people, while others can apply these rules arbitrarily. Being invited regularly to spend time with their landlords, Elinor and Marianne often find themselves in a challenging social situation. Responding to the hosts' intrusive and inconsiderate remarks, Elinor and Marianne feel obligated to comply and disregard these disturbing conducts by either remaining silent or committing deception. When they meet Edward, Elinor's romantic interest, both sisters decide to suppress their suspicion of his affection and maintain the tranquility of the conversations. Their compliance often puts them in a vulnerable position socially and intellectually. As a result, by looking at how the protagonists manipulate their silence and voices during these challenging social moments, I want to argue that *Sense and Sensibility* portrays how Elinor's principle hinders her from achieving any clarity of her love interest's mind. Ultimately, the ideology of female modesty is an oppressive tool that justifies the mistreatment of those in superior positions in the social sphere.

This paper will explore different questions about female manners raised in the novel by reading the juxtaposition of the protagonists' calculated silence and vocal engagement in *Sense and Sensibility*. In such a strictly hierarchal society, how does the concept of female modesty play an influential role in sustaining its class and gender hierarchy? How do its protagonists, Elinor and Marianne, navigate through the oppressive limitations? Ultimately, if emotional concealment was put forward as a new form of female virtue, *Sense and Sensibility* reveals this doctrine's social and intellectual failure. While it fails to fulfill its objective as a social bonding principle, it also prevents its adherents from understanding other characters.

In what follows, I will begin with a discussion of the eighteenth-century debates on politeness, gender and the period's perception of noise to show from where Elinor's principle might have come. Then I will turn to the readings of three critical moments of the novel where we see how Elinor's principle of female modesty, encouraged during the eighteenth century, fails to fulfill its moral objectives.

By the late eighteenth century, politeness was a cultural phenomenon that had been continuously defined and redefined by several published accounts. Philip Carter has collected different sources written from the late seventeenth to the eighteenth century to form comprehensible definitions of these practices. These accounts, while using different terms, contribute to the collective definition of the so-called polite manners. By looking at these records, Carter encapsulates three major principles of politeness - they are "propriety or decorum," "elegance of manners," and "display of generosity and accommodation to one's companions" (Carter 21). The third principle, suggesting its advocates pay more attention to others' needs, was often compared with the two previous principles for its moral superiority. As Carter further discusses, some commentators of the century put forward the third principle over the others. Samuel Johnson raised a contrast between politeness and courtesy, proposing that "manners, though desirable, were not an essential part of 'genuine politeness,' the principle purpose of which was 'rather ease than pleasure'; that is accommodation rather than diverting elegance" (22). In a similar direction, John Locke focused on civility as "care not to shew any slighting, or contempt, of anyone" (23). David Hume viewed politeness as a practice that "lead us to resign our own inclinations to those of our companion" (23). As England embraced the rising commercial society as its new social sphere, cultural commentators in the eighteenth

century viewed the display of generosity as the most appropriate social manners to the change of the British society to the "modern and dynamic city culture" (25).

In fact, the culture of politeness was hierarchical in its nature. In an attempt to bring out the gender hierarchy embedded in this cultural phenomenon, Jenny Davidson draws upon two major written accounts that defend gallantry and its hypocrisy - David Hume and Philip Dormer Stanhope, known as fourth Earl of Chesterfield. The two figures' defenses of hypocrisy ultimately cast more light on this phenomenon as gender-dependent. Gallantry, as a widespread practice of civility, was often criticized for its counterfeit, bringing about insincere interactions between men and women. It was considered the act of concealment that encouraged lying, thus morally corrupted. Chesterfield emphasized the importance of a good reputation, encouraging hypocrisy in both men and women. However, he believed that breaking a good reputation had a worse consequence on men than women (Davidson 61). David Hume agreed with Chesterfield when it comes to a good reputation, claiming that concealment was necessary. Where Hume differed from Chesterfield was in his reluctance to give women the compromise of concealment. As a response to the crisis of hypocrisy, sensibility was a concept later developed to defend the practice of concealment in the polite culture. This behavioral reformation, however, imposed more moral regulations on young women. Before the eighteenth century, there had already been a long, traditional perception and practice of sensibility that encouraged the expression of emotions as a way to show a person's refinement. However, in the eighteenth century, the concept of sensibility evolved from the expression of emotions to a person's ability to regulate and refine one's expression (Ylivuori 90). The excess of sentiments was no longer idealized. The regulation of expression of emotions, instead, was seen as genuinely representing one's sensibility. This new form of sensibility was then also seen as encouraging sincere politeness as

"sensibility was commonly associated with gentleness, sympathy, obliging spirit, and general good-will towards others" (Ylivuori 91). The moral association between sensibility and concealment in polite culture was drawn to "prevent the artifice and duplicity that was now thought an inherent feature of politeness" (Carter 32). This association puts forward the ability to conceal one's emotions as the most virtuous form of politeness. In turn, the attempt to link sensibility to virtuous concealment created a rigid definition of femininity. Seen as a feminine feature, refined sensibility was understood as a capacity that helped women perform polite manners with genuine sympathy. This attempt to define female virtue had a critical impact on the perception of female manners. Ironically, it further encouraged the affectations of manners.

During the same period, there was also a recognition that acts of sensibility could be learned, imitated, and performed; the affectation was deemed less virtuous, yet still necessary (Ylivuori 72). The acts of sensibility became "a set of established practices that started to drift apart from their original ideological frame and began a life of their own as a status symbols of 'true femininity'" (Ylivuori 91). As a result, novels of sensibility were criticized for encouraging young women to exercise pretension of sensibility by following certain codes of conduct. These novels were sometimes called the "externalist conduct book" and condemned for "setting example for dishonest sensibility" (Ylivuori 92). According to Soile Ylivuori's studies on female politeness, an expression of sentiment no longer reflected one's virtue and was performed only as a status symbol. On the outlook, Elinor's principle of emotional restraint reflects the new attempt to reshape female manners. Marianne's expressive manners have been read as Austen's criticism of young women's devotion to the conduct books of sensibility. Many critics share this interpretation concerning Austen's contrasted portrayals of the Dashwood sisters.

Drawing on this cultural phenomenon on sensibility and polite female manners, many critics read *Sense and Sensibility* concerning the novel's displays of the two sisters' manners. Soile Ylivuori reads Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* as one of the novels that aim to mock young women's externalist manners of sensibility and to show restraint of emotions as proper and more sensible practice.

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is a good example of this. Marianne Dashwood is the paragon of uncontrolled sensibility, whereas her sister Elinor is politeness personified. Throughout the novel there is a clearly stated struggle between these two types of conduct; Marianne follows her excessive sentiments in everything, often breaking the codes of polite decorum, whereas Elinor hides her true feeling to maintain her politeness and pleasing exterior (Ylivuori 94).

Ylivuori reads the novel as Austen's dichotomous displays of female manners: a mistaken follower of the externalist sentimentalist and a proper adherent of refined sensibility. The inclinations to read the novel as Austen's attempt to criticize Marianne's performed sensibility as opposed to Elinor's refined manners have been long established. In *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler reads the novel as a conservative narrative that follows the trope of didactic dichotomy to parallel the right example with the wrong ones. She notes that Austen significantly utilizes the repetitions to "maintain didactic comparison" and to "advances on the assumption that what happens to one of the central characters must also happen to the other: at every turn, the reader cannot avoid the appropriate conclusion" (Butler 183). When it comes to the virtues of both sisters, the Dashwood sisters are different in their awareness of their understanding. Marianne is "optimistic, intuitive and un-self-critical" (192). Her lack of self-criticism is what makes her likely to overlook the feelings of others, while Elinor has the

capacity to "doubt her own prior judgment" (192). With a similar interpretation, Susan Morgan focuses on why the novel seems to value Elinor's decorum and criticizes Marianne's sensibility for its fixed attitude. Morgan notes that the novel puts forward the world of deceptions, secrets, and misunderstanding. It is impossible to know someone fully, and the characters are often wrong in their opinions of others. Because of this aspect, decorum appears to be the most suitable tool that will allow one to gradually learn and understand others without creating damage. Elinor's "solution, of course, is decorum, the classical social principle for keeping our judgments from becoming irretrievable in our acts" (Morgan 194). Claudia Johnson arrives at a different conclusion from these three readings, seeing Marianne's sensibility as principled defiance while Elinor's modesty as a conscious tool against the uncertainty embedded in the patriarchal society. Despite the apparent contrast of both sisters' outlooks, Johnson argues that the novel ultimately reveals that both of them are similar in the sense that both are susceptible to their feelings and their own desires. According to Johnson, despite two different approaches, the two sisters are still unable to escape the oppressive structure of the patriarchal society. She notes that "it makes no difference whether one holds back with Elinor's modest caution or hurries forward with Marianne's dauntless ardor, for both are, in Elinor's words, 'led away...to fancy and expect what, as [Willoughby and Edward] were then situated, could never be'" (Johnson 60). Because of this similarity, both Marianne and Elinor, despite their proclaimed different approaches, face the same plight.

Although these scholars primarily focus on the demeanors of the Dashwood sisters, *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel that offers a wide range of polite manners through the silent observation of its main character, Elinor. Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Ferrars, Lady Middleton, Fanny Dashwood, and Lucy Steele are the characters whose polite manners are to be evaluated.

Through these different forms of politeness, the novel presents Elinor's evaluations of their virtues and appears to celebrate Elinor's manners as the most sensible and virtuous. Over time, several silent moments in the novel reveal another problem: the most celebrated form of civility does not seem to fulfill its purpose. Three critical moments from the novel will uncover how Marianne and Elinor behave according to and against their declared maxims of manners: when they first meet the Middletons, their reunion with Edward Ferrars, and their eventual meeting with Mrs. Ferrars. Interacting with these characters, Elinor is cautious of her participation in the conversation. Her strict adherence to the expectation of female modesty often pushes her to turn silent on the matters that bother her and communicate only what she seems sensible. This habit often makes her vulnerable in a social setting and prevents her from genuinely understanding other characters. Marianne is no less constrained by the same expectation. In order to help Elinor in a challenging social situation, she resorts to hypocrisy yet still unable to manage the situation. When experiencing the uncertainty of her relationship with Willoughby, she turns silent to conceal her misery. Ultimately, when she decides to break her silence to protect Elinor's honor, it produces no desirable outcome.

As much as politeness is defined by social manners, noises, based on Mike Goldsmith's studies, also play an essential role in governing these social manners. In the mid-eighteenth century, noises were perceived as the vulgar expressions of the uneducated and unsophisticated groups of the society (Goldsmith 71- 72). This perception was mainly influenced by the change of soundscape in the city of London. The eighteenth century's industrial revolution introduced the arrival of machines as well as blue-collar workers to the city. As Mike Goldsmith describes: "From afar, the whole of London was said to make a humming sound, and, within, its inhabitants were often bathed in a sea of sound, with individual elements hard to isolate or identify" (77).

Although the inventions of machines introduced new sources of noise to the city, the majority of noises indeed came from the larger population in the city of London. These people moved either from the countryside or abroad to join the workforce in a city that provided more opportunities (77). The city's street also welcomed "the numbers of shops, coffee houses and taverns" in response to the increase of its population. Such business brought about drunkenness that added to the noise of the city (78 – 79). If the machinery was associated with the working class, it is not surprising that noises could be classified as something unrefined. This perception governs the manners of the people in the noble society in which only certain noises were allowed in their household, such as "pianoforte or reading aloud" (108). Goldsmith's analysis of soundscape in eighteenth-century England contrasts noises with the tranquil atmosphere of the genteel society.

The life of genteel people in *Sense and Sensibility* on the outlook resonates with a sonic distinction between classes. During social gatherings, however, are we allowed to see the breaking of the tranquil atmosphere as well as the transgression of its idealized polite manners. Only certain people are allowed to perform these social misconducts. When the Dashwood family relocates from an estate to a cottage in Barton, Marianne and Elinor remain undisturbed by the noises of the city's population. However, their new society affords them regular social events full of meaningless noise and painful social interactions with their neighbors. Sir John is obsessed with house parties because "he delighted in collecting about him more young people than his house would hold, and the noisier they were, the better was he pleased" (Austen 34 - 35). Sir John is often so loud in his mingling with his guests that Lady Middleton sometimes has to interrupt to bring down the noise. Mrs. Jennings, Sir John's stepmother, loves to talk as much as her son-in-law and often talks about vulgar and inappropriate subjects. Austen describes her as someone who "was full of jokes and laughter, and before dinner was over had said many witty

things on the subject of lovers and husbands; hoped they had not left their hearts behind them in Sussex, and pretended to see them blush whether they did or not" (36). Mrs. Jennings's particular fondness of such subject matter (such as the love interests of young women) anticipates that the noises from the new neighbors will disturb the tranquility of the mind and put the Dashwood sisters in a difficult situation. During the party, Mrs. Jennings' raillery with inappropriate questions often touches on the subject matters that are meant to be kept private. The host's transgression of propriety is only perceived as humorous, while young women are forced to endure its impact.

Social hierarchy plays a significant role in contributing to the transgressions of polite manners. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the figures of authority have the power to direct social interactions. For instance, the landlords' satisfaction with their guests' good manners is enough to warrant their generous offers. Sir John, a gentleman of landed gentry and the owner of the cottage in which the Dashwood family resides, is a friendly host who loves to invite the Dashwood sisters for dinners. His warm and generous personality might be easily contrasted with the selfish John Dashwood, their half-brother. However, this generosity does not entirely base on a selfless premise. Sir John loves hunting. Because the weather only allows him a certain time of the year to indulge in this activity, he finds hosting events and gathering young people to be his other engagement. His lack of "talents and taste" that "confined their employments" adds another reason for arranging a party regularly. His performance of generosity is, as a result, an antidote to their need to spend his time outside of hunting season. In addition, hosting young people, especially young women, gives him the satisfaction of his social manners. Being an all-woman family, the Dashwood sisters are ideal for Sir John to extend this generosity. It is not

only because they are women, but also because they are "good women," the Dashwood sisters attract Sir John's paternalistic benevolence.

The Miss Dashwoods were young, pretty, and unaffected. It was enough to secure his good opinion; for to be unaffected was all that a pretty girl could want to make her mind as captivating as her person. The friendliness of his disposition made him happy in accommodating those, whose situation might be considered, in comparison with the past, as unfortunate. In showing kindness to his cousins therefore he had the real satisfaction of a good heart; and in settling a family of females only in his cottage, he had all the satisfaction of a sportsman; for a sportsman, though he esteems only those of his sex who are sportsmen likewise, is not often desirous of encouraging their taste by admitting them to a residence within his own manor (Austen 35).

The appearance of unaffected manners has a social consequence. Being "young, pretty, and unaffected" is enough for Elinor and Marianne to secure Sir John's good opinions, thus the opportunities to have dinners at his place regularly. Their agreeable manners allow Sir John to assume their willingness to attend his party, believing himself to be in the position of a generous landlord who gives his guests occasions to socialize and be under his protection. His acts of benevolence are never to be questioned. These events do not, however, grant mutual satisfaction.

The relationship between Sir John and the Dashwood sisters is based primarily on his assumption. Sir John, or almost anyone else in the story, never recognizes these invitations as burdensome to their guests. The burden of such assumption falls to the Dashwood sisters. Marianne once complains with Elinor about the continuous invitations imposed on them. As civility required, Elinor can only respond that "they mean no less to be civil and kind to us now," and "by these frequent invitations, than by those which we received from them a few weeks ago.

The alteration is not in them if their parties are grown tedious and dull. We must look for the change elsewhere" (Austen 106). These invitations are not welcomed by both Elinor and Marianne, as they often find the events dull and meaningless. But because refusing to accept the generous offers would appear impudent, the Dashwood sisters are obligated to hide their unwillingness and attend the party. The Dashwood's sisters know that they must remain agreeable whenever invited. The complaints are never to be raised. Neither are rejections.

During the demanding social gathering, the two sisters are confronted with an invasive question that challenges them with twofold expectations. When Mrs. Jennings breaks out a question about Elinor's love affair, the two sisters must respond with their best compliance with the question and cover the private matters. Assuming that the answer to this raillery is not to be expected, Elinor can only remain silent and join the group's laughter to conceal her uneasiness. At this moment, Elinor's strict adherence to the rules of civilities and female modesty imprisons her, leaving her vulnerable and compelling her to sacrifice the delicate privacy. If initially, Marianne declares herself frank and honest about her feelings; this is when we come to see her compromise as the occasion requires. Her romantic disposition does not prevent her from recognizing the inappropriateness of the question and the uneasiness it triggers in Elinor. As opposed to staying silent on the invasive raillery, she interrupts Margaret's temptation to bring up the name of Edward by claiming, "you know that all this is an invention of your own and that there is no such person in existence" (Austen 62). In this situation, honesty matters less to Marianne than protecting Elinor. To keep up with the table manners, Marianne commits the hypocrisy with which she has denounced her sister and attempts to take control of the situation. However, none of the vocal tactics employed by the two sisters are as helpful as when another host intervenes. Lady Middleton, whose calm and elegant manners Elinor once criticizes "a mere

calmness of manner with which sense had nothing to do," (55) comes in to change the direction of the conversations to talk about the weather. Although Elinor recognizes Lady Middleton's change of subject only due to her dislike of the kind of subject matters, Elinor still appreciates this interruption as it eventually helps distract the group from Mrs. Jennings' invasive raillery. When performed by Lady Middleton, an unconcerned act of civility is the only accommodating act in the situation.

During such social gathering, the hosts like Mrs. Jennings and Lady Middleton have the power to direct social interactions. Mrs. Jennings can bring up a question that their guests would never feel warranted to discuss. With her dislike of vulgarity, Lady Middleton feels no pressure to change the topic. Despite not being influenced by any particular concern for her guests, her participation was the only way to assuage the conversation's uneasiness. However, the same kind of exemption is not offered to guests like Marianne and Elinor. Required to participate and to be yielding to their host's question, Elinor's adherence to her principles pushes her to employ fake laughter. Marianne can only resort to hypocrisy as a necessary strategy despite her dislike of lying. Neither of their acts can result in removing them from the unpleasant situation.

Although the two sisters initially declare themselves to be different in their principles of public manner, the novel eventually shows how similar they might be in some circumstances. Uncertain about the direction of their romantic tendencies, both are susceptible to concealment while indulging in silent self-serving fantasy.

Marianne is not always open about her relationship with Willoughby. When he suddenly leaves Barton for London, to everyone's surprise, the fight between the two of them triggers a sudden uncertainty in the state of their relationship. It is later revealed that Marianne herself is uncertain and unknowing of his commitment. During his absence, she feels the need to conceal

her matters from the public by reminding Elinor that the letters between herself and Willoughby must be kept confidential (84). In order to deal with her longing for Willoughby during this uncommunicable uncertainty, Marianne chooses to express her experience with several sonic activities.

The evening passed off in the equal indulgence of feeling. She played over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every air in which their voices had been oftenest joined, and sat at the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had written out for her, till her heart was so heavy that no farther sadness could be gained; and this nourishment of grief was every day applied. She spent whole hours at the pianoforte alternately singing and crying; her voice often totally suspended by her tears. In books too, as well as in music, she courted the misery which a contrast between the past and present was certain of giving. She read nothing but what they had been used to read together.

Such violence of affliction indeed could not be supported for ever; it sunk within a few days into a calmer melancholy; but these employments, to which she daily recurred, her solitary walks and silent meditations, still produced occasional effusions of sorrow as lively as ever (Austen 83 – 84).

As her relationship with Willoughby remains an uncertain mystery to others, Marianne engages herself with different sonic activities that she and Willoughby used to enjoy together.

Eventually, Marianne's expression of her longing for Willoughby has transitioned from sonic activities to silence to alleviate her inability to communicate her feelings. When she resorts to silent acts, such as reading and solitude walking, the disappearance of noises exhibits her longing for Willoughby's presence as much as the musical. This sonic transformation underlines

Marianne's struggle to go against the openness she admires, yet her silence at the end discloses her surrender. Marianne's exhibition of silence shows that she ends up being confined by the need to conceal her disturbed emotional state. This kind of silence appears again when Marianne feels uncertain about Edward's feelings for Elinor.

Marianne's silence is carried to her reunion with Edward Ferrars after their departure in Norland; during their time at Norland, Edward's presence at the estate and his attention to Elinor make everyone believe that he is forming an affection for her. Marianne's intuition tells her otherwise as she suspects him of "having none of that grace which I should expect in the man who could seriously attach to my sister" (Austen 19). When Edward visits them at Barton, Marianne observes the interaction between him and Elinor again with perplexity. Marianne is surprised to discover that their separation does not evoke in him any appearance of warmth towards her sister. She observes silently that Edward possesses "a deficiency of all that a lover ought to look and say on such an occasion" and that "he was confused, seemed scarcely sensible of pleasure in seeing them, looked neither rapturous nor gay, said little but what was forced from him by questions, and distinguished Elinor by no mark of affection" (86). Unable to express this frustration from what her intuition foretells, Marianne, in her silent observation, turns to her fantasy about Willoughby:

Marianne saw and listened with increasing surprise. She began almost to feel a dislike of Edward; and it ended, as every feeling must end with her, by carrying back her thoughts to Willoughby, whose manners formed a contrast sufficiently striking to those of his brother elect? (87).

Marianne's intuitive reading of Edward's demeanors is eventually distracted by the comparison she draws between Edward and Willoughby. The suppression of her suspicion only allows her to

fantasize more about the absent person. This indulgent fantasy eventually causes her to ignore what is in front of her, resulting in temporarily awkward silence during their conversation. When Marianne is able to break her silence, it is only by asking a generic and non-intrusive question about Edward's well-being. When restrained by the desire not to intrude, Marianne's intuition cannot clarify the person's feelings in front of her. Through the novel's juxtaposition of her silence and what she thinks but not communicates, we are allowed to witness how the external constraint of her emotions only pushes her further into the misleading internal fantasy.

Unlike Marianne, who resorts to silence altogether, Elinor chooses to participate cautiously. However, her strategy does not appear to be helpful when it comes to tackling Edward's uncertain manners. Elinor is committed to intervening in conversations whenever she feels that Marianne is misbehaving socially. When Edward inquires about their current living situation, Marianne is incapable of restraining her disappointment and disapproval of the new neighbors. Witnessing Marianne's uncivil comments on the neighbors in front of Edward, Elinor breaks in to defend the Middletons (Austen 88). When Marianne begins to express her vague longing for Willoughby, Elinor intervenes to prevent Edward from seeing Marianne's improper indulgence in her romance (88). Although Marianne has been trying to avoid confrontation with Edward about his feelings for her sister, she is not always in control of her curiosity. When their discussion about civility finally leads Edward to clarify his manners, Edward admits that his inelegant manners come mostly from his insecurities and awkwardness (93). Hearing Edward's judgment of his demeanors, Marianne bursts out her observation, excusing his reserved manners. Edward's reluctance to consider himself reserved alerts both sisters. His worried expression eventually compels Elinor to intervene.

Elinor looked surprised at his emotion; but trying to laugh off the subject, she said to him, "Do not you know my sister well enough to understand what she means? Do not you know she calls every one reserved who does not talk as fast, and admire what she admires as rapturously as herself?"

Edward made no answer. His gravity and thoughtfulness returned on him in their fullest extent—and he sat for some time silent and dull (Austen 93).

At this moment, Marianne has touched on the point that can contribute to the clarification of his uncertain demeanors. However, when the opportunity opens up, Elinor, witnessing his uneasiness, chooses to suppress her curiosity and pretend to disagree with Marianne to accommodate Edward's feelings. Edward's reluctance to be seen as reserved can only invisibly unsettle Elinor's confidence in his affections. Despite Elinor's civil intervention, Edward remains "silent and dull" at the end of the conversation. Elinor's prioritizing of her guest's needs prevents her from engaging in a meaningful conversation and from reaching any clarity.

Acting against what she truly feels deep down, Elinor is silently observant of Edward's manners and often disappointed whenever Edward's behavior is not as affectionate as she expects. Nevertheless, when the evidence does not satisfy her expectation, she is ready to build up a self-serving fantasy. During another conversation between the Dashwood sisters and Edward, Marianne notices the ring on his hand. Without reservation, she asks Edward openly about the owner of the hair in his ring. Edward responds by claiming it was his sister's hair. However, his expression of uneasiness to the question does not provide any cogency to the listeners. Seeing the inconsistency of his words and looks, Marianne and Elinor arrive at two completely different conclusions:

Elinor had met his eye, and looked conscious likewise. That the hair was her own, she instantaneously felt as well satisfied as Marianne; the only difference in their conclusions was, that what Marianne considered as a free gift from her sister, Elinor was conscious must have been procured by some theft or contrivance unknown to herself. She was not in a humour, however, to regard it as an affront, and affecting to take no notice of what passed, by instantly talking of something else, she internally resolved henceforward to catch every opportunity of eyeing the hair and of satisfying herself, beyond all doubt, that it was exactly the shade of her own (Austen 96).

The sudden silence on the subject from all three characters is the Dashwood sisters are lost in their deceiving thoughts. Marianne is quiet because she thinks she might have invaded a secret between her sister and Edward. Elinor pretends to talk about something else while silently eyeing the hair and, based on his silence, assumes that Edward has taken her hair without her permission. Until later, we learn that the hair belongs to another woman with whom Edward has secretly engaged. At this moment, the truth behind Edward's ring remains unanswered to the Dashwood sisters. When the situation is precarious socially, they are incapable of sincere communication. By remaining calm, Elinor is ready to indulge in fantasy as much as Marianne. Again, the novel's juxtaposition of Elinor's inner thoughts and what she communicates shows the failure of her social principle. She ends up holding on to the inaccurate piece of information about Edward.

The two sisters' similarity can be traced in their vocal participation during their reunion with Edward Ferrars. Both Marianne and Elinor, when they encounter a sense of uncertainty, choose to suppress their feelings. While Marianne chooses silence as a tactical tool that will allow herself to fantasize without revealing any insecurities, Elinor chooses to participate in

conversation cautiously only to hide her feeling of uncertainty and to fantasize as much. The contrasting juxtaposition of what she thinks and how she behaves during her reunion with Edward illustrates how her conformity to polite conversation pushes her away from what she actually desires – to comprehend this character's feeling. During such an important conversation in which the potential for clarification opens up, the constraint of female modesty can only drive the two sisters away from any point of understanding. Again, if concealment was encouraged as a refined expression that helps people socialize, in this case, Austen illustrates that it can only bring out an obstructive result in an intimate situation such as this. These characters are unable to reach the point of any communal understanding.

If we return to Carter's drawing of three principles of politeness, the performance of generosity was believed to be the most superior form as it enhances the friendly atmosphere of socialization. What is portrayed during the meeting with Mrs. Ferrars is full of social interactions antithetical to the moral standpoint of the proposed ideology. Conversations during this moment are only a result of egocentric calculations that reinforce its hierarchical structure protected by the model of female modesty imposed on young women.

On their meeting with Elinor, Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny perform their acts of civility strategically. Assuming that Elinor might be a threat to Edward's marriage plan, Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny coldly ignore her and direct their conversation mostly to Lucy, whom they think is the least threatening, without knowing that Lucy is the one who is engaged to their son/brother. Lucy, who has always been nervous about meeting them, delightfully observes their attention and takes them as good signs (Austen 219). Their strategic attention to Lucy reveals that Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny are aware of the social value of their civil manners when it comes to interacting with young women like Lucy and Elinor. Their dislike of Elinor influences how they

behave towards Lucy. This special attention to Lucy is only a means to insult Elinor. The exploitation of display of generosity by the characters in superior positions, in turn, encourages more selfish social participation from those who are inferior. Lucy is another character whose manners are strategic and calculated. Lucy's exterior agreeable manners often provide her with social benefits, helping her secure opportunities and generous offers from the hosts like Sir John and Lady Middleton. During the meeting with Mrs. Ferrars, the beneficial connection allows her to be consequently connected to the people who influence her future happiness. Fanny does not pay much attention to Lucy and her sister despite them being "the nieces of the gentleman who for many years had had the care of her brother" (218). However, being regular guests at the Middletons secures the Steeles an invitation to attend Fanny's party.

The female modesty model, imposed on young women like Lucy and Elinor, reinforces the power structure within this social sphere. Those in superior positions, such as Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny, recognize their civil manners' values and often perform them according to their self-interested calculation. Lucy and Elinor can only comply with these vain conducts. Such a regime further encourages conceited compliance from those whom the society assigns the principle of modesty. Against the ideology of politeness, as discussed by Carter, the display of generosity in *Sense and Sensibility* is exploited to produce a contrary result. What follows will show how this oppressive structure influences the voices of each character in their social participation.

Perhaps, the best definite moment that Austen offers to illustrate how civility is a concept rooted in the hierarchical structure of society is when the ladies at the party argue over the heights of two grandsons of Lady Middleton and Fanny (Austen 220 – 221). When the two boys are absent, a subjective question such as this turns out to be a political arena that challenges each of its participants differently. Opinions offered during this event vividly reflect the difference of

social expectations of manners imposed on these characters. The mothers of the two boys, wanting to argue for their own son, have to "politely decide[d] in favour of others" (220). The two grandmothers, Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Ferrars, feeling no obligation to please anyone, claim their grandchild to be taller than the other with "not less partiality, but more sincerity" (220). Lucy is confronted with a tough decision. Nervous to please all four ladies, she only offers an observation that both are of the same height. Her cautious answer is to make sure that she does not offend anyone, thus avoiding the risk of damaging her connection. While these characters participate in the politics of polite manners, the Dashwood sisters refuse to join and express their opinions honestly. Elinor's honesty with her opinion has offended both Fanny and Mrs. Ferrars. Marianne dismisses the discussion altogether by giving no opinion. Choosing not to play along with the group, Marianne has "offended them all" (221). This is the moment when the politics of manners are reflected through how these characters voice their opinions. When the event engages people of different positions, the rules of propriety are somewhat arbitrary. Honesty is not valued as much as a compliant expression of opinion. The need to please others is greater for those like Lucy. Those who choose not to play along, such as Elinor and Marianne in this instance, face social criticism.

The final moment of the meeting with Mrs. Ferrars confirms the arbitrary rules of polite manners during these social interactions. The attempt to criticize the more superior can only trigger criticism of the expositor. When Mrs. Ferrars malignantly disregards Elinor's drawing skills, Elinor is incapable of responding and remains silent (Austen 221 – 222). On the other hand, seeing Elinor being treated unfairly, Marianne interrupts to protect Elinor's honor by openly criticizing Mrs. Ferrar's inconsiderate remark:

"This is admiration of a very particular kind!—what is Miss Morton to us?—who knows, or who cares, for her?—it is Elinor of whom WE think and speak."

And so saying, she took the screens out of her sister-in-law's hands, to admire them herself as they ought to be admired.

Mrs. Ferrars looked exceedingly angry, and drawing herself up more stiffly than ever, pronounced in retort this bitter philippic, "Miss Morton is Lord Morton's daughter."

Fanny looked very angry too, and her husband was all in a fright at his sister's audacity. Elinor was much more hurt by Marianne's warmth than she had been by what produced it; but Colonel Brandon's eyes, as they were fixed on Marianne, declared that he noticed only what was amiable in it, the affectionate heart which could not bear to see a sister slighted in the smallest point.

Marianne's feelings did not stop here. The cold insolence of Mrs. Ferrars's general behaviour to her sister, seemed, to her, to foretell such difficulties and distresses to Elinor, as her own wounded heart taught her to think of with horror; and urged by a strong impulse of affectionate sensibility, she moved after a moment, to her sister's chair, and putting one arm round her neck, and one cheek close to hers, said in a low, but eager, voice,

"Dear, dear Elinor, don't mind them. Don't let them make YOU unhappy" (222).

Marianne's attempt to publicly condemn Mrs. Ferrars's inconsiderate remark produces no desirable changes. Her brother, Sir John, and Brandon witness what has happened between Mrs. Ferrars and Marianne with different reactions. John Dashwood only notices the impropriety of her accusations of Mrs. Ferrars. Sir John dismiss Marianne's emotional reactions as influenced by her recent heartbreak. Brandon is left to romanticize such courageous manners just as he

always does. Marianne's attempt to break the silence only produces a scene that is received with ignorant and unconcerned readings of other characters. Elinor, who is initially capable of directing the conversation to cover Marianne's reckless manners, is incapable of making any intervention during such an unexpected scene caused by Marianne's emotion. While Marianne's empathy extends to those she cares about, Elinor ends up being more individualistic. Her silence in this scene is only a reflection of her entrapment caused by her rigid compliance with the principles of manners she regards as the most sensible. Elinor's self-imposed silence, the response she has praised for its noble social tool, turns out to be the significant reinforcer of this structural power. Ironically, while the ladies are busy making their political moves in forms of mannerism, the novel parallels it with the gentlemen's talk of "the variety of politics, enclosing land, and breaking horses." The only topic that can engage all ladies together is a debate over the heights of two boys (Austen 220). The meeting with Mrs. Ferrars confirms how arbitrary and hierarchical the rules of civil manners are in this social interaction. While young women like Elinor and Marianne struggle to remain socially appropriate, those who feel superior to them, like Mrs. Ferrar and Fanny, take advantage of this inevitable compliance to behave however they like. Through the parallel of Elinor's point of view and how she behaves, the novel reveals the antithetical result that the ideology of female modesty has on young women. In what appears to be externally calm, civil manners hide the disturbed minds of these young women.

Moral commentators in the eighteenth century advocated for female modesty as a reformed concept of sensibility by associating its sympathetic nature with the society-oriented objective of civility. To some of the critics, the novel celebrates Elinor's polite manners as the novel's desired form of politeness. However, as revealed through some social interactions in the story, the concept of female modesty is particularly imposed on young women. Politeness

in *Sense and Sensibility* is hierarchical. It allows those in superior positions the freedom to govern and direct interactions while enforcing those in inferior positions to comply. The expectation of female modesty reinforces this hierarchical aspect by governing young women's manners, causing them to either resort to silence and conceal their genuine feelings or voice what they believe to be a proper social engagement. Marianne is as much constrained by the expectation of female modesty as Elinor. Despite her almost accurate intuitions, she is forced to turn to silence and fantasy. With her cautious and calculated social participation, Elinor is incapable of protecting herself from the intrusive raillery or securing herself any certainty of reading others. As the novel has illustrated, these tactical silence and expressions prevent the Dashwood sisters from comprehending others and being socially independent. As a result, civility appears as a conflicted concept because while it is boasted to strive for humanity, it is instead thriving on the social hierarchy full of self-interested politics. *Sense and Sensibility* is a story of social interactions in which the rules of civility are arbitrary. Manners are performed strategically according to the hierarchical structure. Ultimately, the concepts of female modesty are what to be performed but never to be accomplished. It is rather ambivalent of how such a model of female politeness can fulfill its proclaimed objective.

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